

Phase 4 ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan Report

The AgBio Story

College of Agriculture and Bioresources
June 1st, 2026



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

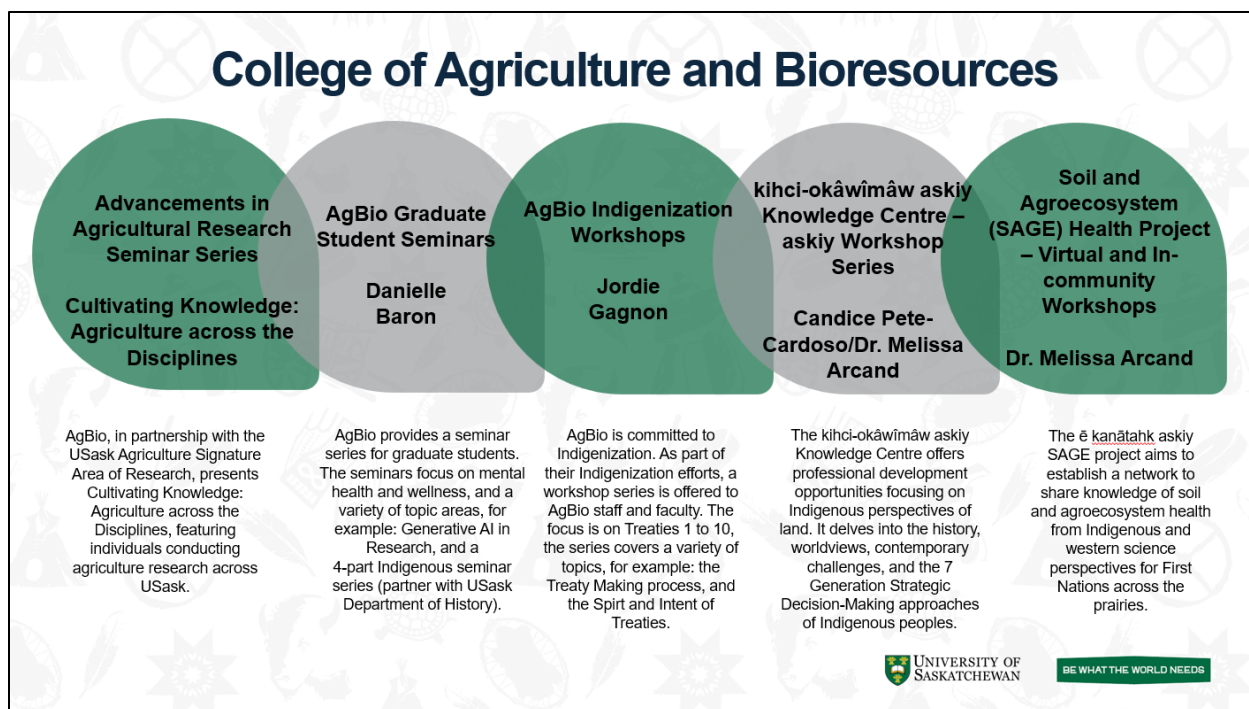
College of Agriculture
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Introduction: AgBio as One

The College of Agriculture and Bioresources (AgBio) is committed to truth and reconciliation through deepened relationships with Indigenous communities, guided by consultation, collaboration, and recognition that reconciliation and Indigenization take many forms. Over many years, AgBio has played a leadership role in creating safe spaces (Safety) for Indigenous students at the University of Saskatchewan, beginning with the Indigenous People Resource Management Program, later the Kanawayihetaytan Askiy Program, and continuing through the Aboriginal Engagement Strategy, engagement processes that informed the kihci-okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre, and the efforts of faculty and departments. This work is ongoing, requiring reflection, cultural change, and Renewal.

