

# Standing Policies

2020

# Agricultural Land

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

There are many issue areas that impact 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. 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 ensuring 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. Multiple levels of governments are working to protect lands from excessive losses. Lands covered under these protections include wildlife habitat, wetlands and more, but do not include agricultural land.

In 2017, NSFA assembled an Agricultural Land Policy Committee to continue work on addressing the issues mentioned above, 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 Members, 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

# Soil Health

According to the Canadian Land Inventory, Nova Scotia has over 1.57 million hectares of soil suitable for agricultural use. Based on the classification system, soil types 1-4 are considered suitable for agricultural production. Nova Scotia soils range from classes 2 to 4, with class 3 representing 60% of NS soils.

Nova Scotia soils tend to have silt/clay content which causes them to imperfectly drain of water – this leads to pooling, rill erosion and the accompanying challenges. Nova Scotia soils also tend to be acidic. Limestone is often necessary as a soil amendment to increase the soil pH and encourage the availability of soil nutrients to plants while gypsum can be used to improve soil structure. Gypsum is also known to not increase soil pH, thus being an important nutrient source for crops requiring lower pH values.

Topsoil removal is governed at the municipal level. In a survey of Municipal Plans and By-Laws conducted by the Department of Municipal Affairs regarding topsoil removal provisions, only a handful directly referenced topsoil. These references referred to erosion, flooding and environmental contamination in the context of construction and property development; not in the context of agriculture. The few by-laws that did reference agriculture were for counties that tended to have more class 2 and 3 soils.

In addition to the human removal of topsoil, the changing climate has the potential to put soils at risk of loss. Fluctuating weather events which will bring more erratic precipitation and more frequent freeze-thaw events threaten the existing soil structure and will likely lead to erosion of Nova Scotia’s best quality soil (top organic layer). Much like other risks in agriculture, they cannot be eliminated, but managed with proper supports and planning.

## Policy Statement

It shall be the policy of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture to convene the appropriate bodies to ensure healthy and productive soils remain throughout Nova Scotia.

# Labour

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, bring product to market and run effective businesses – this creates an opportunity to increase revenues and grow markets.

The Canadian Agriculture Human Resource Council (CAHRC) conducted studies across Canadian farms and the agriculture industry to identify the labour gaps and associated costs. The reports analyzed the needs, barriers and opportunities for each of the provinces. The Nova Scotia report discovered in 2017, (6585) people were employed in agriculture and 29% of those were made up of foreign workforce. With that, there were 251 jobs left unfilled which lead to an estimated \$33 million in lost sales due to labour shortages. The report projected that in 2027 there will be 7,190 workers required in the agriculture industry. Between 2017 and 2027, CAHRC anticipated 43% of the workforce will be lost to retirement, creating a labour gap of more than 2,600 people.

Foreign labour is an avenue that many farms access to meet labour requirements. Programs like the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) and the Temporary Foreign Worker (both Agriculture and Low-Wage Stream) are examples of two federal programs that farms can access to recruit foreign labour on the farm. Farms employing both foreign and domestic workers face a significant amount of regulatory burden. Different legislation applying to two groups of employees may lead to one group being treated unfairly compared to the other, and farmers requiring multiple systems to track employee time (breaks, days off, etc.). Clear understanding of legislation and contracts, and improvements to the federal programs will help farmers address the labour gap on the farm.

## Policy Statement

It shall be the policy of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture to work with necessary organizations and government departments at both the Federal and Provincial levels to address the labour and skills gaps with domestic and foreign labour and legislative burdens in Nova Scotia's Agriculture Industry. In doing this, NSFA, with funding under the Agriculture Sector Council Program, will address HR, recruitment/retention and skills training to benefit Nova Scotia farms and farmers.

# 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 needs. 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 Fall 2018, the government passed the Traffic Safety Act. Areas 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 troublesome. Roads, roadsides and related infrastructure 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. There is also concern around the deferral of maintenance to roadways and the future cost implications. In other aspects, policies on taking roads out of the regular maintenance schedule do not exist thus decisions appear to be made arbitrarily.

## Policy Statement

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 when considering the reclassification of roads.

# Regulatory Alignment

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 complicates the matter.

The reasons that regulations can be a burden to those in agriculture vary. Outdated regulations can limit growth and often don't reflect the current direction of the industry. Inspection has proven to be a challenge across many 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 challenging, there are elements that are promising. For example, The Meat Inspection Act has a provision allowing the Minister to assemble 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.

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 lobby for regulations that reflects the needs of farmers, farm families and farm operations. NSFA will then 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.