

## **Filling a funding 'GAPP' at Vineland Research**

Innovation centre receives federal funding to further project with University of Toronto researchers

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*Federal Minister of Science and Sport Kirsty Duncan announces \$6.7 million in federal funding for seven genomic research studies including a joint project between Vineland Research and Innovation Centre and the University of Toronto. - Luke Edwards/Metroland*

Healthy plants produce healthy vegetables, and in turn, healthy humans.

Federal funding for a joint research project between Vineland Research and Innovation Centre (VRIC) and the University of Toronto aims to produce new varieties of greenhouse vegetables, such as tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers, that will better fight diseases. Federal Minister of Science and Sport Kirsty Duncan was in Niagara Thursday morning to announce the seven recipients of the latest round of Genomic Applications Partnership Program funding. Those recipients will

share \$6.7 million in money from the federal government and a total of \$21 million in funding from federal and provincial governments and business partners.

“What that means to the farmers here is better crop yields, and it helps their bottom line,” Duncan said following the announcement.

Researchers at U of T have discovered a family of genes that provide wide-range disease resistance. They have partnered with VRIC to turn this discovery into practical applications that can be commercialized for greenhouse vegetable growers in Niagara and beyond. This project will receive a total of about \$2 million.

Plant diseases in greenhouse operations can cause up to 20 per cent crop loss — a burden for growers.

“This will give growers a competitive edge,” said Ontario Genomics president and CEO Bettina Hamelin.

“It’s meant to meet the gap between science and application,” added Mark Lepage, president and CEO of Genome Canada, which receives applications for the funding. This is the ninth round of funding announcements for the program. VRIC is a prior recipient. In fact, earlier funding from Genome Canada helped the centre develop its reverse genetics platform, which this new project will now utilize. It uses gene sequence information to quickly identify desirable plant traits.

Duncan said the current federal government has made research and innovation a top priority, pointing to a \$4-billion federal commitment as an indication of how seriously her government takes research.

“Research leads to discovery; discovery leads to business opportunities,” she said.

Canada’s greenhouse vegetable sector generates more than \$1 billion in revenue each year. Genome Canada predicts annual benefits of \$26 million for growers, as the new varieties are rolled out. With that increase, said Duncan, comes business expansion and new jobs.

Following the announcement, Duncan took a brief tour of VRIC. She said the institution “makes an enormous difference” in innovating for the Canadian agricultural sector.

And for St. Catharines MP Chris Bittle, it’s a sector that can sometimes be overlooked.

“Too many take agriculture for granted,” he said.

The VRIC-University of Toronto project was just one of seven to receive funding. Other projects include a University of Regina study on improving seed survival and performance of legume inoculants, a U of T study that aims to develop pre-

emergence surveillance of the influenza virus in humans and animals, and a British Columbia project looking at antibody therapeutics for Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

Genome Canada has run GAPP since 2013. Roughly \$127 million has been invested in 48 projects across the country.

<https://www.niagarathisweek.com/news-story/8842785-filling-a-funding-gapp-at-vineland-research/>