



# Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture

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## Law Amendments Committee

### *Municipal Government Act*

October 1, 2018

*The Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture (NSFA) represents the interests of over 2400 farm families in Nova Scotia. Founded in 1895 to provide Nova Scotia's farm community with a single voice, the NSFA is the province's only general farm organization.*

I'm Victor Oulton and I farm a mixed farm operation with my dad, brother and our families just outside of Windsor. As president of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, I would like to thank the Law Amendments Committee for the opportunity to present on the proposed changes to the Municipal Government Act in Bill 58.

Protecting agricultural land has been a key priority for farmers across Nova Scotia. Land is essential to agriculture and once it is lost to development, it cannot be recovered.

Here in Nova Scotia we are fortunate to have 1.57 million hectares of agriculture classed soils which is almost 30% of our land suitable for agriculture production. While a portion of this land – though incalculable – has been lost to urban development, what is remaining is vital to the future of our industry.

When we think "agriculture land" we immediately think food, maple groves or Christmas Trees. Agriculture land is so much more than these.

Agriculture land contributes to the livelihood for more than 2400 farm families across Nova Scotia and their employees.

Agriculture land is a rural economic driver. Nearly \$600 million dollars of gross farm income is generated each year in Nova Scotia from agricultural land. This gross farm income creates over 9000 jobs on farms as well as indirectly supporting industries like machinery, feed stores, construction and many more.

60 Research Drive, Perennia Innovation Park, Bible Hill, NS B6L 2R2

Telephone: (902) 893-2293 • Fax: (902) 893-7063

[www.nsfa-fane.ca](http://www.nsfa-fane.ca)

Our office is located in the Annapolis Building



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Agriculture land creates scenic landscapes which yield agri-tourism opportunities. Agri-tourism generates economic opportunities for communities. People from around the world come visit our orchards, vineyards and farm markets for the experience – the spinoff from these experiences supports bed and breakfasts, local restaurants and local artisans.

Aside from the economics of agriculture land, agriculture land encourages biodiversity which creates habitat for wildlife and plant species.

Not all of the available agriculture land is currently in use. There are several factors that play into inactive agricultural land:

- Abandonment may occur when there is no farm successor.
- Agricultural land values are on the rise. Sometimes farmers sell the land for development as a means for retirement.
- There also lots of farm land that is forested. Though this land isn't actively farmed, and maybe not even maintained, the land is still available for future farmers.

Land has always been important to farmers. Over the last couple of years, NSFA brought together stakeholders to work on recommendations outlined in government papers to preserve agricultural land in Nova Scotia. It goes without saying that preserving agricultural land is a multi-faceted issue which includes land taxation, protection and planning. This committee is working on developing a provincial land strategy for agriculture land use in Nova Scotia. An Agriculture Land Policy must have an authentic statement around agriculture land use and protection thereof and further include transfer of land, accessing land, land bank, taxation, registration and migration. Changes to the Municipal Government Act to make planning mandatory across all municipalities are welcomed and support the work of the NSFA Land Policy Committee.

With regards to the addition of regulation development identified in section 214 (4)(a), in the event that regulations with regards to the planning of agricultural land are developed, NSFA would like to be part of that consultation process and inform from the industry perspective.

Thank-you for the opportunity to speak today.