

November 1, 2022

Office of the Legislative Counsel
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SENT VIA EMAIL

RE: Bill 224 – Perennia Food and Agriculture Corporation Act

Honourable Brad Johns,

The Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture (NSFA) represents over 90% of agricultural production across the province – just under 2,000 registered farm businesses that are primarily run by Nova Scotian families. Our vision is a prosperous and sustainable future for Nova Scotia farms and farmers. The agriculture industry is an economic driver for the province and is essential to the fabric of our rural communities.

Agriculture extension and applied research are key roles that Perennia provides in support of a prosperous and sustainable agriculture industry. It is essential that these services continue to be available and meet the needs of the industry while being both agile and responsive. At the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, we are strong supporters of industry-led, government-supported initiatives because this is where we see the most success.

Since this bill has been introduced, the NSFA has been hearing from several industry partners about their concerns regarding the proposed legislation. The lack of consultation with the industry in this significant shift in organizational structure leaves us concerned about future engagements and priorities of the organization.

There are a number of areas of concern we would like to highlight:

- With a shift to an advisory board, the industry will no longer be leading the priorities of the organization. It is essential that the industry lead the strategic direction and mandate of Perennia. Industry organizations and farmers need to be assured that the work of agriculture extension is led by the subject experts themselves, those with the direct experience and expertise that decisions pertaining to the sector impacts.
- Recruitment and retention of qualified specialists is key to the success of the extension and applied research mandates of the organization. It is unclear whether strategic recruitment and retention strategies will be in alignment with the proposed hierarchical structure.
- Successful extension and applied research require strong strategic partnerships with industry stakeholders, it is essential that Perennia grow these strategic partnerships to ensure the continued development of the industry.

- With the broad mandate of the advisory board, it's important that these do not duplicate the efforts of or compete with the existing advisory boards (e.g. Meat Inspection Board, Agricultural Marshland Conservation Commission, Livestock Health Services Board). Additionally, many agencies, boards and commissions have had vacancies for several years which has impacted their ability to fulfill their mandates. Priority must be placed on recruiting board members for all agencies, boards, and commissions to ensure they are able to operate effectively with broad representation, this includes the board of Perennia.

Perhaps most importantly, the message we wish to make clear is the essential need for the Government of Nova Scotia, and the Department of Agriculture specifically, to engage meaningfully, consistently, and authentically with industry and the farm families through NSFA and commodity organizations.

An advisory board cannot replace this necessary action.

Further, we must assert that this legislation cannot impact Perennia's ability to maintain and grow its partnerships and relationships with stakeholders. That impact, intentional or not, would effectively fracture the strong relationships that industry has built with our partners.

We believe the agriculture extension and applied research mandates of Perennia are essential to the long-term success of the industry but without clear engagement and leadership from the industry on these mandates, we are concerned about the potential disconnect that may occur in the future. If the decision to shift the structure of an organization that is vital to the industry is made unilaterally, it weakens our sector's confidence that the work will continue in our collective best interest.

We strongly believe in the importance of accountability and transparency through effective governance practices and respectfully request that the board, mandate, and strategic direction of Perennia be industry-led.

Respectfully submitted,



Tim Marsh
President