

Helpful tips for farmers collaborating with researchers and agronomists for on-farm research



1. Assess your interest and capacity to participate before committing:

Ensure you're genuinely interested and available to carry out what is required of you before committing to being a farmer-cooperator. Do not get involved if you do not have the time required to partner with the researcher.

- **Understand what is required of you:** Meet with the researcher before the season starts to discuss the research protocol and the time, roles, and responsibilities you may need to provide and ensure it is a plan you can commit to.
- **Be transparent about what you can reliably provide:** Sometimes researchers only require land access, but other times, more extensive involvement is requested. Share any time or logistical challenges, particularly during peak farming seasons. Consider any potential risks or disruptions to normal farm operations and discuss ways to minimize them. Agree only to what aligns with your schedule and capabilities. Specify what you can offer in terms of land area, equipment, soil type, climate, time, and growing season support (e.g., field prep, planting, pesticide applications, nutrient applications, harvest, etc.). Indicate if you're open to hosting trials for only one season or multiple seasons.
- **Get clarity about the researcher's farm access requirements and field activities and discuss concerns in advance of the project starting:** Ask about the planned frequency of research team visits (including other collaborators or students), treatments to be applied to the land, and any soil or plant sampling the research team intends to carry out. Discuss any protocols (e.g., biosecurity) you may require of visitors in advance.
- **Opportunities for compensation vary by project:** Identify what you can provide in kind (e.g., without compensation), and discuss any remaining costs per acre with the researcher before the project starts.

2. Freely share your perspectives with researchers:

Your farming experience is valuable. Freely share ideas on measurements or treatments that could make the research more relevant to farmers. Offer honest feedback on the collaboration experience and be open to discussing preliminary findings and final results.

3. Follow agreed-upon research protocols for your farm:

Good science relies on consistency and accuracy. Familiarize yourself with the research protocols and data collection methods in advance and follow agreed-upon research protocols. If you foresee or run into an issue, inform the researcher immediately to discuss solutions. Maintain detailed records and observations (e.g., smartphone photos, flags, stakes, and texts may be useful) for the project's duration. Collect and submit data in a timely manner and observe confidentiality agreements where applicable. Be prepared to share the field location's detailed crop history and field management practices (e.g., planting date, fertilizer rates, product use, etc.) to ensure a successful project.

4. Communicate status during the season:

Share GPS coordinates of the field site and keep open lines of communication with the researcher during the season, providing timely updates on management activities affecting the research site, including anything that could affect researcher access to the site.

5. Anticipate the need to be flexible:

Just like farming, sometimes research doesn't go as planned, and researchers may need to suddenly adjust their predetermined routines/practices while working on your farm. Be open to collaborating with the researcher to resolve issues that may arise and discuss any concerns with the researcher.

6. Be patient and recognize that research results take time to compile:

Data analysis and interpretation often happen after field operations and take time to compile. Wait patiently but DO request a copy of the results when available. Even if results differ from expectations, they can still provide valuable insights for future practices.

By actively engaging and maintaining flexibility, you can help ensure that on-farm research is successful, meaningful, and minimally disruptive. Interested in connecting with researchers? Sign up with Grain Farmers of Ontario's [Farmer-Research Connect](#).