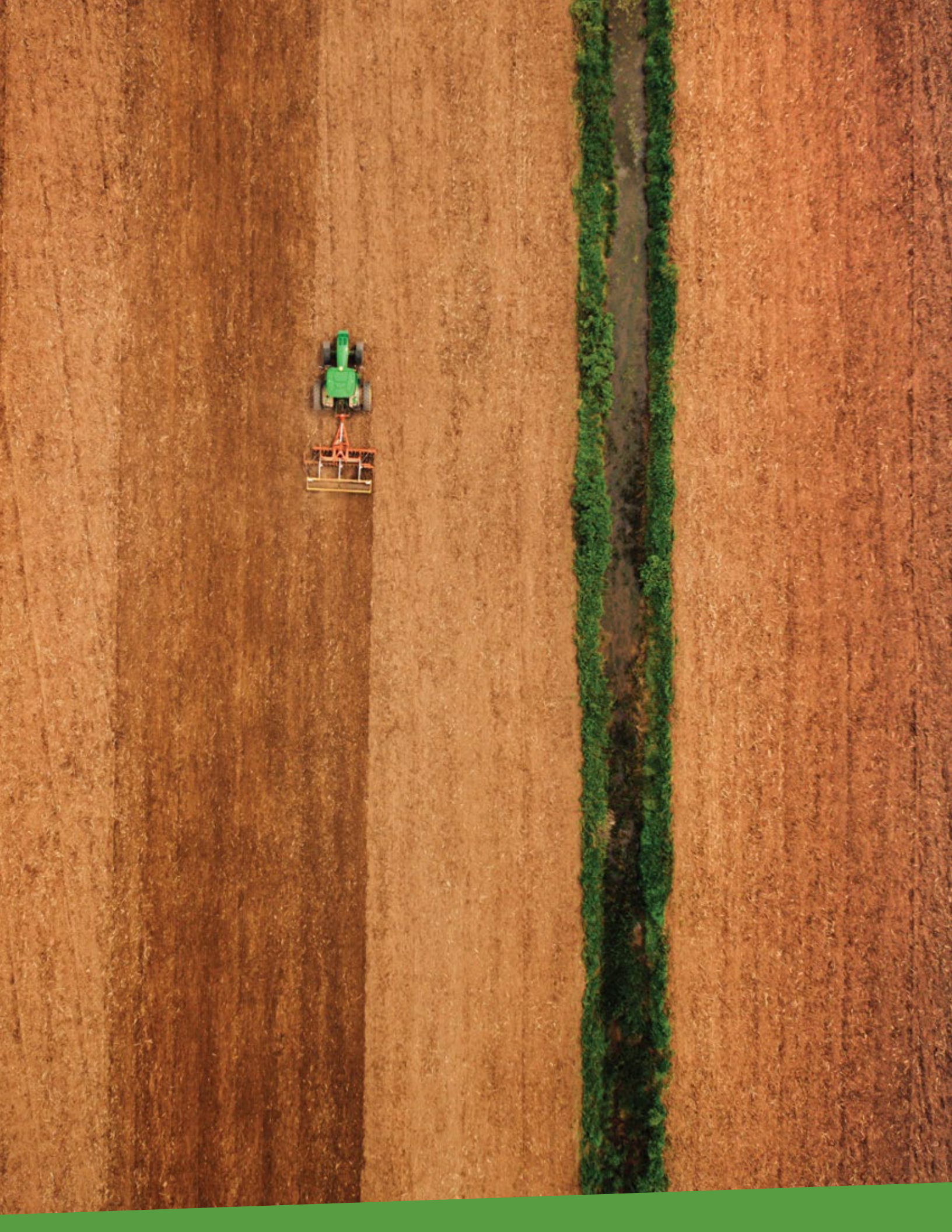


Growing NOVA SCOTIA TOGETHER

MAY 2023





Where We Are

Farming, along with other resource industries like fishing and forestry, is the backbone of our rural communities. Nova Scotia's agriculture industry also supports environmental sustainability through the preservation of critical habitats, improving soil health and water quality, and supporting climate change efforts. There are many benefits to growing our province's food system, such as food security enhancement, reducing our carbon footprint, promoting environmental stewardship, and bolstering economic growth.

And perhaps most impactful at this time, farmers are proud to provide healthy food to support healthy people – a strong agriculture industry is a foundational component to fixing the healthcare crisis long-term.

