

# Farming Smarter cancels spring crop walks

## Producer-run research organization urges farmers to lobby new government for more dollars

By [Staff](#)

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A funding shortfall has prompted Farming Smarter to cancel its spring crop walks for 2015.

The shortfall resulted from cutbacks by the outgoing Progressive Conservative government, said Ken Coles, general manager of the farmer-run research organization based in Lethbridge.

“Even if the new provincial government decides to keep or improve the AOF (Agriculture Opportunities Fund) grants, Farming Smarter does not have funds in place to operate the crop walks this spring,” Coles said in a press release.

“If the (new NDP) provincial government manages to address agricultural research funding before winter, we may hold some late-season crop walks.

Farming Smarter and other farmer-guided research groups have long lobbied the provincial Agriculture Department to “value our research associations and fund them accordingly,” he said.

“It’s been a one-step-forward, two-steps-back process for many years,” said Coles.

Last month, the chair of the Agricultural Research and Extension Council of Alberta said his group had been repeatedly promised a doubling of funding to \$3 million. Acting on the advice of provincial officials, ARECA’s nine forage and applied research associations launched new initiatives and improved wages in a bid to reduce staff turnover, said Acme rancher Ian Murray.

But the pre-election budget was unexpectedly harsh, he said.

“We were prepared for a hit just like everybody else was, but our hit was 50 per cent of our budget,” said Murray.

The \$1.5 million allocated for ARECA hasn’t increased for nearly 10 years.

Coles urged farmers to speak up about the importance of research.

“We have an almost entirely new roster of Alberta MLAs now,” he said. “It could be an opportunity to make agriculture’s case in a more favourable atmosphere.”

But farmers also have to realize that “the new government will be inundated with requests,” Coles added.

“We can’t let agriculture get lost in the racket,” he said.