

**NOVA SCOTIA FEDERATION
OF
AGRICULTURE**

Standing Policy

2015-2016



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Introduction

Since 1895, the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture has represented the interests of Nova Scotia's agricultural community. Today its members account for over 90% of all agricultural production in Nova Scotia. With an organizational structure that includes representation from 13 county and regional federations and 27 recognized agricultural commodity groups, the Federation brings together over 2400 individual farm businesses representing all aspects of primary agriculture in the province.

The NSFA Standing Policy outlines, in terms of issues and action strategies, its position on major issues facing the industry. This document consists of current policy statements as well as resolutions passed during the past 3 years at the annual meeting of the Federation. Once adopted the Policy Paper along with resolutions adopted at the Annual General Meeting become the major focus of the Federation's activities during the ensuing year.

The Policy Paper reflects unresolved and ongoing issues from previous years and emerging issues that may have an impact on the development of a profitable agricultural sector. It is developed through industry discussion, background papers prepared by the Federation and issues that surface throughout the year. The context for the Policy Paper is developed by the Executive Committee; it is expanded through consultation and discussion by the Council of Leaders and presented to the Annual General Meeting.

The objectives and actions set out in the Policy Paper are informed by the principal Vision of NSFA *"A competitive and sustainable future for the farming community in Nova Scotia."* and our Mission *"To enable a sustainable future for the farming community by building farm businesses that are focused on the triple bottom line – that being financially viable, ecologically and socially responsible."*

The Policy Paper is distributed to all Federation Members through the Federation's newsletter. It is debated and amended by the Annual General Meeting before it effectively becomes the blueprint for the Federation's lobbying efforts in the following year. Principal initiatives will become the main focus of the Federation's policy agenda in the coming year.

Our Vision:

“A competitive and sustainable future for the farming community in Nova Scotia.”

Our Mission:

“To enable a sustainable future for the farming community by building farm businesses that are focused on the triple bottom line – that being financially viable, ecologically and socially responsible.”

Members of the NSFA

NSFA Affiliated Commodity Groups

1. Chicken Farmers of Nova Scotia
2. Chicken Producers Association of Nova Scotia
3. Christmas Tree Council of Nova Scotia
4. Dairy Farmers of Nova Scotia
5. Egg Farmers of Nova Scotia
6. Goat Association of Nova Scotia
7. Grape Growers Association of Nova Scotia
8. Greenhouse Nova Scotia
9. Horticulture Nova Scotia (Berry)
10. Horticulture Nova Scotia (Vegetable)
11. Nova Scotia Potato Marketing Board
12. Landscape Nova Scotia
13. Maple Producers Association of Nova Scotia
14. Nova Scotia Beekeepers Association
15. Nova Scotia Cattle Producers
16. Nova Scotia Fox Breeders Association
17. Nova Scotia Fruit Growers Association
18. Nova Scotia Greenhouse Vegetable Marketing Board
19. Nova Scotia Mink Breeders Association
20. Nova Scotia Young Farmers Forum
21. Organic Council of Nova Scotia
22. Pork Nova Scotia
23. Sheep Producers Association of Nova Scotia
24. Soil and Crop Improvement Association of Nova Scotia
25. Turkey Farmers of Nova Scotia
26. West Nova Agro Commodities Limited
27. Wild Blueberry Producers Association of Nova Scotia

County/Regional Federations

1. Annapolis County
2. Antigonish/Guysborough Counties
3. Cape Breton / Richmond Counties
4. Colchester County
5. Cumberland County
6. Digby County
7. Halifax-East Hants
8. Hants County
9. Inverness/Victoria Counties
10. Kings County
11. Lunenburg/Queens Counties
12. Pictou-North Colchester
13. Yarmouth / Shelburne Counties

Corresponding Members

1. Women's Institute of Nova Scotia
2. Nova Scotia 4-H Council
3. Farmers Markets of Nova Scotia

Rural Infrastructure Deficit

Farms are businesses and require quality rural infrastructure to ensure success and growth opportunity. Because of the rural nature of farm businesses, rural infrastructure deficits contribute to inefficiencies, inability to upgrade farm operations (e.g.: 3-phase power, technological advances).

Rural Roads

The condition of many rural roads in Nova Scotia is unacceptable. Safety concerns are an evident issue with overgrowth of weeds in ditches creating sight barriers for drivers when turning out from farms or fields. The poor condition of rural roads cause agriculture goods to be damaged and bruised while being transported, thus unsellable or sold at a lower value.

Dust is another cause for concern regarding rural roads. Road dust on field produce and blueberries, for example, creates additional market preparation.

Technology

High speed internet and cell phone access is not only for staying connected with customers. Technology has evolved to assist farms with on farm quality control, safety, planting, harvesting and point of sale. However, to use most of the available technology, access to high speed internet and cell phone service is required.

Policy Statement: It shall be the policy of NSFA to work with respective government departments to ensure rural infrastructure needs are being met. Areas of immediate concern are rural roads, cell service and high speed internet.

Other deficits not mentioned above can be found throughout the policy paper: energy access, land and buy local shelf space.

