

Draft Policy Paper

2018 - 2019



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 28 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. Hatching Eggs Association of Nova Scotia
10. Horticulture Nova Scotia (Berry)
11. Horticulture Nova Scotia (Vegetable)
12. Nova Scotia Potato Marketing Board
13. Landscape Nova Scotia
14. Maple Producers Association of Nova Scotia
15. Nova Scotia Beekeepers Association
16. Nova Scotia Cattle Producers
17. Nova Scotia Fox Breeders Association
18. Nova Scotia Fruit Growers Association
19. Nova Scotia Greenhouse Vegetable Marketing Board
20. Nova Scotia Mink Breeders Association
21. Nova Scotia Young Farmers Forum
22. Organic Council of Nova Scotia
23. Pork Nova Scotia
24. Sheep Producers Association of Nova Scotia
25. Soil and Crop Improvement Association of Nova Scotia
26. Turkey Farmers of Nova Scotia
27. West Nova Agro Commodities Limited
28. 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
4. Perennia

Climate Change

Weather activities and patterns have been proven to be changing over the last number of decades. The unpredictability of intensity and increased frequency of extreme weather causes burden on agriculture, rural economy and food system as a whole. Agriculture can be used as one of the tools to mitigate stresses of severe weather activities and ought to be protected.

Severe weather activities cannot be easily planned for, and in many instances, crops are lost. These losses have ranged from frost and freeze damage as experienced throughout Nova Scotia in 2018 to drought conditions in southern Nova Scotia in 2016. With almost 18,000 acres of the Nova Scotia's farm land protected by dykes, appropriate maintenance of dyke systems is necessary to ensure that good agriculture land is not lost to rising water levels. Nova Scotia has more than 7,000 km of coastline in addition to shoreline with rivers and fresh water bodies which is at risk of being lost or reduced due to expediated erosion from the more severe weather events.

Drought conditions have also been experienced and though impacted agriculture, farms can be part of the solution to protect communities from the severities of drought. Agriculture technology allows farms to have the capacity to store and manage water. Tile drainage is one tool that can be used to ensure that water is not lost to ground water sources but redirected to ponds. Having the capacity to store water and manage water resources during non-drought seasons will increase insurance of water availability for irrigated crops resulting in continued local employment and economic spin-off. Also, stored water on a farm can provide assistance in the local community in times of desperate need.

Agriculture can play a role in reducing atmospheric greenhouse gas emissions and can ensure a healthier environment. Tools such as wetlands can reduce pollutants into the natural environment and improving soil health can increase soil carbon sequestration. Farms play a role in environmental health, however, there is a cost to the farmer, which cannot be recouped in the market place.

Water is a critical component of producing agricultural goods and must be managed, with support from government, to ensure sustainability of the agriculture industry and rural economies. While many impacts of climate change are not easily mitigated, taking appropriate steps to manage what can be managed is critical to the resilience of the Agriculture Industry.

Standing Policy

It shall be the policy of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture to work with government, industry and stakeholders to ensure that the Agriculture Industry of Nova Scotia has the capacity to manage water resources in light of climate change. The Federation will also lobby government to implement programs to support farms with on farm climate change mitigation strategies.

Labour Gap

Skilled labour is critical to any farm operation. Trained employees increase farm productivity and efficiency. Additionally, with sufficient labour, farms are able to add value to their products which creates an opportunity to increase revenues and grow markets.

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 report analyzed the needs, barriers and opportunities for each of the provinces. The Nova Scotia report discovered in 2014, 9,200 people were employed in agriculture and 15% of those were made up of foreign workforce. With that, there were 500 jobs left unfilled which lead to \$15 million in lost sales due to labour shortages. The report projected that in 2025 there will be 11,300 workers required in the agriculture industry. Between 2014 and 2025, CAHRC anticipated 29% of the workforce will be lost to retirement, creating a labour gap of 3500 people.

Foreign labour is an avenue that many farms access to meet labour requirements. The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) and the Temporary Foreign Worker – Agriculture Stream are two federal programs that farms can utilize to access foreign labour workforce. General concerns with these programs include Nova Scotia being a less appealing province to work in since the province has a lower minimum wage than other provinces like Ontario, concerns around paying a fee for processing applications, impracticality of advertising position far in advance of start date, translation services for workers, multiple year applications and standardized housing inspections. Improvements to these programs will help farmers address the labour gap on the farm.

Policy Statement

It shall be the policy of Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture to partake in consultations and work with industry stakeholders and organizations to identify changes that need to be made for the foreign worker programs. The Federation will also work with appropriate bodies to ensure training and other translative supports are available for foreign workers. NSFA will also work with stakeholders to ensure that programs to hire local labour are well communicated and accessible to farmers.

