



AGTECH INNOVATION CAMPUSES & COMPARABLES

2026 COMPARATIVE BRIEF

What leading AgTech campuses reveal about research, commercialization, shared infrastructure and the path from startup to scale.

TURNER DEVELOPMENT
Western North Carolina

Comparable campuses show that successful AgTech ecosystems combine specialized real estate with research access, talent, capital, shared services and places where companies can test and demonstrate technology.

Cover imagery is an editorial illustration informed by the three campus models discussed in this report; it is not documentary photography.

1. Alexandria Center for AgTech - Research Triangle Park, NC

For the Mills River concept, Alexandria Center for AgTech is the most directly relevant U.S. comparable. Alexandria describes 5 & 9 Laboratory Drive as an integrated AgTech R&D; and greenhouse campus offering turnkey laboratory, greenhouse and office space in a collaborative setting.

Alexandria's broader Research Triangle platform totals more than 3 million square feet of laboratory, office and greenhouse space. The AgTech campus is part of that larger innovation cluster, giving tenants access not only to specialized real estate but also to nearby life-science companies, universities, talent and capital.

What makes it important

The model goes beyond leasing buildings. Alexandria LaunchLabs provides shared and private research environments for early-stage companies, while AscentLabs provides move-in-ready laboratory, office and greenhouse environments for growing teams. The real estate is intentionally designed around a company-growth pathway.

Comparable feature	Lesson for Mills River / Fletcher
Turnkey greenhouse + lab + office	Specialized space can be a competitive advantage when it is difficult for a startup to build itself.
Multi-tenant model	Companies can share an ecosystem while maintaining dedicated research space.
LaunchLabs + AscentLabs	Different real-estate products can serve different company stages.
Research Triangle location	Proximity to universities, talent, investors and industry strengthens the property itself.
Dedicated greenhouse operations	Operational capability is part of the product, not merely the shell.

Sources: Alexandria Research Triangle campus site; 9 Laboratory Drive; Clark Nexsen project profile. Clark Nexsen reports approximately 180,000 SF for the reimagined campus, completed in 2020.

2. Agro Food Park - Aarhus, Denmark

Agro Food Park demonstrates a different model: a purpose-built business and innovation district where agriculture and food companies, research organizations and supporting institutions are physically clustered. The campus includes offices, laboratories, research facilities and space for prototype production, with farmland integrated into the setting.

Aarhus University's Department of Food Science operates research facilities at Agro Food Park, including controlled-climate and glasshouse-based plant-production research. The campus therefore connects commercial organizations directly with academic research capability.

The physical planning is itself part of the strategy

The campus master plan places different actors close together and uses a compact, walkable layout to encourage knowledge sharing. A central agricultural strip called 'The Lawn' functions as both landscape and a living outdoor showroom for crops and agricultural activity.

This is a useful lesson for an AgTech park: agriculture does not have to be hidden behind the buildings. Demonstration plots, greenhouses and visible technology can become part of the identity of the place.

What transfers: cluster related tenants; provide flexible paths from R&D; to prototype production; use shared gathering spaces; integrate real agriculture into the campus; and make collaboration visible rather than incidental.

Sources: Agro Food Park; Aarhus University Department of Food Science; URBAN POWER campus master-plan description.

3. Wageningen Campus - Wageningen, Netherlands

Wageningen represents the large-scale research-led end of the spectrum. Wageningen University & Research describes its campus as a meeting place for students, scientists, entrepreneurs, startups and established companies working on food, agriculture and the living environment.

The campus model is built around collaboration: companies gain access to scientific expertise, research facilities and talent, while startup support is provided through organizations such as StartLife. Plus Ultra II functions as an innovation and incubation center where startups, companies and researchers can work together.

Specialized facilities deepen the ecosystem

Wageningen's facilities include capabilities in food and biobased research, computer vision, robotics, post-harvest research and other specialized areas. A strong innovation campus accumulates difficult-to-replicate infrastructure and expertise over time.