Regulatory Burden

The regulatory burden in Nova Scotia hinders our industry's competitiveness when compared to other provinces. In part, this burden is caused by unclear, conflicting regulations. Some regulations are time consuming and others require farmers to incur significant costs in order to comply.

Agriculture falls under provincial jurisdiction, but municipal by-laws often cause interference with the right to farm. Inconsistencies in such things as building permits and building codes for agricultural buildings are just a few of the challenges. Regulations should not exist to hinder the development of agriculture and should be written in plain language to facilitate understanding.

The FoodARC and Mount Saint Vincent University report "Making Food Matters: Strategies For Activating Change Together" identified an Opportunity regarding regulations:

"4. SCALE-APPROPRIATE FOOD REGULATIONS: Regulations on licensing, quality assurance, labelling, food safety and handling, and distribution impact anyone wanting to grow, catch, harvest, produce, process, distribute, and sell or share food with others. Many current regulations are designed to address large-scale production, processing, and distribution. These same regulations, however, impede small-scale operations and informal activities and their capacity to concretely and positively impact community food security (and associated contributions to individual and community health, vibrancy and sustainability). Pilot projects could test strategies to create a spectrum of regulations for different scales of activity."

Changes to regulations that affect farm operations always strike concerns. Any update to regulations should be phased in and facilitate clear communication with farmers around compliance.

In comparison to many other provinces, Nova Scotia Farmers face burdens that effect the growth of our industry. The Nova Scotia government has established a "Better Regulation Initiative", a province-wide process to improve the laws and regulations in Nova Scotia. According to a fact sheet explaining the initiative, Better Regulation is Nova Scotia's approach to regulatory reform and commitment to continuous improvement; keeping the benefits of regulation and making it easier to do business in Nova Scotia. The Red Tape Reduction Act was also put in place in April 2012.

Leading the industry toward increased capacity for innovation, responsiveness, and reduced business risk will help ensure the competitiveness of Nova Scotia agriculture. These costs must be recoverable in the market place or be recognized as a public good supported by Nova Scotia government, not downloaded to the agriculture community.

Policy Statement: It shall be the policy of the Federation to lobby Nova Scotia Government for reduction of red tape and regulatory burden so farmers can do business in Nova Scotia. It shall also be the policy of the Federation to work with counterparts at CFA to reduce red tape at the federal level.

Agricultural Land

According to the “Is Nova Scotia Running Out of Agriculture Land” discussion paper by the Agriculture Land Review Committee, Nova Scotia has a little over 29% (1.57 million hectares) of its land classed as Agriculture. Though classed as Agriculture, some of this land is not being used for Agriculture and is growing in with weeds, brush and trees. Increasing the amount of agricultural land under production in the province will have a significant impact on the economy of Nova Scotia including job creation, farm gate sales and economic spinoff.

Developing Agricultural Land

It takes significant time, money and resources to bring former and new agriculture land into production, which are difficult to come by when starting a farm or expanding existing operations. Increased support for land development and preparation must be a priority of the government.

Land bank

One of the ways to address agriculture land shortages is to protect current agriculture land by implementing a land bank program. To be effective, an agricultural land bank program must compensate farmers for removing development rights from their farm land. As part of the broader picture, an agricultural land bank would help offset the current deficit of agricultural land. A land bank would provide access to agriculture land to new farmers and farmers expanding their farm operations without tying up capital.

The existing regulations in place under the Community Easements Act already allow for easements to be placed on land for agriculture use. However, not all regions in Nova Scotia have an organizing body that can hold easements on agricultural land.

The Federation’s policy regarding the protection of agricultural land suggests government intervention must go well beyond simply placing restrictions on the use of agricultural land. Incentives to encourage private land owners to continue farming and voluntarily place an agricultural easement on their farm land would be the least invasive and most receptive means of increasing the amount of private farm land in the province.

Crown land

The Province of Nova Scotia has 1.3 million hectares of Crown Land. Much of this crown land is located in rural areas, close to farmers. A land deficit plan should include the use of underutilized Crown Land for agricultural purposes.

Zero taxation on farm land

The zero taxation policy on farm land was developed so that farmers in rural and urban settings would have an equalized tax burden, land tax would be higher in more desirable urban or industrial settings. This has been a benefit to farmers but also to owners of farm land that do not farm. In some cases this has the unintended consequence of a landowner not allowing a farmer to use the land since there is no incentive; they receive the zero tax benefit anyway.

Policy Statement: It shall be the policy of the Federation to lobby the Nova Scotia government to implement a well-rounded program to protect agricultural land. This program would include a land bank system along with zero taxation of farm land, access to Crown Land for agriculture use and support for those who are bringing former and new agriculture land into production.

Energy

Energy consumption is inevitable when producing agricultural products. Access to affordable, environmentally responsible and sustainable energy sources is critical to the success of a farm operation. Farms produce by-products that can be used to produce renewable energy without negatively impacting other industries. To ensure stability of the industry, renewable, affordable and environmentally responsible sources of energy are required.