Agriculture Land

Agricultural land is land that is managed for farm use and land with agricultural potential. These uses include pasture land, crop land, horticultural land, maple groves, Christmas tree, orchards and class 2, 3, and 4 soils as defined by the Canadian Land Inventory. Ensuring availability of agricultural land allows for future generations to farm.

There are many issue areas that are impacting agricultural land use. According to the “Preservation of Agricultural Land” report by the Agriculture Land Review Committee, Nova Scotia has a little over 29% (1.57 million hectares) of its land classed as Agriculture. Of these 1.57 million hectares, 182 thousand hectares was being farmed in 2006. The report indicated that agriculture land abandonment, urban sprawl/development, soil fertility and impact of rising water on dykeland are all issues of concern that must be addressed. Beyond insuring availability of agricultural land for present and future generations, increasing land values, property migration when sold and trespassing are all significant concerns among land owners.

In 2017, NSFA convened an Agricultural Land Policy Committee to continue work on addressing the aforementioned issues as well as other recommendations. The committee’s goal is to examine and work toward implementation of the recommendations in the Preservation of Agriculture Land Report. The committee has representation from varying organizations who are impacted by work directly with agricultural land, including NSFA Executive and Council, Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture, Department of Natural Resources, Annapolis Valley Farmland Trust Society, Department of Municipal Affairs, Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, and Perennia.

Policy Statement

It shall be the policy of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture to address land issues through a joint committee and collaborative effort. The Federation will lobby for a comprehensive land use strategy that will include an agricultural land bank, 0% taxation on land owned by a registered farm or land actively maintained as farmland by a registered farmer, access to Crown Land for agriculture use, and support for those who bring land into agriculture production. The Federation will also use the appropriate avenues to request at minimum that 5,000 acres of agriculture land be placed under easement within the five-year review of EGSPA.

Regulatory Burden

Regulatory burden is imposed when regulation and policies are implemented and increase the amount of paperwork, cost and time for businesses to operate. In agriculture, regulatory burden can be imposed by varying levels of government: municipal, provincial and federal. Some issues can be multi-jurisdictional which further complexes the burden.

The reasons that regulations are burdensome to agriculture are varying. Outdated regulations can limit growth and often don't reflect the current direction of the industry. Inspection has proven to be a challenge across a multitude of aspects of the agriculture industry. Access to abattoirs is a barrier for many livestock farmers in Nova Scotia and pending changes under the provincial inspection system have the potential to further limit inspection times and booking deadlines. While legislation is often burdensome, there are elements that are promising. For example, The Meat Inspection Act has a provision allowing the Minister to convene an advisory committee on topics related to abattoirs and meat inspection. Many of the challenges that processors face would be able to be addressed through this committee.

Labour and worksite inspection are becoming challenges as well. While the labour gap and the process to apply for foreign labour are addressed in the Labour Gap standing policy, labour and records inspections and provincial regulations differing from federal program contracts have caused conflict for farms accessing federal foreign labour programs.

Regulatory burden has been a Standing Policy of the Federation for a long time. New regulations and changes to existing regulations are inevitable; however, should be implemented in such a way that minimally impacts farmers, farm families and farm operations. NSFA regularly collaborates with industry stakeholders – Canadian Federation of Agriculture, commodity organizations and others – to ensure that impact is minimal and that changes are warranted.

Policy Statement

It shall be the policy of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture to continue to monitor, participate and communicate changes to regulations at the provincial and federal levels that will impact agriculture. NSFA will also work with industry stakeholders to ensure compliance requirements are well communicated throughout the industry.

Transportation

Farmers require the use of roads for many different aspects of farming. Not only are goods for sale transported on roadways, farm trucks, tractors and machinery move from field to farm via roadways.

Current legislation is not up to date with the changing industry trends. For example, self-propelled implements of husbandry are not written in legislation. Other challenges with current legislation are around officers' unfamiliarity of farmer exemptions under the Motor Vehicle Act. Much like other elements of regulatory burden and red tape, service delivery of provincial programs, such as farm plating, is inconsistent across the province.

In Spring 2018, Nova Scotia Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal opened a consultation for the development of a new Traffic Safety Act. Areas to be addressed under this Act include vehicles and farm equipment, use of the road, licensing and permitting processes and administration. New regulations will be developed as part of the Act creation. These regulations provide an opportunity to improve the red tape as it relates to farm transportation.

Aside from regulations, the physical transportation of products and farm equipment is often burdensome. Roads across Nova Scotia are in disrepair causing safety concerns for both farm equipment operators and general public, damaged produce and equipment damage creating costly repairs. In other aspects, policies on taking roads out of the regular maintenance schedule do not exist thus decisions appear to be made arbitrarily.

Standing Policy:

It shall be a standing policy of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture to be actively engaged in the development of new legislation regarding transportation as it pertains to agriculture. NSFA will also lobby Nova Scotia Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal to ensure that agriculture is a lens that is applied with considering the reclassification of roads.