The province of Nova Scotia has set an ambitious objective of doubling its population. As such, a prosperous agriculture industry is critical to ensuring we can meet the demands of an increasing number of consumers with locally grown products while providing opportunities and the environment for newcomers to join the industry as employees and farm operators.

Although the opportunities in the agriculture industry are apparent, it has been grappling with substantial obstacles for the past few decades. These challenges have not only affected the sector's economic stability but have also taken a toll on farmers' mental health, with declining farm profits and increasing barriers, regulatory demands, and roadblocks.

Nova Scotia's farmers want nothing more than to continue providing safe, affordable, and accessible food for Nova Scotians, but it cannot come at the expense of their physical and mental health, or at the expense of providing for their own families.

In a recent National Survey on Farmer Mental Health, stress, anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, and cynicism (two components of burnout), suicide ideation and lowered resilience were all higher among farmers than the national average¹. However, farmers are known to be eternal optimists and continue to invest in their farms and our future.

We are at a crucial juncture where our choice is clear – we must work together to alter the course, protecting not only one of Nova Scotia's oldest and most valued occupations – but to protect our farmers working tirelessly today, and the next generation of farmers tomorrow.

The only way to grow our industry and our province is to work toward a common goal of growing Nova Scotia together.

The Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture (NSFA) and its industry partners have come together to identify key areas that require immediate attention to propel the industry forward. Investing in agriculture is a strategic move that pays off in the long term, even though the immediate benefits may not always be visible. By investing in agriculture, we are investing in the health and sustainability of our province, while securing a prosperous future for generations to come. We truly believe that the agriculture industry can support the government in achieving its long-term goals for the province in health care, environmental targets, and population growth.

¹ University of Guelph (2022). Farmer Mental Health in Canada Worsened During Pandemic, U of G Research Finds. [online] U of G News. Available at: <https://news.uoguelph.ca/2022/06/farmer-mental-health-in-canada-worsened-during-pandemic-u-of-g-research-finds/>

Who We Are

With a vision for a prosperous and sustainable future for Nova Scotia farms and farmers, the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture (NSFA) has been representing and advocating for farm families since 1895 and currently represents over 2,000 registered businesses in the province. The NSFA works closely with its commodity partners to achieve this vision.

NSFA has a long and accomplished history of bringing together industry and government to work collaboratively, staying steadfast to our values of collaboration, integrity, equity and inclusion, innovation and most importantly, valuing the needs of our members.

These members represent a diversity of farm operations across Nova Scotia, ranging in size and commodity type. This diversity reflects a variety of products from eggs to wild blueberries to flowers. Some farms specialize in direct-to-consumer marketing, while others focus on selling their products for further processing. In fact, Nova Scotia has the most farmers' markets per capita in Canada². Agriculture not only produces food but also flowers, plants, and Christmas trees to support community beautification and the mental wellness of Nova Scotians, while also producing fibre and other byproducts that contribute to essential items.

The diversity of our farm operations is to be celebrated and fostered. There is no farm type or size better than another as we all strive to produce safe, quality products for our communities and beyond.

² Farmers Market Nova Scotia (2013). Fresh Farmers' Market Facts. [online]

Available at: http://farmersmarketsnovascotia.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/cultivatingcommunityeconomy_highlights.pdf [Accessed 9 May 2023].



The Priority Areas of Impact

Nova Scotia's Agriculture Ecosystem

The Situation:

"The farmer buys everything at retail, sells everything at wholesale, and pays the freight both ways."

– John F. Kennedy

While farming may be one of the province's oldest occupations, it is also an industry that has innovated and evolved at a rapid pace on many fronts. Farms have improved their productivity and efficiencies through significant adoption of technology over the last generation. Farm cash receipts continue to grow reaching \$752.13 million in 2022, according to Statistics Canada. Yet farm profitability has been challenged for about half a decade in the province. Farmers are price takers and do not have the ability to recover costs at the same rate their production costs are increasing. Profit margins are shrinking, and the future of the industry is beginning to show its fragility. It is essential that we see systemic change and policy interventions to support the potential of Nova Scotia's agriculture industry.

It is equally critical that we view agriculture as a whole system that include input suppliers, food processors, distributors and transporters, retail, waste management, and food service, but also involves people, government, society, and research institutions. Farmers are only successful if the entire ecosystem is successful, with everyone having a clear understanding of how we are connected.

The agriculture industry is influenced by various policy directives that span different levels of government and departments. Although the impacts of these policies may not be immediately apparent, they can have significant impacts and consequences. Changes such as the implementation of a higher minimum wage, carbon tax, or climate change targets can affect the industry in diverse ways. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the potential impact of policy decisions on agriculture and to engage in constructive dialogue between policymakers and industry stakeholders to ensure a sustainable and resilient future.

