

Standing Policy Drafts

2021

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) if 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 land for various reasons including biodiversity, wildlife, wetlands and agriculture. There is potential for conflict between these objectives.

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 Lands and Forestry, 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. Land efforts will focus on protecting agricultural land for future generations.

Soil Health

Healthy soils are the foundation to sustainable farming. 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. Soil management has potential to mitigate against climate change through carbon sequestration.

Policy Statement

It shall be the policy of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture to consult with farmers, stakeholders and experts to ensure healthy and productive soils remain throughout Nova Scotia.

Regulatory Affairs

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.

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.

FPT Agreement

Federal Provincial Territorial (FPT) agreements have been in place to support farmers for decades. The Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP) replaced Growing Forward 2 FPT which expired in 2018 and was preceded by Growing Forward from 2008 to 2013. These agreements provide program funding intended to support agriculture. Each framework identified new priorities and the cost share between provincial and federal governments. Some programs are cost shared between the federal and provincial governments while others have a national scope and are federally delivered. The framework can be divided between two groups – Business Risk Management (BRM) Programs which includes insurance and disaster programming and non-BRM programs such as environmental protection, climate change adaptation, marketing and diversity in agriculture. The FPT agreements reduce ad hoc payments to industry and meet Organization for Economic Co-operation Development (OECD) standards to be within the green and amber boxes for trade.

The current FPT Agriculture framework, Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP), is set to end in 2023 with anticipation that CAP2 will follow. With the current government already referring to the next framework as CAP 2, it is reasonable to expect priorities under the non-BRM programs to remain the same as those priorities under CAP. This federal government has demonstrated interest in consulting on various matters across government and there is anticipation that consultations can be expected for CAP2. This will give industry associations and farmers opportunities to participate in consultations and inform the needs of the Agriculture Industry.

Program content and delivery haven't been satisfactory in recent years. This is obvious as NSFA membership has passed more than a dozen resolutions pertaining to programs in recent years. Some resolutions were focused on programming to support specific sectors of the agriculture industry while other resolutions were broad to address the flaws in program delivery. With better consultation, many of the industry concerns could be addressed.

BRM programming has long had its faults. The intention for the BRM suite of programs is presumably to support farms with various unmanageable risks including climate change and volatile markets. Many BRM programs, notably AgriStability, have demonstrated themselves ineffective and inaccessible to many farms. The BRM programs are undergoing federal review with input from the National Programs Advisory Committee and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture.

Policy Statement

The Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture will take a leadership role in consulting with membership to inform recommendations and lobby efforts for the next Federal/Provincial/Territorial agreement for Agriculture.