For a smaller regional park, the lesson is not to recreate Wageningen. It is to connect intelligently to universities and research organizations while providing the commercial real estate and real-world environments that research institutions often do not provide.

Sources: Wageningen University & Research campus pages; Wageningen Campus; Plus Ultra II; Phenomea research facility.

Three models - three different strengths

Campus	Core strength	Real-estate lesson
Alexandria Center for AgTech	Turnkey lab + greenhouse + office	Specialized facilities can directly support company growth stages.
Agro Food Park	Industry clustering + visible agriculture	Place-making and proximity can make collaboration part of the product.
Wageningen Campus	Research + talent + startup ecosystem	Deep expertise and specialized facilities attract companies and partners.

Other Comparable Models Worth Watching

Not every useful comparable is a dedicated AgTech real-estate development. Several adjacent models illustrate how specialized facilities, incubators and regional networks can strengthen a commercialization ecosystem.

Alexandria LaunchLabs / AscentLabs - RTP

A staged space model: flexible serviced research environments for early companies, followed by larger move-in-ready lab, office and greenhouse environments for growing teams.

NC State Plant Sciences Initiative - Raleigh

A university-centered research platform focused on plant improvement, data-driven plant science and resilient agricultural systems. Its value to a commercialization park is as a source of science, talent and partnerships rather than conventional tenant real estate.

Research Triangle AgTech Cluster - North Carolina

A regional network connecting companies to incubators, research, greenhouses, funding, regulatory resources and partnerships.

Wageningen Plus Ultra II - Netherlands

A purpose-built innovation and incubation environment colocating startups, companies and researchers in agriculture and food.

Aarhus University at Agro Food Park - Denmark

An example of academic research physically embedded within a broader commercial agriculture and food campus.

The recurring pattern

*Across these examples, the successful campus is not simply a collection of buildings. It combines **specialized space + research access + startup support + industry relationships + talent + capital + demonstration environments**. The exact mix varies by region, but the underlying logic is remarkably consistent.*

Implications for Western North Carolina

The comparable campuses suggest that Western North Carolina does not need to imitate a major university research campus. A more differentiated opportunity is to become the commercialization bridge between research centers and full-scale industry.

Mills River can occupy the research-and-validation end of that bridge: greenhouse zones, laboratory and office space, controlled growing environments and access to farms. Fletcher can occupy the commercialization-and-scale end: prototyping, engineering, assembly, light manufacturing, warehousing and distribution.

Comparable lesson	Application
Specialized infrastructure wins	Preserve and improve hard-to-replicate greenhouse/lab assets at Mills River.
Companies need a growth path	Allow tenants to move from small research footprints to larger flex-industrial space as they mature.
Operations matter	Use a capable third-party greenhouse operator rather than making the landlord the research operator.
Clusters are networks, not just buildings	Formalize relationships with universities, farmers, investors, manufacturers and regional economic-development groups.
Demonstration accelerates adoption	Create visible places for field trials, equipment demonstrations and customer visits.
Flexibility reduces tenant capital needs	Offer adaptable space so companies can spend scarce capital on technology and growth rather than constructing facilities.

The strongest precedent is therefore not one campus but the combination of ideas: Alexandria's turnkey greenhouse/lab real estate, Agro Food Park's commercial cluster and demonstration character, and Wageningen's deep connection between research, talent and companies.

Selected Sources

Alexandria Real Estate Equities - Research Triangle campus and Alexandria Center for AgTech, 5 & 9 Laboratory Drive.
Clark Nexsen - Alexandria Center for AgTech project profile.
Research Triangle AgTech Cluster - incubators and regional AgTech resources.
Agro Food Park - Aarhus, Denmark; campus and domicile information.
Aarhus University Department of Food Science - research facilities at Agro Food Park.
Wageningen University & Research / Wageningen Campus - campus ecosystem, Plus Ultra II and research facilities.

TURNER DEVELOPMENT
Land. Ideas. Companies. A Stronger Tomorrow.

AgTech commercialization in Western North Carolina