

Agricultural Land

Agriculture relies on natural resources such as soil, water and a land base. Agricultural land is increasingly at risk due to urban development pressure. In a recent Agriculture Land Inventory study, the project found that over a 20-year period from 1998-2018 more than 9% of agricultural land became inactive. This inactivity wasn't evenly distributed throughout the province – some regions experienced loss while some regions experienced some gain.

Question

What will your government do to ensure no net loss of agricultural land in Nova Scotia?

Recommendations

- Establish a landbank program for farmers to be able to buy or rent land at an affordable price. Buying land through a landbank is one way to reduce capital costs.
- Ensure farmers receive compensation for removing development rights from their land when placing easements on their property.
- Place an agricultural easement on all currently farmed lands owned by government, notably community pastures.

Environment and Climate Change

As the effects of climate change become more prevalent, mitigation, adaptation and resiliency are increasingly important. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions, carbon sequestration and participating in the green economy are all areas where agriculture can contribute to provincial, national and international emissions targets. While the opportunities exist for agriculture to be part of the solution, the industry also needs support in adapting to and mitigating against the impacts of climate change.

Questions

What will your government do to ensure our agriculture industry isn't compromised from the impacts of climate change?

Recommendations

- Develop a comprehensive Soil Strategy to benchmark the long-term trend of the health of our soils.
- Develop a provincial water strategy prioritizing agriculture use for both ground water and surface water.
- Support research and adoption programs to collect water during high precipitation seasons to offset low flow or drought conditions.

Market for Nova Scotia

Increasing consumption of Nova Scotia products has benefits that include and go beyond economic impact. 1 in 8 jobs are connected to agri-food. Farms in Nova Scotia generate almost \$600 million in farm gate sales and provide agri-tourism for Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia farms contribute to the provinces food security and, as demonstrated by the report released by the Advisory Council on Economic Growth "Unleashing the Growth Potential of Key Sectors", agriculture is an industry that has substantial potential for growth. Additionally, Nova Scotia imports much of the food consumed in this province though Nova Scotia farmers, with the right supports, could replace these imports.

Question

What is your government's commitment to ensuring agriculture in Nova Scotia reaches and increases its growth potential?

Recommendations

- Establish a healthy school food policy that prioritizes the benefits of buying Nova Scotia products.
- Establish and action policies that increase government procurement of Nova Scotia products for institutions such as schools, hospitals and prisons.
- Provide government incentives for Nova Scotia institutions such as universities, hotels and conference centers to purchase local.
- Collaborate with the agriculture industry to establish networks to get Nova Scotian grown food distributed throughout Nova Scotia.
- Work with the agriculture industry to establish the supports needed for Nova Scotia's farmers to participate in interprovincial trade and international exports.
- Ensuring that regulation enforcement is consistent across the province, necessary information to support new entrants is readily available and the right number of inspectors are available to make sure there aren't delays will help with increasing processing capacity.

Labour

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, 6,585 people were employed in agriculture and 29% of those were through federal programs such as the Seasonal Agriculture Worker Program and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. The report also found that there were 251 jobs left unfilled which led to an estimated \$33 million in lost sales due to labour shortages. The report projected that by 2029 there will be 7,190 workers required in the agriculture industry. By 2029, CAHRC anticipated 43% of the workforce will be lost to retirement, creating a labour gap of more than 2,600 people.

Question

What will your government do to ensure agriculture has the resources they need to increase success and growth in the industry?

Recommendations

- Government support industry led initiatives to connect Nova Scotians to careers in farming.
- Government supports innovative and intentional agriculture recruitment and retention practices and programs.
- Government supports solutions to strengthen the agriculture workforce in Nova Scotia through automation and innovation.
- Government work with NSFA to develop programs that promote and encourage on the job skills training and applied learning opportunities.
- Support ongoing growth and productivity in agriculture by supporting farm adoption of continuous improvement processes.

Mental Health

We Talk. We Grow. is an initiative of Farm Safety Nova Scotia raising awareness and taking action to protect and nurture the mental health and well-being of Nova Scotia's farming community, and enhance and maintain a culture where mental health is valued, prioritized and protected. To inform the action, recent recommendations were adopted under the following themes: there is an existing gap in mental health supports and resources for Nova Scotia farmers; stigma surrounding mental health – and accessing treatment – is still very much prevalent; the stressors and obstacles to treatment identified in consultations and research exercises in other provinces and territories are for the most part the same in Nova Scotia; and, Farming is a unique industry, with unique challenges. Any tool, treatment or support needs to reflect these unique aspects.

Questions

How will your government support this initiative and act on addressing the gap in mental health support for Nova Scotia's farm community?

Recommendations

- Partner with agriculture stakeholders and leaders to meet the objectives of the blueprint.
- Work with industry to address the common stressors facing Nova Scotia farmers.
- Increase mental health support in rural communities.
- Address the financial barriers to accessing the required mental health support.
- Establish a program and network with professionals who have a keen understanding of the agriculture industry.
- Commit long-term funding for the farm specific mental health resources and supports
- Increase financial support for mental health supports and services across the province.