

HANSARD

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COMMITTEE

ON

RESOURCES

Thursday, January 15, 2015

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEES OFFICE

Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia

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Resources Committee

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Chairman)
Mr. Keith Irving (Vice-Chairman)
Mr. Lloyd Hines
Mr. Bill Horne
Ms. Margaret Miller
Hon. Alfie MacLeod
Mr. John Lohr
Hon. Sterling Belliveau
Ms. Lenore Zann

[Hon. Alfie MacLeod was replaced by Hon. Christopher d'Entremont]
[Mr. John Lohr was replaced by Mr. Allan MacMaster]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia

Ms. Keltie Butler, Executive Director



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 2015

STANDING COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Gordon Wilson

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would like to call the meeting to order. My name is Gordon Wilson and I am the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Resources.

The committee will be receiving a presentation today from the Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia, thank you very much.

At this time I'd like to ask the committee members to introduce themselves, recording their name and constituency, starting with Mr. Belliveau.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. I'd like to remind those in attendance to please turn off their cellphones or turn them on vibrate. It's safer sometimes to have them off. I'd also like to remind the members and the witnesses to wait to speak and if they can speak through the Chair.

We have an agenda here for witness presentation, committee business, correspondence, March meeting. We're hopefully going to wrap up around 10:40 a.m., to allow us time to deal with committee business, so we'll go no later than that.

I'd like to welcome our presenter to the committee and ask her to start her presentation and introduce yourself.

MS. KELTIE BUTLER: My name is Keltie Butler. There's a bit of a theme here about Cape Breton so I'm sorry that we're missing our other Cape Breton representative. That's also where I hail from originally. Thank you very much for inviting me.

I think I'll start right in because I use my 15 minutes to the max. I will hold up a few items as I'm speaking, just so you can follow along from within the booklet. The Farmers' Markets sector is a sector of stories, stories of long-standing Nova Scotia farm families, stories of emerging entrepreneurs and new business development, and stories of communities coming together to celebrate. We are at the intersection of rural livelihoods and distinctive downtowns and we're helping to write the story of our local economy.

Make no mistake, each of you is playing an important part in that story. As a Cape Bretoner, I have a strong sense of place. I take great joy in welcoming and hosting others and I love to gather around the kitchen table. I also enjoy a good story. You could certainly say that I am the perfect fit for the role of executive director with the Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia - or FMNS, as I'll use from now on.

Sharing the stories of the farmers' market sector is one of the roles of FMNS. We are the voice of Nova Scotia's farmers' market sector, home to over 40 farmers' markets - the highest number of farmers' markets per capita in Canada - and we have plenty of stories worth sharing. Over the past 10 years we've made tremendous headway in the province, including threefold growth in the number of farmers' markets across Nova Scotia, the emergence of markets operating multiple days per week, a steady growth in the number of markets operating year-round, and a bloom of market-based business across the province.

FMNS works with markets new and old to ensure sustainable growth, community-based economic stimulus, and knowledge-sharing between markets. With 10 years of experience as the industry association, we offer support and services to our member farmers' markets and to their vendors through business development, skill building, strategic research, advocacy and promotion. We are the leader in developing and offering training programs for farmers' markets based businesses as well as market staff.

At FMNS we house sector knowledge and history, marketing expertise, customized resources and training - I'll just refer to that for some of the training we have - and the current pulse of the sector within the province and beyond. So just to be clear, if you take a look at this, in the province, Nova Scotia is currently home to 43 farmers' markets and 24 of those markets are members of the Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia Cooperative. Within those 43 farmers' markets operate some 1,500 individual businesses.

FMNS member markets and their vendor businesses lead the sector and can be characterized as well-established, whether long-standing or new entrants. They take part in ongoing training and professional development opportunities, they have a governing structure and strive for staff retention. They're building partnerships across their community and they adhere to the farmers' markets' principle of "make it, bake it, grow it."

Our membership includes the regional flagship markets, the majority of year-round markets in the province, markets in HRM and large towns, as well as many markets in small communities and rural communities. The prominence and success of FMNS member markets clearly illustrates the role that we play in building and ensuring the long-term success of farmers' markets across the province.

The vision of FMNS is to serve all Nova Scotia farmers' markets current and future. With strength and support and capacity from our organization, from our network and our partners, this would cement not only the long-term viability of the sector, but it would also ensure the growth and success of farmers' markets as an essential marketing stream for agriculture and other small- and medium-size businesses.

Now allow me to indulge and share two stories of businesses based within the farmers' market sector in Nova Scotia. The first is The Flying Apron Inn & Cookery, owned and operated by Melissa and Chris Velden. You'll see their picture on the sign there. Chris is a chef - a fantastic chef - and has a true passion for local ingredients. Originally from Germany, Chris has made a name for himself originally in Halifax as the chef of Ryan Duffy's. He also attracted a positive buzz as an amateur beekeeper when he put bees on the roof of the restaurant in downtown Halifax. Melissa, his partner, is a Nova Scotia transplant as well. She shares Chris' passion for local food and has built a career in the restaurant industry herself.

