

Innovation Scouting Fund - Call for Proposals Winter 2026

About the partner

The piloting partner is a large Canadian food company and global leader in prepared vegetable-based products and frozen appetizers. They operate high-volume manufacturing facilities focused on elevating the eating experience through sustainable manufacturing, advanced preservation, and novel product formats. Their innovation mandate targets the gap between 'fast' and 'nutritious', specifically seeking solutions for vegetables in complex, multi-textured formats (e.g., crispy, coated, or stuffed). Successful applicants should be prepared to deploy solutions within a rigorous, large-scale production environment that prioritizes defect detection and consistent quality control.

To support their mandate of delivering superior quality and nutritional value, the Canadian Food Innovation Network (CFIN), in partnership with this industry leader, invites companies and academics across Canada to pitch their innovations.

Overall Call Eligibility

- **TRL Level:** Solutions must have achieved a Technology Readiness Level (TRL) of 3 (Analytical/experimental proof of concept) or higher.
- **Timeline:** Solutions can be 3–5 years from full commercialization.
- **Regulatory:** Submissions must be safe for consumption under Canadian regulations; novel ingredients must be considering Health Canada approval.
- **Applicants:** Must be CFIN members (membership is free) from Canadian businesses or academic institutions.

Call Priorities This food company is exploring opportunities for its next generation of products and manufacturing capabilities. Applications must align with one or more of the following areas:

1. Next-Generation Processing & Preservation

Seeking technologies that move beyond traditional methods to improve health profiles and sustainability.

- **Non-Thermal & Non-Frying Technologies:** Processes that cook or preserve food without deep frying or high-heat thermal impact, preserving nutrients and texture.
- **Seed Oil Alternatives:** Novel ingredients or processing methods that reduce or replace reliance on traditional seed oils while maintaining functional properties (crispiness, mouthfeel).

2. Novel Formats & Textural Experiences

Innovations that create new eating experiences through advanced forming and layering techniques.

- **3D Forming & Printing:** Technologies for creating unique 3D shapes, including forming technologies for leafy greens and custom appetizers.
- **Complex Layering:** Capabilities to layer distinct ingredients (e.g., potato + spinach, or vegetable + cream cores) while maintaining structural integrity.
- **Textural Innovation:** Technologies that deliver distinct sensory experiences, specifically targeting gooey, melty, crispy, or stuffed attributes.
- **Non-Frozen Convenience:** Exploring shelf-stable or chilled microwavable formats (e.g., rice pouches) that offer high quality without freezing.

3. Functional Flavor Systems Moving beyond taste to deliver functional benefits.

- **Differentiation with Nutrition:** Flavor systems that deliver distinct taste profiles while simultaneously adding nutritional value.
- **Enhancers:** Clean-label sodium enhancers and flavor modulation technologies.

4. Smart & Active Packaging Packaging solutions that actively contribute to product quality and preparation.

- **Edible & Dissolving Packaging:** Food-safe films and coatings that dissolve upon cooking or are safe to consume.
- **Moisture & Temperature Management:** Moisture-activated coatings or packaging materials that retain heat and texture (crispiness) post-preparation (e.g., during delivery).

5. Smart Manufacturing & Digital Quality Technologies combining the physical and digital worlds to create "Smart Factories."

- **Advanced Analytics & AI:** Integration of physical sensors with digital analytics to optimize production lines.
- **Inline Defect Detection:** Systems capable of detecting internal defects in raw materials (specifically various forms of rot in root vegetables) in real-time.
- **Process Harmonization:** Novel techniques for measuring and harmonizing in-line parameters such as blanching and drying levels to ensure consistent quality.

Funding & Program Details: The Innovation Scouting program supports a targeted, 12-month collaboration between the applicant and the partner company to test and validate high-potential innovations.

- **Funding:** Up to **\$75,000** is available to support further development, trial production, demo formulations, and performance validation.
- **Guide:** See the **Program Guide** for a full overview of eligible costs and application questions. **Further program details are available at:** www.cfin-rcia.ca