

Guide for Members Engaging with Provincial Candidates

This is a guide prepared by the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture which outlines some tips for farmers to engage with candidates running for Provincial candidates in the 2024 general election.

The role of provinces in supporting agriculture

Canada has multiple levels of government, each with distinct responsibilities for agriculture. While agriculture policy is a shared priority at both the federal and provincial levels, provinces play a critical role in managing and supporting local agricultural sectors. Here are the primary areas where provinces influence agriculture:

- **Land Use and Zoning:** Provinces have control over land use policies, determining how land can be used for agricultural purposes. They establish regulations that can protect farmland from urban sprawl and industrial development, ensuring that agricultural land remains available for farming activities.
- **Administration of Provincial Agricultural Programs:** Provinces implement and manage agricultural support programs tailored to the needs of local farmers. These programs may include farm income support, crop insurance, environmental conservation incentives, and research funding to improve regional agricultural practices.
- **Environmental Regulation:** Provinces regulate environmental factors that impact agriculture, such as water usage, soil conservation, and pesticide application. They create policies to promote sustainable farming practices and mitigate the environmental impact of agricultural activities.
- **Food Safety and Inspection:** Provinces oversee food safety for products sold within their borders, such as local abattoirs and food processing facilities. They establish food inspection systems to ensure the health and safety of provincially regulated food products, including meat and dairy.
- **Veterinary Services and Animal Health:** Provinces are responsible for the regulation of animal health services, including veterinary licensing, disease monitoring, and animal welfare standards. They ensure that livestock health is maintained to prevent disease outbreaks that could impact food security.

Provincial Marketing Boards and Supply Management: Provinces have the authority to establish marketing boards and manage supply systems for agricultural products, such as dairy, eggs, and poultry. These boards help regulate production, maintain stable pricing, and control supply to meet provincial demand.

How can Members of the Legislative Assembly help farmers?

Members of the Legislative Assembly are important political supporters of the agriculture sector and have a role in reviewing legislation proposed by the government, studying government expenditures, and participating in legislative committees. While each individual MLA does have authority to make decisions in agriculture policy, they have access to the Minister and can play an advocacy role for the industry. MLAs can support the agriculture community through:

- Chair or participate in Standing Committees of the provincial legislature. They can study issues relating to agriculture and invite the industry to present their concerns and policy ideas to MLAs at committee.
- MLAs represent their constituents' interests in the provincial legislature. Even if an MLA does not make cabinet, they have an important advocacy role in making the concerns of the farmers in their community heard by the Premier and the Minister of Agriculture.

- MLAs have a vital role in helping farmers navigate the complex landscape of government programs. Their offices can serve as a point of contact for farmers with finding access to grants, loans, services, and benefits the province has to offer.
- MLAs like to have investments directed to their communities and are advocates for rural infrastructure such as roads, broadband access, and water systems, that directly supports agricultural productivity and market access for farmers.
- MLAs are well-positioned to elevate local agricultural concerns to both provincial and federal levels of government. They can build coalitions with other MLAs and engage with federal representatives to push for broader policies that reflect the needs of Nova Scotia's farmers.

What is the role of the Premier and the Cabinet?

- If MLAs are members of the caucus who forms government (the party who carries the confidence of the Legislature, usually the party with the most seats, but not always), then there is a chance that they could be named to Cabinet as a Minister.
- The Premier and the Cabinet serve as the Executive branch of government and have the authority to introduce legislation, spend government money, and implement programs. MLAs in the governing caucus who are not in the Cabinet are not part of "the government."
- The Premier, the Minister of Agriculture, and the Minister of Finance are the most crucial decision makers in the province of Nova Scotia, but other Ministers, such as the Minister of Labour, Skills, and Immigration, and the Minister of Economic Development are also key decision makers for the industry.
- It is important to remember that MLAs are running to be an MLA, not to make cabinet. From the perspective of candidates, whether they make it into cabinet or not is outside their control and entirely up to the Premier.
- The mayor is the top official in the municipal government. They have many of the same roles as city/town councilors, but they are responsible for proposing budgets, amending bylaws, and advancing policies for council to approve.
- They are the official spokesperson for the municipality and can advocate in the interests of local farmers.

Growing Nova Scotia Together provides direction for conversation

We would like to encourage all our members to take an opportunity to speak with the candidates running in the election. Elections are a valuable time to raise issues that are of concern to you. If you would like to raise any priority areas that the Federation is trying to address, our Growing Nova Scotia Together report focuses on issues around agricultural land, workforce challenges, business risk management, climate change and resilience, and market development.

Key Tips for Meeting Candidates

- **Research a candidate:** It helps to be prepared. If candidates drop off flyers, take a chance to read them. It will help you understand what their priorities are. Candidates should have profiles on their party websites. Party websites should also have a platform with a complete list of their election promises.
- **Have your priorities:** To have an enjoyable conversation with a candidate, enter the conversation with an idea of what you would like to discuss with them.

- **Ask open ended questions:** Politicians on campaigns tend to shy away from yes or no questions because once elected, they individually have limited ability to deliver on these commitments. This is especially true for candidates running for MLA with no guarantee of being selected for Cabinet. Open ended questions allow them to expand on how they think things should happen.
- **Be respectful and curious:** Even if you disagree with a candidate, try to be respectful. Candidates are members of our community who are stepping up to serve their community in a meaningful way. There may be other candidates and parties you can find that you agree with more.
- **Keep it local:** All politics is local, and this is especially true for provincial elections. MLAs will try to look at problems from a provincial perspective, but each MLA wants to deliver for the people in their community. Keeping the conversation focused on problems in the community will make for a better conversation.
- **Try to be concise:** The number one way that candidates will connect with voters is through door knocking. Candidates try to get to as many doors as they can in a day. It is important to take time to have a good conversation when they come to the door but try to be concise and respect their time. Hopefully, they will return the favour during a busy day.