Melissa and Chris decided to start their own business here in Nova Scotia, investing in a certified kitchen and selling through Nova Scotia's farmers' markets along the South Shore. Their business, The Flying Apron Cookery, grew and grew, as did their community involvement and their passion for educating consumers on local food. Selling at three farmers' markets, catering both small and large events, selling through specialty grocery stores, and doing home delivery, The Flying Apron built a loyal clientele.

This Spring, Melissa and Chris and their two young daughters relocated to West Hants where they bought a former inn and restaurant, renaming it The Flying Apron Inn & Cookery. Hitting the ground running, they're already operating the inn and a restaurant, and very soon will be opening a cooking school - all in the community of Summerville.

Farmers' market sales continue to be an important part of their business and farmers' market relationships continue to be a key aspect of their promotional strategy. Melissa and Chris proudly source 98 per cent of their food ingredients locally year-round.

One more - while it's too early for sampling, I wanted to share the story of Ironworks Distillery, also operating on the South Shore. Lynne and Pierre were living in Toronto, but dreaming of relocating to the Maritimes. For Lynne, this would be a coming home. In the end, they made the move, but after relocating to Nova Scotia they were still unsure of what was to come. In fact, Pierre was still commuting regularly to Toronto.

It was on a flight back from Toronto that Pierre had the lightbulb moment. They would craft truly unique and truly local artisan spirits. With their furthest ingredient, Crosby's molasses, coming from just across the border in New Brunswick, Ironworks Distillery is a taste of local.

What is particularly interesting to us here today is that they truly are a farmers' market-based business. With the exception of their on-site retail shop and online store, their sales come almost exclusively from the farmers' market sector. During the high season for the farmers' markets, Ironworks employs individuals across the province to represent them at over 15 farmers' markets.

Sharing these stories is a way to illustrate and bring to life the economic impact of our farmers' markets. There are so many stories: Fox Hill Cheese, Getaway Farm and Meatmongers, and as a proud Cape Bretoner and admittedly a fan of craft beer, I never miss the opportunity to promote Big Spruce.

Big Spruce is the second in Canada organic on-farm brewery - pretty exciting to have it right here in Nova Scotia. Owner-operator of Big Spruce Brewing is Jeremy White, and he's very proud to say that each and every Saturday at the Cape Breton farmers' market is his best sales day by leaps and bounds.

In the summer of 2013, with support from the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture, we undertook a provincial economic impact study of the farmers' market sector. We gathered information from 21 of Nova Scotia's more than 40 farmers' markets in a province-wide study that could tell the economic story of our sector. The last time such research was done was 10 years ago when FMNS was founded and since then, as I had mentioned, the number of farmers' markets in the province has grown threefold.

The numbers themselves tell an important story about a typical day in the life of Nova Scotia's farmers' markets, so just to share a few highlights: each week more than 55,000 adults shop at farmers' markets, spending approximately 20 per cent of their food budget there and keeping more than 1,500 Nova Scotia producers in business. On average, each individual visitor is spending more than \$16 per market visit and in some communities they're spending as much as \$25.

Stories of success are plentiful, again illustrating and bringing to life the existing and potential economic impact of this growing sector. In your booklet you will see everyone has a copy of the Lunenburg one-page - it should be right inside your slick - and then you also have a few from your surrounding area, as close as I could find to your riding.

If you look at Lunenburg, for example, the Lunenburg market resulted in \$60,000 circulating through the market on the day of this study. In Mabou, Cape Breton, with a population of only 1,200, more than \$10,000 was spent at the market in just one market day. This is rural economic development at its best.

Our economic study also reveals that market visitors were frequenting surrounding local businesses as well and spending money there. In fact, on average, each market visitor spent more than \$15 at nearby shops and in some communities that figure was as much as \$29 per visitor.

In the small but vibrant community of Pugwash, market shoppers spent close to \$20,000 on one market day at surrounding local businesses. This again shows the power of rural economic development and the impact and draw of farmers' markets.

The story of Nova Scotia's farmers' market sector is also one of possibility. What if more Nova Scotians spent money at farmers' markets, doing their weekly shopping, meeting producers and experiencing the value of local agriculture? One can certainly speculate about the positive impact on the survival and resilience of rural communities in Nova Scotia on our shared economy, on our rates of entrepreneurship, and on our overall food security. Simply put, the possibility for growth and impact is astounding.