With the gifting of the ohpahotân / oohpaahotaan strategy, AgBio developed a complementary approach grounded in the seven fundamental commitments: Safety, Wellness, Stewardship, Representation, Right Relations, Creation, and Renewal. These commitments shaped college initiatives that include educational opportunities on treaty history, racism, and reconciliation; respectful inclusion of Indigenous ceremony; strengthened partnerships with First Nations; establishment of the Knowledge Centre as a gathering and working space; collaborative agreements with Indigenous communities; shared workshops and knowledge exchange; and systemic changes to improve pathways and connections for Indigenous students. Together, these actions support Wellness, strengthen Representation, honour responsibilities to stewardship of land and knowledge, foster innovation, and promote rights relations through cultivation of respectful, reciprocal partnerships.



AgBio has advanced these commitments through co-developed programming, curriculum Indigenization at undergraduate and graduate levels, and expanded opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to deepen their understanding of reconciliation. Efforts to recruit and support Indigenous learners include creating more opportunity through admission pathways, improved student experiences, and clearer routes to graduate education, contributing to both Safety and Renewal.



Elder Roland Duquette

Internally, AgBio has aligned with university reconciliation priorities by supporting faculty-led initiatives and establishing an Elder in Residence, Indigenous-focused curriculum and programs, and an Indigenous Students Society. These initiatives reinforce Wellness, Representation, Creation, and Stewardship, while the Elder in Residence and ongoing treaty education workshops further advance Right Relations.

Targeted supports for Indigenous graduate students, including the [Sprott Indigenous Graduate Scholar and Achievement Awards](#), address financial barriers, promote Wellness, and increase Representation within academia, which will contribute to long-term systems change. Externally, AgBio has formalized partnerships with



MOU Signing with Mistawasis Nêhiyawak First Nation

Thunderchild First Nation and Mistawasis Nêhiyawak First Nation and continues to rely on Indigenous-led governance of the kihci-okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre and the Kanawayihetaytan Askiy Program to ensure accessibility, leadership, and accountability.

Despite this progress, challenges remain. Curriculum Indigenization is uneven, access barriers persist for students outside Saskatoon, and financial and administrative obstacles continue to affect participation. AgBio remains committed to addressing these barriers and to sustaining Renewal guided by the seven commitments.

The remainder of this report highlights selected activities that reflect AgBio's commitment to reconciliation and Indigenization in the spirit of ohpahotân / oohpaahotaan: the origins and impact of the Kanawayihetaytan Askiy Program, faculty research and teaching initiatives, the evolution of the kihci-okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre, and a critical reflection on successes, challenges, and next steps.

Enhancing Access and Pathways through the Kanawayihetaytan Askiy Program

[Kanawayihetaytan Askiy \(ASKI\)](#)—meaning “Let us take care of the land” in Cree—is an Indigenous-focused academic program offered by the University of Saskatchewan's College of Agriculture and Bioresources and developed in close partnership with First Nations. The program prepares Indigenous learners for leadership in land governance and resource management by braiding Indigenous knowledge systems with Western science, policy, and practice, while fostering learning environments where Indigenous students feel safe, supported, and able to thrive. Through culturally grounded teaching, small cohorts, and flexible, blended delivery models, ASKI supports student wellness by enabling learners to remain connected to their communities, families, and cultural responsibilities while pursuing post-secondary education.

The origins of the Kanawayihetaytan Askiy program reaches back to 2007 when it was first established in the College of Agriculture and Bioresources as the Indigenous Peoples



IPRM Class of 2013-14

Resource Management program (IPRM). Initially it received financial support through the federal government in its mission to provide training for First Nations lands managers. Federal funding to the program ceased in 2012. The College of Agriculture and Bioresources, recognizing the importance of the program, stepped in to provide the required funding and keep the program going as a revised and improved Kanawayihetaytan Askiy.

