

Presentation to Law Amendments Committee Regarding Food Goals, Nova Scotia Legislature

by

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Agriculture is integral to our rural economies, our social fabric and our resilience. In recent years, we have seen an incredible increase in awareness of and support for local food systems. There is a strong desire from the public to know where our food is coming from and to ensure the long term sustainability of our farming communities. In 2010, the Ecology Action Centre and the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture released, “Is Nova Scotia Eating Local?”, a report on the social, economic and environmental benefits of a more locally-based food system. Our submission today is rooted in our findings from this study

We would like to propose the following friendly amendments to subsection 4 (2) of the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act.

1a: Support and encourage local food with the goal of 20% of Nova Scotians’ food spending to be from local farms by 2020

- In 2010, the Ecology Action Centre and the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture released “Is Nova Scotia Eating Local?”, a report on the social, economic and environmental benefits of a locally-based food system. In this report, we examined the proportion of the food dollar that went back to local farms and found that in 1997, 17% of the food dollar returned to our local farmers. By 2008, this had declined to 13%.
- If farmers receive a larger percentage of the food dollar – through better farm gate prices, value-added products, and/or better market access – it would help to improve farm viability and encourage new entrants.
- Because just 15 years ago, 17% of the food dollar returned to local farmers, we know that it is possible to achieve, and potentially exceed, such an amount again.

1b: Increase and consistently measure institutional local food procurement

- Subsection 4 (2) (q) states the existing goal of the creation of a sustainable procurement policy.
- Many institutions are working to increase their local food procurement, which should be encouraged and commended. However, measurement varies by institution and often includes goods processed in Nova Scotia, but not made with local products, e.g. bread baked locally, using wheat from the Prairies.
- An institutional local food goal should be set for each category of food, such as fruit and vegetables, meat, fish, dairy, processed foods, with targets set for each category.

2: Support and encourage local food production with the goal of increasing the number of farms by 5% by 2020

- According to a recent report from Statistics Canadaⁱ, Nova Scotia is the only province to report an increase in farmers, with a modest 2.9% increase in farms between 2006 and 2011.
- This is a positive trend, which should be encouraged, and thus we propose this goal of a 5% increase by 2020, based on the number of registered farms. In pursuing this goal, attention must be paid to both the size of farms and the types of livestock and crops produced, in order to ensure a diversity of farming operations in the province.

3: Protect farmland through conservation easements

- The new Community Easements Act holds great potential for protecting agricultural land for agriculture. Currently two farms in Nova Scotia, totalling 300 acres, are protected under working land conservation easements, held by the Ecology Action Centre. The success of farmland conservation easements can be seen in New England, where over 750,000 acres of farmland have been protectedⁱⁱ. A preliminary goal of protecting 5000 acres of farmland in Nova Scotia by 2020 would raise awareness about the importance of farmland conservation and ensure that this land remains food producing land in perpetuity.

Thank you for seriously considering our proposed amendments. We would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

ⁱ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/95-640-x/2012002/prov/12-eng.htm>

ⁱⁱ Farmland Preservation Report: <http://www.farmlandpreservationreport.com/>