The Solutions:

1. Apply an agricultural lens to all government policies recognizing agriculture as an economic, social, and environmental contributor.
2. Enhance collaboration between industry, government, and system partners to make meaningful systemic changes to support a profitable agriculture industry.
3. Government must recognize the potential of the agriculture industry to support a prosperous province and take action to support its profitability and sustainability.

Agricultural Land

The Situation:

“Despite all our accomplishments, we owe our existence to a six-inch layer of topsoil and the fact that it rains.”

– Paul Harvey

This quote is commonly known throughout the agriculture industry and emphasizes why protecting our natural resources – agricultural land, soil, and water – is of utmost importance. Efforts need to be focused on ensuring agricultural land is protected, healthy, and accessible.

Use of land for agriculture is often not the most financially valuable use of the land in comparison to development, therefore, we need to consider agricultural land as an essential resource and implement effective programs and policy interventions as protection. Farms continue to increase productivity and have reduced the amount of land needed to support production; however, we must not lose agricultural land as we continue to grow the population and demand for products. Nova Scotia is also unique, with a significant amount of agricultural land and transport corridors protected by dyke infrastructure.

The Solutions:

1. Establish a provincial land bank program to ensure farms have access to rent or purchase land at an affordable rate to support farm succession and growth.
2. Establish policies and programs to incentivize and compensate farmers for placing land under agricultural easements and support the associated costs for a designated organization to administer agricultural easements.
3. Enhance the Statement of Provincial Interest regarding agriculture land and establish an advisory committee with expertise in agriculture land planning to support municipalities in applying the appropriate policy interventions.
4. Increase investment in dyke infrastructure systems, including prioritization to dykes protecting agricultural land.



The Situation:

Our people are our greatest assets, our industry is full of passionate and hardworking individuals. With over 5,000 people employed in primary agriculture and temporary foreign workers representing 29% of the workforce, the industry provides employment opportunities throughout our rural communities.

However, like many industries, we continue to experience a significant gap in our workforce. According to the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council, it is estimated that Nova Scotia's agriculture industry has \$33 million in lost sales per year due to workforce challenges and the labour gap is forecasted to increase to 2,644 unfilled jobs by 2029. With 43% of the workforce expected to retire by 2029, there are many opportunities in the sector both at the employee and farm operator levels. While many farms have a planned successor, very few have a formal succession plan. Although this may be concerning, it also shows the opportunity that exists for the next generation and those new to the industry; however, we must make farms profitable for new entrants to see their future here.

The solutions provided throughout this document, such as a land bank and risk management, will support workforce development by increasing farm profitability to ensure a prosperous future for our next generation of farmers.

The industry has developed a Farm & Workforce Development Strategy focused on the following priorities:

- Connect to Farming
- Prepare Strong Farmers
- Manage Farms & People
- Automate & Innovate
- Grow in Diversity

The Solutions:

1. Working with industry, establish targeted immigration programs to support farm workers and farm operators moving to Nova Scotia.
2. Support farm succession by applying a new entrant lens to policies and programs to foster profitable and equitable farm transitions.
3. Support farms in increasing productivity and efficiency through meaningful investments in innovative technologies and reduce the regulatory burden of importing innovative equipment.
4. Enhance support for Temporary Foreign Workers while in Nova Scotia by providing access to MSI on arrival.
5. Continued support for the implementation of the Farm & Workforce Development Strategy and action plan.

Risk Management

The Situation:

Farmers continue to take on increased risk, whether it is related to climate, market, disease, or rising costs of inputs. Farms need access to effective risk management programs because it is not a matter of if the next weather event or market disruption hits, but when. Unfortunately, in recent years, farm businesses have weathered many storms – through a global pandemic, multiple hurricanes, and a deep freeze event. The farm community continues to come together in these challenging times, and we have also seen what successful collaboration between industry and government looks like in these times of need. However, we need to shift directions and move to a more sustainable model where risks are effectively managed, and farms are less dependent on government support following emergency events.