At its core, ASKI is grounded in stewardship; honouring responsibilities to land, people, and knowledge by equipping students with skills to manage lands and resources in ways that reflect Indigenous laws, values, and intergenerational accountability. The program strengthens Indigenous representation in governance and decision-making by preparing graduates for roles in land management, policy, administration, and leadership at community, regional, and national levels.

ASKI is built on right relations through reciprocal, respectful partnerships with First Nations communities, Elders, and knowledge holders, ensuring the program remains relevant, accountable, and community-driven. By integrating Indigenous ways of knowing with contemporary governance and environmental tools, the program supports Indigenous-led innovation and the development of place-based solutions to complex land and resource challenges. Through accessible pathways, ladder credentials, and adaptive delivery across multiple locations, ASKI contributes to renewal—supporting personal growth, community capacity, and meaningful progress toward reconciliation.

Recent program changes demonstrate AgBio's commitment to Safety, Wellness, Representation, and Renewal by reducing barriers to post-secondary education and expanding learner pathways. [Students can now enter the diplomas in the Kanawayihetaytan Askiy program directly from high school](#) (AgKnowledge 2023). Direct entry into the diploma programs from high school increases accessibility for younger students, strengthens Indigenous participation in post-secondary education, and supports long-term leadership development. Blended delivery models that combine classroom, online, and field-based learning accommodate students' professional and community responsibilities, promoting holistic Wellness and learner success.

The USask Prince Albert campus has collaborated with AgBio to offer Kanawayihetaytan Askiy programming. The expansion of [Kanawayihetaytan Askiy Certificate programming to the USask Prince Albert campus](#) (AgKnowledge, 2025) further advances Safety and Wellness by enabling students to learn closer to home and remain connected to family and community support systems. Smaller class sizes and individualized instruction enhance learning environments, while increased regional access strengthens Representation of Indigenous learners in land governance and resource management fields. Graduates can ladder from the certificate into diplomas and onward into degree studies in Renewable Resource Management, supporting educational continuity, creation through innovation, and long-term community capacity building.

Through ongoing collaboration with Indigenous partners and continued adaptation of curriculum and delivery models, AgBio remains committed to Rights Relations by fostering respectful and reciprocal partnerships and to Renewal by sustained institutional change

and growth in alignment with the spirit of ohpahotân / oohpaahotaan. Connected to this is a recognition that the skills and knowledge provided by ASKI is relevant to potential students as a pathway into other AgBio programs as well as alternative career paths. The future challenge will be finding the capacity to properly communicate the availability of the program to communities broadly, but more importantly communicate to potential employers the skills and knowledge available to their organizations through these graduates. The barrier to meeting this challenge is outreach and recruitment capacity.



Dr. Melissa Arcand instructing ASKI 101.3 Field Studies in the Environment

Faculty Connecting with Community

The College of Agriculture and Bioresources has had strong engagement from its faculty in ohpahotân / oohpaahotaan that is evidenced by their support of the college-led Kanawayihetaytan Askiy programs, and the kihci-okāwimāw askiy Knowledge Centre. Examples of this engagement include the Indigenizing of curriculum, instructing courses for the Kanawayihetaytan Askiy program, collaborating with Indigenous communities on research and teaching, and creating opportunities for Elder Duquette, the Elder in Residence, to engage with undergraduate and graduate students.

Such engagement has not always been the case. Prior to receiving the gift of ohpahotân / oohpaahotaan the IPRM program and ILMI led the way in terms of Indigenous engagement for the college. A small number of faculty were highly engaged in those initiatives; but otherwise, overall faculty Indigenous engagement was essentially low. The university and college leadership around Truth and Reconciliation, the college's Aboriginal Engagement Strategy, and subsequent ohpahotân / oohpaahotaan, highlighted the need for and importance of engaging with Indigenous communities and working to make AgBio a safe place for Indigenous students. The results were several faculty-led activities. Many of these collaborations and initiatives are mediated or supported by the kihci-okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre and/or the AgBio Strategic Officer for Indigenous Engagement. To illustrate the breadth and depth of the involvement of our AgBio faculty, what follows are the summaries of four projects that illustrate collaborations with Indigenous partners.

