

The Eastern Junction's Ag Innovation Startup Program

Building innovation, trust, and growth across Eastern Saskatchewan.

The Problem

Eastern Saskatchewan has never been short of capable people or good ideas, but it has never had the support structure that turns an idea into a company, which is why innovators here either leave for somewhere that does or never start at all. At the same time, agricultural innovation is largely being built without the people it is built for, because most innovators, wherever they happen to come from, never get in front of an ordinary farm or an agri-value producer long enough to understand what actually matters in the field. Those two problems are usually treated as separate. We think they solve each other.

What This Program Does

The program takes ten companies through a structured curriculum that ends where it probably should have started, in the same room as the producers whose work they are trying to change. Some of those companies are from here and some are from outside the province, and that mix is deliberate, because founders coming in gain access to working farms and agri-value producers while the region gains the networks, market connections, and outside perspective they bring with them. Along the way we are demonstrating something that matters to every rural community watching, which is that a region like this one can lead work of this calibre and draw people toward it rather than only watching them leave.

What Participants Actually Get

The curriculum matters, but it is not really the product. Nearly every session is built to end with a founder sitting across from someone who changes how they think, whether that is a peer one step ahead of them, a producer with decades in the field, or a guest who has already made the mistake they are about to make. What the program offers is proximity, and everything else hangs off it.

- **Access to producers.** A structured path into conversations with working farms and agri-value producers, ending with a week on the ground in Yorkton.
- **A peer ladder.** Six activation, three incubation, and one acceleration company in the same cohort, so early founders learn from people one or two steps ahead of them rather than from paid consultants.
- **A validation pipeline.** Sessions that chain deliberately from problem to discovery to offer to sales, ending in a real customer conversation rather than a certificate.
- **Marketing and visibility.** Selection into the cohort, a presence during our in person week, and a platform most early companies cannot build for themselves.
- **A reason to stay.** A visible path to building something serious without having to leave the region to do it.

What we are really doing is concentrating resources that already exist in this region but sit scattered across it, the mentors, producers, subject matter experts, and community organizations, and pointing all of them at ten companies inside a single window of time. That concentration does not exist in rural Eastern Saskatchewan today.

What Counts as Ag Innovation

We define ag innovation broadly and on purpose, because the interesting work rarely arrives neatly labelled. It might be agricultural technology or biotechnology, a new machine or implement, a new use for a resource the region already has, or a new business model, service, or ownership structure built around agriculture and rural life. If it grows out of farming or rural life and someone is building a business from it, it belongs here.

Cohort Design

Focus	Ag innovation, broadly defined
Size	10 startups
Stages	6 activation, 3 incubation, 1 acceleration, built as a peer mentorship ladder
Geography	Rural Saskatchewan, plus Canada and international
Selection	Open application, August 1 to August 22
Delivery	Virtual sessions weekly, September 18 to October 30, then in person in Yorkton, November 2 to 8
Cost	No cost to the startup, though participants cover travel to Eastern Saskatchewan for the final week, and we can help secure low cost places to stay in the Yorkton area.

Why Support This Initiative

We are building a conduit for new ideas in rural Saskatchewan, connecting early stage founders to the community leaders, industry experts, and innovation champions who can move them forward. Supporting it is as much a straightforward economic development decision as anything else.

- **Economic development.** New ventures, new customers, and new investment moving into a regional economy that needs all three.
- **Talent retention.** A visible reason for capable young people to build something here instead of somewhere else.
- **Rural capability.** Proof that Eastern Saskatchewan can lead work of this calibre and pull talent, companies, and expertise toward the region.
- **Sector bridging.** Lasting collaboration between rural communities, Indigenous groups, startups, producers, and business leaders.
- **Real ventures.** Support that turns working ideas into companies that stay and employ people here.

What Supporters Get

Supporters are visible to a growing network of emerging ventures, community leaders, and innovation organizations across the province and beyond, and are recognized through our program materials, events, and media. More practically, you get early sight of the companies coming through and the people building them, before anyone else is looking.

How You Can Help

Listed from the easiest to the most involved, and any of them is useful to us.

- **Have a conversation.** The most useful first step is a conversation about where our work and yours overlap.
- **Let us list you.** Adding your logo to our supporting organizations signals to founders and funders that this region backs the work.
- **Share it.** Passing the program along to your network before intake closes on August 22 costs nothing and reaches people we cannot.
- **Open a door.** An introduction to a farmer, an agri-value producer, or a potential mentor is the single most valuable thing anyone gives this program.
- **Help run a session.** Leading a fireside chat, workshop, or panel puts your experience directly in front of ten companies at once.
- **Fund a piece of it.** Financial or in kind support, whether that is a venue, tools, services, or a specific line in the budget, extends how far the program can go.

Why Now

This is moving quickly, and that is a response rather than a strategy. Community members, producers, and organizations across Eastern Saskatchewan have been asking for something like this, and several have already committed their time and their networks without needing to be asked twice. We would rather build at the speed of that momentum than let it cool while waiting for a funding cycle to line up. Intake opens August 1 and closes August 22, the program begins September 18, and it will run whether or not the support arrives. What support changes is how far we can take it.

Contact

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Supporting Organizations

The Eastern Junction	Startup-in-Residence: Chariot Command Corp.	Saskatchewan Economic Development Alliance	Suncrest College
			

The Eastern Junction is honoured to be headquartered in Treaty 4 Territory and the Homeland of the Metis, and to operate across all Treaty Territories in Canada with a firm commitment to reconciliation. | All paths lead to The Eastern Junction.