The Solutions:

1. As an essential service, agriculture must be prioritized during regional and provincial emergency events to ensure our local food supply is protected.
2. Work with industry to identify the required infrastructure and services needed to support an effective response during an emergency.
3. Enhance the agriculture business risk management programs delivered under the Federal-Provincial-Territorial agreement for agriculture. Including:
 - a. Conduct an assessment for Nova Scotia delivery of AgriStability to improve its effectiveness and local uptake.
 - b. Increase awareness of the AgriInvest program and introduce a top-up and kick-starter program for new entrants.
 - c. Conduct a comprehensive review of AgriInsurance (Crop & Livestock Insurance) in collaboration with industry and adopt a national livestock price insurance program.
 - d. Review and adapt the AgriRecovery program to meet the risks faced by industry.



Climate Adaptation and Resilience

The Situation:

The impact of climate change on agriculture is both positive and negative. While changes in growing seasons have allowed for crop diversification and extended production, extreme weather events resulting from climate change, such as hurricanes, droughts, heavy rains, minimal snow cover, and late frosts, have also presented significant challenges to the industry. With agriculture being heavily dependent on weather, the effects of climate change must be prioritized. As the impact of climate change becomes more prevalent, mitigation, adaptation, and resilience are increasingly important. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions, carbon sequestration and participating in the green economy are all areas where agriculture can contribute to government targets. While opportunities exist for agriculture to be part of the solution, the industry also needs support in adapting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

The Solutions:

1. Support the industry in the implementation of best management practices and transitioning to clean technologies including green energy, energy efficiency and precision agriculture.
2. Support the development and implementation of industry-led collaborative climate adaptation strategies.
3. Establish a joint advisory committee to develop a strategy to understand the current state of our soil health, to improve the adoption of best practices, and to monitor soil health over time.
4. Establish a joint advisory committee to develop an agricultural water strategy that assesses water availability, usage, and infrastructure needs, and makes recommendations on best practices and investments for sustainable water use in agriculture.
5. Increase investments in weather stations and climate modelling to ensure more accurate weather data and forecasting are available to farms to make proactive management decisions to mitigate the impacts of climate change and adverse weather conditions, and to support production management decisions.



Market Development

The Situation:

With various business models across Nova Scotia farms, both export and local markets must be developed and strengthened. A system-wide lens must be applied to market development and include consumers, grocers, markets, transportation, distribution, and processing. Markets cannot succeed unless all elements of the system are strong.

The Solutions:

1. Amend government procurement policies to require a Nova Scotia first preference for food and agricultural goods purchased by government institutions including but not limited to hospitals, schools, and residential and detention facilities. Support this Nova Scotia first policy through the required budget allocations, capital investments, education, and training.
2. Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the processing capacity in the Atlantic Region, identifying the opportunities and a strategic path forward in collaboration with industry.
3. Take a whole system approach to market development initiatives and continue exploration of new and emerging markets.

Rural Infrastructure

The Situation:

Like all rural industries, we are dependent on rural infrastructure to run our businesses and to recruit and retain our workforce. Without access to internet and cellular networks, businesses are challenged to use technology in the field, to update their web presence or to market their products. The value of our product is impacted by the rough rural roads it travels over before reaching the market. In order for our rural industries to flourish, investments in rural infrastructure must continue.

The Solutions:

1. Increased investment in internet and cellular infrastructure capacity in rural communities.
2. Apply an agricultural lens to prioritize investments in rural roads through increased funds to Rural Impact Mitigation Program (RIM) and Gravel Road Capital Program.

Growing NOVA SCOTIA TOGETHER

Agriculture is a complex industry facing many challenges. However, it is an industry that supports our rural communities, contributes to our economy, and enhances our ecosystem.

Agriculture is the epitome of the term “essential”, providing food and products to our communities. Farming is a noble career and a vital industry with tremendous opportunities for the future. We need a targeted plan to alter the current trajectory, enhance profitability and support our future generations of farmers, which in turn supports the prosperity of our province.

As an industry, it is imperative that we come together and collaborate to make sure we continue to provide food and products to our communities, and beyond. These efforts are necessary if Nova Scotia is going to achieve the goal of a healthy, growing population – and a prosperous and sustainable future for Nova Scotia farmers and farm families.

To realize this future, we recommend the government support:

1. An industry-led joint task force to develop a strategic action plan that is system-wide and farmer-centric.
2. A strategic investment in Nova Scotia’s agriculture industry to support the work of the task force and to achieve the outcomes identified in the strategic action plan.
3. Collaboration between industry and government to realize the full potential of our province, our communities, and our industry.
4. The application of an agricultural lens to all government policies, in an effort to reduce regulatory burden, recognizing agriculture as an economic, social and environmental contributor.



nsfa-fane.ca

Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture
7 Atlantic Central Drive, East Mountain, N.S. B6L 2Z2