Indigenous-Led Wild Rice Research and Partnership Development: Dr. Tim Sharbel and collaborators undertook an Indigenous-led research initiative that re-centered Indigenous communities as leaders, knowledge holders, and partners in strengthening wild rice production across northern Saskatchewan. While grounded in advanced plant genomics and phenotypic analysis, the project prioritized Safety and Right Relations by beginning with listening, trust-building, and culturally safe engagement with Elders, harvesters, and community members. Indigenous participants determined how knowledge and resources would be shared, ensuring respectful and reciprocal relationships.

The research addressed community-identified priorities related to yield, quality, nutrition, and long-term sustainability, supporting Wellness through food security, economic resilience, and cultural continuity. Indigenous harvesters actively shaped research design and sample collection, and community consent, germplasm preservation, and benefit-sharing reinforced Stewardship of land, biological resources, and Indigenous knowledge systems.

By integrating Western scientific methods with Indigenous understandings of place and interconnectedness, the project advanced Creation, generating new insights rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing. Indigenous scholars, harvesters, and industry partners were central, strengthening Representation, while innovative ideas such as community-owned branding and food sovereignty pathways reflected Renewal through Indigenous-led transformation of wild rice systems. To learn more about this project see [Wild rice research puts Indigenous communities at the forefront](#) (AgKnowledge, 2023).



Aerial view of wild rice growing at Meeyomoot Lake-SK

Soil and Agroecosystem (SAGE) Health Project: Led by Dr. Melissa Arcand, the Soil and Agroecosystem (SAGE) Health Project advances soil health and sustainable land use through reciprocal partnerships with First Nations across the Prairies. Grounded in the understanding that soil health underpins food sovereignty and community wellbeing, the project creates Safe, inclusive learning spaces where Indigenous knowledge and Western agroecological science are brought together in support of Wellness and long-term resilience.

Guided by Indigenous leadership through partnerships and an Indigenous Advisory Circle, SAGE embeds Representation and Right Relations throughout its work. Knowledge sharing is relational rather than transactional, and programming is shaped by community-identified priorities related to agriculture, land stewardship, and food systems. Hands-on field tours, demonstration sites, and applied learning support informed land-use decisions that balance economic livelihoods with responsibilities to future generations, reinforcing Stewardship.

The project also supports Indigenous-led buffalo rematriation as a powerful expression of ecological stewardship and cultural Renewal, alongside initiatives in seed saving,

horticulture, and traditional food production. By combining scientific tools with Indigenous indicators of land health, SAGE advances Creation through innovation rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and supports adaptive management and enduring agroecosystem resilience.



Flying Dust First Nation Co-Learning Event - June 2025

USask and Métis Nation–Saskatchewan Collaborate on Climate Change Mitigation Research (AgKnowledge, 2024): The College of Agriculture and Bioresources, led by Dr. Bryan Mood, in partnership with Métis Nation–Saskatchewan, undertook collaborative research focused on climate change mitigation and ecosystem stewardship within the Nisbet Community Forest. Initiated and guided by Métis Nation–Saskatchewan, the partnership reflects Right Relations, with Indigenous leadership identifying research questions, priorities, and protocols to ensure respectful, community-driven inquiry.

Land-based, experiential learning created Safe and supportive environments for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students while honoring Stewardship responsibilities to land and knowledge. Guided by Métis Elders, fieldwork brought together university and high-school students, supporting intergenerational learning, Indigenous youth engagement, and Representation in STEM-related environmental fields.

Participants explored wetland ecology, carbon sequestration, and traditional medicines, reinforcing Wellness through connections between environmental health, culture, and education. Research findings were returned to community leadership, demonstrating accountability and reciprocity. By blending Indigenous ecological knowledge with

advanced soil carbon science, the project supported Creation, while exploring conservation and economic opportunities such as voluntary carbon standards. The partnership exemplifies Renewal by reimagining research and education as tools for Indigenous-led climate action and long-term sustainability.