The next piece I'll refer you to is this little postcard in your booklet; some of you are already familiar with this, I do believe. This September, Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia built and led a coalition of local food organizations to launch the 50 per cent Local Food Club. The concept was simple, we asked Nova Scotians to step up to the plate and commit to sourcing 50 per cent of their diet locally for the entire month of September. Individuals, families, businesses, organizations and community leaders - including a few of you in the room - accepted the challenge and the initiative was truly a team effort. Our team included a representative from Select Nova Scotia as well, which was fantastic. You can take a look at this later but it has a bit of information on the participation for our first year.

As you well know, the provincial government has set a powerful goal - to see 20 per cent of the food bought in Nova Scotia to be locally produced by 2020. This is under the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act of course. We enthusiastically share this vision and farmers' markets are undoubtedly the key to reaching this impressive goal as markets offer not only extraordinary access to delicious local food but also provide communities with food awareness and education and, let's be honest, more than a dash of fun. Farmers' markets across Nova Scotia act as a welcoming and accessible marketplace for beginning farmers and thereby play a fundamental role in increasing the number of new entrants to agriculture across the province, a second key aspect to meeting the noble goal of 20 per cent by 2020.

The Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia sector is a key economic driver, most specifically in our rural communities. With employment challenges, the culture of entrepreneurship and the opportunities and accessibility of farmers' markets is a shining light. Our farmers' markets offer opportunities for tourism, agriculture and other rural livelihoods, downtown and community revitalization and much more.

FMNS has proven itself as an exciting and essential piece of infrastructure in our province, leveraging the value of individual farmers' markets into a growing sector with economic and social value. We are looking for creative ways to increase the capacity of our organization in order to keep up with, to foster and to continue to leverage the growth of our sector. I hope your questions and comments can bring further ideas to light on that.

To close, as a Cape Bretoner I believe that storytelling is in my blood but the truth is and, as you know in your position, all of us play a role in sharing the stories of our province, of our communities and of our farmers' markets. Even further, we are each part-owners in our province, in our communities and in our farmers' markets and it is through our hard work and our passion that we create stories and build our province.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Just before we start with the questions, we have a few members that I would like to offer the opportunity to introduce themselves, starting with Ms. Zann.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. We'll start by entertaining questions from the floor. Mr. Belliveau.

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: I have a two-part question. I am trying to make it humorous early in the morning. I am concerned - you talked about food security. To me, and I'm picking my words carefully here because I think we're almost vulnerable that people can sabotage certain food products and the industry is very vulnerable to that. I'm concerned, as a consumer - is that something you take seriously and how are you addressing that?

The second part to that question is, you talked about ways of increasing your profile for the farmers' markets. There's a statistic I throw out here that has really jumped out to me - I think there are 3 billion more ways of increasing your profile because there are going to be 3 billion more people on this planet in the next 30 years. To me, there is a concern about how is the world going to achieve this protein? So I'll put that out there, that two-part question: security and the added population.

MS. BUTLER: Thank you for your questions. First, regarding food safety in the province - I would say there are two pieces that I'll speak to there. First, I suppose the sort of hard science side of things - that would be that thus far, Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia, we've had a fantastic relationship with the Department of Agriculture, with their Food Safety Division.

We've basically shared a view between the two of us that it's really preventive, so while a large-scale company can have a recall, a farmers' market really can't afford something like that, which is a bit ironic, but a reputation is so important and it's very localized. So as an organization and in partnership with Food Safety, we really see that

prevention is the key so we know the importance of maintaining community trust and safety and we work very closely with them.

We meet regularly and we also run programs together. This year actually, for the first time they created a farmers' market expert so they now have a staff person who is increasingly working with the regional staff and becoming the one go-to person to keep things consistent across the province. That has been proving - at least among the markets, they're really appreciating that contact person. On the ground, the food safety officers are out and in the markets on a very regular basis.

On the second piece of that, which is I guess a bit more on the anecdotal side - I'm sure probably many of you were told by your mother and father when you were growing up that it's important to look someone in the eye. I think that's a bit about what the farmers' markets are about - you're looking the person who produced your food right in the eye. That does give a certain sense of weight and responsibility. Of course that's not enough alone, but I do think that there's still a lot of value in those relationships.

When it comes to increasing our profile and the reality of growth in population across the world, a very interesting point that I learned just a few months ago was that although it often sounds and is presented to us that large-scale agriculture is feeding the world, the United Nations did a report this year because it is the International Year of Family Farming - 2014 was the Year of Family Farming, I guess we've transitioned.

The reality is that the majority of people in the world are fed by small-scale agriculture - by family farms, small- and medium-sized agriculture. I wish I had the exact percentage at the tip of my tongue, but for me it was an important realization and something to kind of shift our minds on to where we're putting our attention when it comes to food production. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. d'Entremont.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: First of all, thanks for your presentation. If you wouldn't mind, when you are talking to Natalie after this - your president - just pass on our condolences on the passing of her father. I know I was looking forward to having Natalie here - she is one of my constituents, and a real firecracker when it comes to supporting Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia - but she did have something else that came up and I do pass on our condolences on that.

