



## **Standing Policy**

Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture's Standing Policy identifies current and emerging issues facing the industry.

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 organization 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 advocacy areas that the Federation prioritizes are addressed through standing policy, resolutions and committee work. The Federation also has positions on issues. Progress updates on each of the advocacy areas are presented to Executive Committee, Council of Leaders, News and Views, and the NSFA AGM.

The advocacy areas are guided by the principal Vision and Mission of NSFA.

Vision:

***"A competitive and sustainable future for the farming community in Nova Scotia."***

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

## Agriculture 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.

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.

### *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.

### *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.

**Policy Statement:** It shall be the policy of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture to lobby the Nova Scotia government to implement a well-rounded program to protect agricultural land. A program would include a land bank system along with zero taxation on land owned by a registered farm or land actively maintained as farmland, access to Crown Land and support for those who are bringing former and new agriculture land into production. The Federation will also lobby to include an agriculture land protection goal in the next Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperities Act.

## Energy

Energy consumption is inevitable when producing agricultural products. Access to affordable, environmentally responsible and sustainable energy sources along with energy conserving technologies and methods 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*

Access to three phase power is a concern for farms upgrading equipment on their operations. Much of the newer equipment requires efficient 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. The economic loss of these limitations is significant, but the exact value is not known. To better understand the gaps, a needs assessment must be industry executed and supported by government.

### *Production*

Many farms have the biomass capacity to produce enough energy for their operation and to supply their neighbours with energy. The Direct to Retail provision under the Electricity Reform Act has the potential to allow farms in the province an opportunity to produce energy with their farm by-products and sell using the Renewable to Retail model as was presented to UARB. However, the cost prohibitive barriers that were present under COMFIT still exist in this new program. Two significant cost barriers that limit a farm's ability to supply electricity are the communication connection costs and accessing three phase power. The cost of building the necessary public infrastructure (e.g. three phase power lines) to support energy production is a barrier for farmers interested in producing 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 logistical 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 Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture to lobby the Nova Scotia 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. The Federation will also advocate for the addition of a farm energy specialist. The Federation will also lobby government to create a capital fund to support investment in creation and use of renewable energy.

## Labour

Skilled labour is critical to any farm operation. The Canadian Agriculture Human Resource Council (CAHRC) conducted a study across Canadian farms and the agriculture industry to identify the gaps and associated costs.

The Labour Market Inventory report identified current trends in Agriculture Labour as well as projected trends based on population growth and distribution. In the breakdown, there is a current labour gap of 600 people. This would be greater if there weren't employment options through the Temporary Foreign Worker program. The study projected a labour gap of 3500 people by 2025. The gap is expected to increase because of the aging workforce and rural out-migration.

The challenges that Nova Scotia faces were also identified in the CAHRC report. Recruiting employees is often difficult because the jobs are in the rural areas and the skill availability is insufficient. Employee retention has challenges as well, including insufficient compensation.

Trained employees increase farm productivity and efficiency. Farm operations are becoming more mechanized and farm employees require specialized training that cannot be achieved through general programs. These specialized programs may be in the form of a farm apprenticeship program.

To immediately address the labour gap, farms must be able to draw from pools of employees. The Seasonal Agriculture Worker Program is available; however, the amount of paperwork to apply for and transfer employees causes burden on farmers. Programs and policies need to be adjusted to reduce the burden on farmers as well as hold ups during processing.

The cost of labour shortage is significant. According to the report, the estimated cost of unfilled vacancies in Nova Scotia is \$15 Million in sales. This cost is in part from lost value added opportunities that couldn't be filled because of labour shortages. To further hinder the opportunity to value add, programs like the Temporary Foreign Work Programs have stipulations around what constitutes as agricultural work.

Harvest Connection Program allows eligible Income Assistance recipients to keep up to \$3000 of income earned from working in the seasonal harvesting of field produce crops like berries, vegetables and apples and harvesting of Christmas trees. This program provides an incentive for local residents to work in commodities that require an increase in seasonal labourers at peak times. A similar program should be made available for those receiving other assistance such as the Guaranteed Income Supplement.

**Policy Statement:** It shall be the policy of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture to lobby provincial and federal governments to establish programs and policies that provide relevant training and encourage employment on farms.

## Local Awareness

Increasing the amount of Nova Scotia produced goods consumed in Nova Scotia is a key piece in to strengthening the local economy.

The One Nova Scotia report identified goals to strengthen the agriculture industry. As stated in goal 16, the value of agricultural products produced for, and consumed within, the Nova Scotia domestic market will have doubled. The current value is approximately \$230 million. To stay ahead of this increasing trend, consumer awareness of Nova Scotia produced goods must be a priority.

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.

While ensuring government institutions increase local procurement, organizations must be willing to increase local spending, as well.

Increasing consumption of Nova Scotia produced goods needs to be addressed at both the consumer and policy development levels. 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. At the policy level, government and organizations must implement a "local first" policy when catering or ordering food service.

**Policy Statement:** It shall be the policy of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture 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 encourage government and organizations to implement a "local first" policy for food service and catering.

## 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 are not consistent across the province. 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.

While food safety programs have a place to protect Nova Scotians, scale appropriate regulations and programs that allow for long term farm business planning must be considered. Scale appropriate regulations will help increase the number of processing facilities thus decreasing the amount of time – in some cases up to three hours - livestock farmers have to travel for processing and be away from their farm. Also, navigating the various regulations and programs is often a barrier to accessing markets.

Many of the barriers mentioned are inhibiting the growth of Nova Scotia's Agriculture Industry. Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture is releasing a report on "Barriers to Growth", resulting from industry survey and focus groups in 2015.

Through the Joint Office of Regulatory Affairs and Service Effectiveness, the governments of the Atlantic Provinces are working together to address red tape and other inconsistencies across the region. Future priorities have been identified and include: internal trade, occupational health and safety, transportation and procurement.

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.

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 Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture 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. The Federation will also monitor the results of the Barriers to Growth report and the activities of the Joint Office of the Regulatory Affairs and Service Effectiveness.