Peat Sampling in Nisbet Forest

Community Orchard at Kahkewistahaw First Nation: The Community Orchard at Kahkewistahaw First Nation emerged from relationship-first engagement supported by the kihci-okāwimāw askiy Knowledge Centre and Dr. Nicholas Tyack. Beginning in 2023, reciprocal visits and collaboration with Kahkewistahaw First Nation as rights holders established Right Relations, leading to the planting of a community orchard on treaty land entitlement lands in 2024.

The orchard was created through a land-based, community-led event involving youth, land managers, and leadership, reinforcing Stewardship, intergenerational learning, and Wellness. Engaging children directly in planting and caring for the orchard strengthened connections to food systems and land, while collaborative planning and implementation demonstrated Creation rooted in shared knowledge and practical action.

This initiative represents meaningful Renewal by shifting university engagement from project-driven activity to respectful, rights holder-led partnership. Similar to initiatives such

as the Wild Rice Research Partnership and the SAGE Health Project, the community orchard at Kahkewistahaw First Nation reflects broader systems change aligned with ohpahotân / oohpaahotaan in moving toward reciprocal research, transparency, data return, and long-term community benefit, while strengthening Safety, Representation, and institutional accountability.

The faculty-led projects described above are significant collaborations between the College of AgBio and Indigenous communities or organizations. These are representative of a larger number and wider range of activities that AgBio faculty engage in each year. From having Elder Duquette engage with graduate students in a CREATE program, to collaborating with Little Pine First Nation in a project-based course, to meeting with One Arrow First Nation land managers on the land during a field-based course, many AgBio faculty have created a safe space for all students to become aware of First Nations culture, history and challenges. However, those faculty would still represent a subset of AgBio faculty. The challenge is to increase faculty participation in Indigenous engagement and to increase the number of faculty who are also Indigenous. The barriers to successfully meeting this challenge are complex and involve faculty autonomy in course delivery and academic freedom, as well as their knowledge of First Nations history and culture. A possible solution is to bring further change to the standards for tenure and promotion that would see a requirement for evidence of engagement with Indigenous communities and organizations. Increasing access to Elder Duquette and opportunities to learn about the history and challenges faced by Indigenous peoples will also improve engagement by AgBio faculty.

Reconciliation in Action: kihci-okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre

The Indigenous Land Management Institute (ILMI) was the predecessor to the kihci okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre. Established in 2008 the ILMI mandate was to address the applied research needs of Indigenous communities in regard to land and resource management. By 2021 it was clear that a revitalization was needed and that Indigenous peoples should lead this redevelopment.

The result of this revitalization is the [kihci okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre](#), which demonstrates how reconciliation can be meaningfully enacted when Indigenous governance, relational accountability, and responsibility to Indigenous knowledge systems are centered. Throughout its development and early years of operation, the Centre has shown strong alignment with the University of Saskatchewan's ohpahotân / oohpaahotaan Indigenous Strategy. Its work consistently reflects the Seven Fundamental Commitments which are embedded into daily practice. This reflective summary highlights both

accomplishments and limitations and identifies areas where institutional change is necessary to sustain progress.

Significant progress has been made in establishing cultural safety. The Centre has created spaces grounded in Indigenous ceremony, language, and protocol, under the guidance of kēhtē ayak (Elders), knowledge keepers, and language keepers. Participation occurs on Indigenous terms, reducing the risks of racism, assimilation, and extractive engagement. These efforts have been particularly impactful within national conservation dialogues, where Indigenous voices have historically been marginalized, and demonstrate the feasibility of culturally safe, Indigenous-led engagement.

