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MEDIA RELEASE

Organizations coming together to introduce youth to careers across the agrifood sector

New program will show students opportunities available in plant protein, agrifood and digital agriculture

(Regina, Saskatchewan, January 22) — Today, Protein Industries Canada announced an investment into a program that will introduce youth in Kindergarten through Grade 12 to the career opportunities available to them in the plant-protein, agrifood and digital agriculture sectors.

Part of a \$2 million co-investment with the Enterprise Machine Intelligence & Learning Initiative (EMILI), national STEM outreach charity Actua and Agriculture in the Classroom Canada (AITC-C), the project is intended to help address the agriculture industry's growing need for a skilled workforce. In particular, it focuses on building capacity and fostering a competitive business environment within the plant-protein sector as Canada works toward positioning itself as a global leader in the supply of plant-based ingredients, food and feed.

"As Canada's agricultural sector continues to grow and innovate, it is creating more good, well-paying jobs," said The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry. "To support this growing sector, we must promote equity, diversity and inclusion in STEM professions, and educate youth about the opportunities available in these occupations before they make their career choices. We must ensure that we have a skilled workforce representative of the diversity of talent that exists in Canada. That's what the Protein Industries Supercluster is helping to do: foster more diverse environments in the future."

The program will engage youth in Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba, with a particular focus on Indigenous and other under-represented groups. It will be based on Actua's existing STEM and digital skills programming, which incorporates Indigenous perspectives and land-based learning, and expand upon agriculture curriculum developed by the partners.

The program, targeted to reach 69,000 youth over three years, will increase knowledge of career opportunities in the agrifood sector and be delivered by post-secondary students from colleges and universities in Actua's network across the prairies.

"Canada has the potential to become a global leader in plant protein, and strengthening and maintaining that reputation requires a knowledgeable, skilled workforce now and into the future," Protein Industries Canada CEO Bill Greuel said. "By teaching students about the opportunities available to them in our sector, EMILI, Actua and AITC are helping fill that need. They're helping teach a new generation that our sector is filled with potential, and that it's one where they can flourish in whatever capacity best suits them."

The project is the first to be announced under Protein Industries Canada's Capacity Building Program umbrella. EMILI, Actua and AITC-C are together investing \$0.6 million into the project, with Protein Industries Canada investing the remaining \$1.4 million.

“In order to attract more skilled talent to the plant protein and digital agriculture sectors, we need to engage early and ensure that school-age students know about the exciting and ever-growing opportunities in the agri-food industry,” EMILI Board Chair Ray Bouchard said. “This approach to engagement should allow for a stronger pipeline of post-secondary graduates for the industry. This program is an important activity for doing just that, with local network members and staff. The digital agriculture opportunity in Canada is significant and we will need talent from all backgrounds and disciplines to fully leverage the opportunity for Canada.”

"Actua is proud to partner with Proteins Industries Canada, EMILI and AITC to expose youth to the exciting, tech-driven jobs in Canada's agriculture industry," said Jennifer Flanagan, President and CEO of Actua. "Through this partnership, Actua's network will build on our existing STEM and digital skills model to engage youth across the prairies in digital agriculture programming that will cultivate greater curiosity for the industry's innovation potential. Youth from a diversity of backgrounds will have the opportunity to build the skills, knowledge and confidence needed to thrive in the future, ag-tech workforce."

“We are thrilled to partner with Protein Industries Canada, EMILI and Actua on the development of these impactful learning opportunities for young Canadians,” said Johanne Ross, Executive Director of Agriculture in the Classroom Canada. “AITC knows that the future of Canada's agriculture sector will rely on innovative and cutting-edge participation from tomorrow's agriculture leaders. By helping develop these lessons, we will all benefit by inspiring students to get curious about the highly technological careers in agriculture and food. No matter where their passions lie, there is a role for every student!”

Because of its reach across the agriculture industry and its potential to raise high awareness of the job opportunities available to the future generation, the project has gained support from several companies with pre-existing Protein Industries Canada technology projects. Businesses that have expressed support for the project include the following:

- Avena Foods;
- Aberhart Farms;
- Roquette;
- Exceed Grain Marketing;
- Lucent BioScience;
- Verdient Foods Inc.;
- Ingredion Inc.; and
- Botaneco.

“Today's empowerment of tomorrow's producers, inventors, researchers and labour force represents a cornerstone for future sustainable food production opportunities,” Verdient Foods Inc.'s Senior Advisor Blair Knippel said. “In order to enable the next generation of innovation, our ecosystem must create a thirst for knowledge and provide tangible evidence that there are both exciting challenges that lie ahead for today's youth and that those challenges are the foundation of fulfilling careers. Fundamental engagement with students early on provides opportunities to reinforce the core belief that today's students represent our future and can each become catalysts for change.”

Protein Industries Canada plans to invest more than \$15 million into activities to build capacity in Canada's agrifood sector. Applications for Capacity Building projects are accepted on a continual intake cycle. More information about the program's priority areas can be found on the [program information page](#).

About Actua

Actua is Canada's largest science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) youth outreach network representing [41 university and college based members](#). Each year, Actua's growing network of member organizations reach over 300,000 young Canadians in 500 communities nationwide with programs that build skills and confidence in critical future employment areas. Actua focuses on the engagement of underrepresented youth through specialized programs for Indigenous youth, girls and young women, at-risk youth and youth living in Northern and remote communities. Its national InSTEM program reaches over 35,000 Indigenous youth per year in over 200 Indigenous communities. Actua's major funding partners include: Government of Canada, Google Canada, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, RBC Foundation, Suncor Energy Foundation, TD, Toyota Canada Foundation, Finning Canada, Microsoft Canada, Imperial and Lockheed Martin Canada. For more information about Actua, visit actua.ca.

About the Enterprise Machine Intelligence & Learning Initiative

EMILI is an Agriculture-AI accelerator based in Manitoba. Founded in 2016 by an industry-led board, EMILI works to grow the digital agriculture ecosystem in Manitoba and ensure that people have the skills required to embrace digital agriculture opportunities. EMILI is the co-host of Manitoba's Digital Agriculture Table, bringing industry and academic leaders together to identify opportunities and address gaps in digital agriculture in Manitoba. EMILICanada.com

About Agriculture in the Classroom Canada

Agriculture in the Classroom Canada (AITC-C) is a Canadian charitable organization with a vision to bring agriculture to every classroom, inspiring every student. Along with 10 provincial member organizations, AITC-C provides accurate, balanced and current, curriculum-linked educational tools, resources and experiences at all grade levels that reinforce 21st century skills and that foster a passion for lifelong learning.

With teaching tools and programs, including Canadian Agriculture Literacy Month and the thinkAG career initiative, AITC-C reaches more than two million students across Canada every school year with Canada's remarkable agriculture and food story.

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