Access

Nova Scotia has a supply of natural gas, but the gas is not easily accessed because the cost of transport, lateral lines, etc. Heating costs are significantly lower in other regions such as Ontario where greenhouses, poultry and other agricultural operations have better access to natural gas, than in Nova Scotia where oil and wood are sources of heat.

Access to three phase power is a concern for farms upgrading equipment on their operations. Much of the newer equipment requires consistent energy which single phase power cannot offer. This is prohibiting many farms from upgrading to modernized and more efficient equipment, and growing their operation.

Nova Scotia Power has not consistently maintained needed upgrades to services across the province to match the growth and the energy needs. These limitations are severely restricting the economic growth of Nova Scotia.

Production

As part of the current government's policy to reduce the dependence on fossil fuels and energy costs, a Direct to Retail program concept is being explored. Many farms have the biomass capacity to produce enough energy for their operation and to supply their neighbours with energy.

Access to three phase power is also a concern for those who produce energy. Access is cost prohibitive to those who can provide energy. Other provinces, such as New Brunswick, have significantly lower connection costs which creates an unfair competitive disadvantage for Nova Scotia businesses.

There are many restrictions that must be addressed for small scale energy production to be effective. Other restrictions include net metering restricted to within distribution zones and same account addresses.

Policy Statement: It shall be the policy of the Federation to lobby the provincial government for access to affordable energy sources and to allow fair and cost effective connection into the distribution grid without placing the burden on the farmers.

Local Awareness

Increasing awareness of the importance of buying locally produced food and agri-products and which brands are of Nova Scotia origin are major components of increasing the amount of food and agri-products sourced from local farmers.

The FoodARC and Mount Saint Vincent University report “Making Food Matters: Strategies For Activating Change Together” identified opportunities that would support food security and farm businesses in Nova Scotia. One Opportunity identified was:

“3. MOBILE/POP-UP FRESH AND LOCAL FOOD OUTLETS: Access to healthy foods is a challenge for many in Nova Scotia and producers encounter barriers in distributing their foods. The creation of mobile (a food van or truck) or pop-up retail (a market stand using existing, non-exclusive retail space) of fresh and local food holds strong potential for improving food access in rural communities and low income neighbourhoods in which access to and affordability of transportation are barriers, as well as for anyone far from a grocery store. These mobile/pop-up outlets can also help small producers to distribute their foods, by aggregating products from small-scale fishers and farmers for direct sales to citizens. Pilot projects could explore several models and evaluate the impacts for both community members and producers.”

As part of the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperities Act (EGSPA), two food goals are identified:

- 20% of our food spending from local farms by 2020 and increased local procurement by government
- A 5% increase of new farmers to the Nova Scotia Farm Registration System by 2020.

Having a well identified brand to promote Nova Scotia’s agricultural products helps consumers to identify which items in the grocery store are of Nova Scotia origin. Nova Scotia producer brand recognition is also essential to promote and could be as simple as a sign in the produce section of a grocery store that identifies which labels belong to Nova Scotia farmers.

Policy Statement: It shall be the policy of the Federation to provide support to government in fulfilling the EGSPA goals. The Federation shall also lobby the government to provide resources for consumers so they can make an informed decision when considering local agricultural products at grocery retail stores. The Federation will also lobby government for the Select Nova Scotia brand to be exclusive to Nova Scotia Agriculture products.

Ongoing Policy Initiatives

Ongoing Policy Initiatives include previous policy initiatives that are of sufficient importance to remain at the top of the Federation's policy agenda. The Federation will continue to pursue the following issues:

Dalhousie Faculty of Agriculture Academic Focus: NS Federation of Agriculture supports Dalhousie Faculty of Agriculture in having a strong technical and academic focus as well as an enhanced capability to continue to support the agricultural sector, and the closely related areas of health, environment, economic development and renewable energy.

Federal/Provincial Funding Initiative: It shall be the policy of the Federation to continue to play a meaningful role in the implementation of Growing Forward 2. Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture will also advocate for changes to successor programs, advocating for policies and programs that address the specific needs of Nova Scotia's primary agricultural industry. The Federation recognizes the need for greater investment in the agricultural industry so that programs can play a meaningful role in farm development on a continual basis.

Investment Tax Credit: It shall be the policy of the Federation to lobby the provincial government to provide a provincial tax credit for such investments as new machinery, equipment, buildings and land improvement.

New entrants into agriculture and young farmers: It shall be the policy of the Federation to present the issues of young farmers and new entrants when lobbying opportunities arise.

On Farm Health and Safety: It shall be the policy of the Federation to enhance the health and safety practices of the farmers and the agricultural workforce by means of working with Farm Safety Nova Scotia (FSNS) to provide NSFA members with opportunities and services related to farm health and safety.

Research: It shall be the policy of the Federation to advocate with provincial governments, Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, the Dalhousie University Faculty of Agriculture and other universities, and industry stakeholders to support the creation of a strategy to support a regional approach to fundamental and applied research.

Veterinary Services: The Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture will continue to lobby the provincial government to encourage veterinarians, especially recent graduates, to establish large animal practices in the rural farming communities of Nova Scotia.