Wellness is approached holistically through Indigenous-defined practices such as ceremony, storytelling, mentorship, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. These practices strengthen identity, language, and community connection and intentionally move beyond narrow institutional definitions of wellbeing. Stewardship is foundational to the Centre's mandate and is reflected in Indigenous-led grasslands and conservation initiatives that frame land as a living relative with reciprocal responsibilities. These initiatives have influenced national conservation narratives and demonstrated Indigenous leadership in environmental stewardship.

Representation has been consistently advanced through Indigenous leadership embedded within the Centre's governance and programming. Elders and knowledge keepers guide, name, and shape gatherings, public messaging, and decision-making spaces, ensuring Indigenous perspectives are not only present but influential. Convening Indigenous knowledge holders from across the prairie regions has strengthened inter-nation and regional representation, moving well beyond symbolic inclusion. Right Relations are upheld through reciprocal, trust-based partnerships grounded in accountability rather than transaction. Collaborations with national conservation organizations offer strong examples of ethical engagement where Indigenous autonomy, protocols, and decision-making authority are respected. Elder-guided processes, including ceremonial naming and ongoing oversight, reinforce proper relational practices and long-term accountability.

Creation is evident in Indigenous-led knowledge production, story-based conservation communications, and the use of Indigenous languages in public education. These approaches generate knowledge that is both culturally grounded and nationally relevant. Renewal is supported through youth engagement, mentorship, language revitalization, and long-term partnerships guided by seven-generation responsibility. Planned national conservation initiatives aim to extend this work beyond individual projects.

The revisioning of ILMI that led to the development of the kihci okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre has significantly increased and broadened AgBio participation in Truth and Reconciliation and is a realization of the gift of ohpahotân / oohpaahotaan. Phase 4 reporting requires honest reflection. The kihci okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre demonstrates that alignment with ohpahotân / oohpaahotaan is possible when Indigenous governance and knowledge are genuinely centered. At the same time, reconciliation cannot rest solely on Indigenous-led units. Persistent barriers related to land governance, funding structures, authority, and institutional accountability point to the need for leadership-level action.



Steering Committee members, sign Buffalo Treaty as supporters on behalf of the kihci-okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre.

For example, the Centre's capacity to fully enact Indigenous defined wellness remains constrained. Elders have consistently emphasized the central importance of land-based practice, yet barriers related to land access, governance, and approval processes have limited the realization of these teachings. Institutional land governance structures continue to restrict the Centre's ability to carry out land-based ceremony and teaching. There is a need for more sanctioned ceremonial and learning spaces which represents a misalignment between Indigenous stewardship and institutional systems. At the heart of the issue, institutional systems continue to treat land-based Indigenous methodologies as exceptional rather than essential, limiting the full expression of Indigenous creativity and knowledge making. This also speaks to renewal which depends on change that enables Elders' teachings – particularly those rooted in land-based responsibility – to be enacted in practice rather than acknowledged only in principle. This gap between commitment and implementation remains one of the most significant challenges. Moving reconciliation from exceptional practice to institutional norm will require concrete, systemwide change to ensure Indigenous responsibilities to land, knowledge, and future generations are honoured in practice. For AgBio to successfully meet this challenge, Institutional support is needed to remove barriers.



Steering Committee kihci okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre

Reflection and Commitment

The College of Agriculture and Bioresources (AgBio) is proud of its ongoing work to fulfill the gift of Ohpahotân/Oohpaahotaan and advance Truth and Reconciliation. Many of these efforts represent long-term commitments, including the continued delivery of the Kanawayihetaytan Askiy undergraduate programs and the growing momentum of the kihci-okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre. Through these initiatives, AgBio has worked to center Indigenous worldviews, support knowledge sovereignty, and uphold ethically grounded approaches to accessing, earning, and sharing traditional knowledge. Indigenous leadership, values, and relational accountability are embedded across many areas of the college, supported by faculty and staff who are committed to ensuring Indigenous Knowledge systems are respected, protected, and recognized. While these initiatives align with the Seven Fundamental Commitments and demonstrate critical systems change, there remain aspects of AgBio's work that this transformation has not yet reached.

Reflecting on the past, present, and future of the programs, collaborations, and initiatives that have been described in this report, they can be collectively viewed as action toward one overarching purpose: to bring Indigenous voices into the work of the college and the

university. Change to critical systems at the college, the university, and academia that address Truth and Reconciliation in a meaningful way will happen faster if there are more Indigenous peoples in decision-making roles and more Indigenous voices on campus overall. More Indigenous voices in academia will also see that the truth will be spoken and part of the decision making. AgBio seeks to do this, but challenges both within and outside the college need to be addressed.

Invitations to partner on research, teaching, and community initiatives are numerous, requiring difficult decisions about how to prioritize these opportunities. Engagement often depends on the availability of resources and disciplinary alignment of individual faculty members, leading to variability in the depth and consistency of partnerships. Placing more recognition on research and teaching collaborations with Indigenous partners within the standards for tenure and promotion; and prioritizing Indigenous candidates for graduate, post-doctoral, and faculty positions will encourage more faculty to engage in these meaningful collaborations and bring more voices to prioritizing such engagement.

Indigenizing curriculum remains a gradual process that depends on faculty cooperation and understanding. Additional work is needed to educate faculty on the responsibilities, benefits, and impacts of this work. While academic freedom necessitates voluntary participation, Indigenizing curriculum could be recognized more formally, similar to how community-based research is embedded within tenure and promotion criteria. Continued support for the Senior Strategic Officer, Indigenous Programs and Partnerships, and the Director of the kihci-okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre is essential to provide educational and collaborative opportunities. Expanding access to Elder Roland Duquette would further support wellness, inform research, and increase exposure to Indigenous methodologies for faculty, staff, and students.

Strengthening connections with Indigenous students across the college is critical to improving the student experience for all. This requires creating safer spaces for Indigenous students and educating non-Indigenous students about the essential role Indigenous peoples play in Saskatchewan's agriculture and bioresource industries. AgBio could do more to elevate Indigenous student voices. Two key challenges include identifying a physical space for an Indigenous Students Society that is available each day – all day, and improving inclusivity within the Agriculture Students Association (ASA). Space constraints may necessitate shared arrangements with existing student groups while preserving Indigenous student identity. Additionally, targeted education for the ASA executive and members is needed to foster a more welcoming environment, potentially through college-sponsored workshops embedded into course requirements.

Outreach to Indigenous communities about AgBio programs, especially opportunities to study closer to home, requires additional capacity. Community-based recruitment is challenged by the number of communities and events. Increased efficiencies and support from central administration, such as developing Major Maps for certificate and diploma programs, could significantly improve recruitment and advising, particularly for the Kanawayihetaytan Aski Certificate and Diplomas. Opportunities to study closer to home will increase participation of Indigenous students in degree level programs leading to more Indigenous participation in graduate programs and subsequently leadership in academia.

AgBio also recognizes a missed opportunity for deeper collaboration with Indigenous and Métis faculty and staff across campus, who often work in isolation. Dedicated time and space for informal connections and dialogue would benefit both individuals and the broader college community.

Over the next five years, AgBio anticipates new opportunities for engagement with Indigenous partners. Key priorities include expanding program access, deepening community-guided collaboration, increasing access to the Elder in Residence, establishing formal roles for Indigenous student representation, further Indigenization of curriculum, enhancing recruitment materials, creating spaces for cross-campus Indigenous connection, and increasing Indigenous representation among faculty and staff. While each initiative may appear modest, together they will strengthen and increase the Indigenous voices at AgBio and advance the realization of ohpahotân / oohpaahotaan. We look forward to the continued journey towards Truth and Reconciliation and walking this together with the Office of the Vice Provost Indigenous and the university community.