Part of the job of the Opposition sometimes is just to find out how government is doing in these things. I think you guys have a lot going on here and all very positive for rural economic development in our province. I'm just wondering, how does the Department of Agriculture or the Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism - how do they support farmers' markets? Are there marketing dollars from them? Do they provide money for rent? Could you give me an idea of how government supports you?

MS. BUTLER: I'll start by giving a couple of examples of where we've partnered. The brochure you have here, this is an annual partnership that we do. We do the legwork in updating each of these markets and it is fully the budget of Select Nova Scotia within the Department of Agriculture that prints this and does the graphic work. It's just a small piece of paper but for us it's really key. We have grown now and we have more marketing materials, but this has been a key piece for a number of years.

We also partner with Select Nova Scotia to participate in the Saltscapes Expo every year. The way we do that is we invite a number of vendors from across the province to sell their wares and we also promote the markets. The economic impact study we did in 2013 - we received \$5,000 which was actually about half of our budget to run this project, from the Department of Agriculture as well. Currently this year we are receiving funds through the Homegrown Success Program of the Department of Agriculture. Those would be the ones that come to the top of mind for me.

I would say we also receive in-kind support in terms of being updated when there are changes that are going to be happening that affect the sector, or if there are questions and more clarity is wanted, and other things like that, so relationship support certainly from the Department of Agriculture, from the Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism. Through the 50 per cent Local Food Club initiative, we also made a lot of contact within the Department of Health and Wellness, which is fantastic. Because of the artisan side of farmers' markets in Nova Scotia - which is not what every province does as a farmers' market but it is certainly an important piece of our markets - we are as well building bridges with the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage.

What I would say and one of the challenges is that farmers' markets bring those four departments together very smoothly and easily, and not always does our society or our government work in that way. We are organized by topics so sometimes it is challenging to bring all the right people to the table. Not that that hasn't happened - sometimes the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage will invite the Department of Agriculture to come into a meeting with us. But in figuring out sort of going forward how we can bring all those departments together, perhaps there is a committee or a task force or a group that could do some bridging there.

The other piece would be that we do see the farmers' markets as a core piece of infrastructure in Nova Scotia but we are challenged each year to be able to grow financially to meet what we're doing. There are examples in other provinces and other states in the U.S. where there is a more direct connection between the farmers' markets. In Alberta, for example, there is a staff person within their Department of Agriculture who basically does my job. Certainly as we continue to grow, maybe there are five-year or 10-year visions that we should be looking at.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: When it comes to the specific farmers' markets around the province, are they all a little bit of a different model or are they all sort of booked through you or sort of follow the trail from the documents we have or are some of them sort of on

their own? I'm just wondering about the cohesiveness of those farmers' markets across the province because we have 42 of them.

MS. BUTLER: Exactly. We are a co-operative so 40 per cent of our annual budget comes from membership fees. We are very proud of that, it means that we have that sustainable revenue stream coming in. Our fees are actually very accessible. Our fees are based on \$1.90, so just under \$2 per vendor per week the market operates. A large-scale market like the Seaport is spending close to \$10,000 but they can actually asking their vendors for \$1.90 for their table added on to their fees. Smaller markets - for example, the Inverness Cottage Workshop market is spending \$250 a year to be a member so there's quite a range.

For some markets it is our membership fee that is the blocking point for them. The Mabou Farmers Market in Cape Breton, for example, is a fantastic market and they're one of the markets I often mention when I talk about the economic impact study because they're doing great work. They run a very tight budget so every year they really work to try to put the funds together, but the \$1,500 it would cost for them to join has been a barrier for them year after year. This year they are in place to join and to be able to access our membership benefits, but it is a challenge.

On the other hand, the other thing for some markets, they actually don't meet our criteria. We do set fairly strict criteria on what we believe it means to be a farmers' market. In some provinces it is a legislated term - "farmers' market" - in Nova Scotia it is not. For the most part our understanding is that it's a "make it, bake it, grow it" place. So the person who is selling you the goods made those goods, or at least employs that person and works directly with them.

There are a few markets in the province that have producers selling that way but also some resellers. We are willing to work with markets and set a goal on them transitioning and being a member, with the idea that they are moving away from reselling but they have to share that commitment that the underlying value is "make it, bake it, grow it."

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Miller.

MS. MARGARET MILLER: Thank you so much for your presentation, it was great, especially on such short notice to be able to step in and be able to give us all that information. I love this, absolutely love this. My husband and I like to travel a little bit and whether it's anywhere in another province or here, if we go to any town that has a farmers' market and it's open, we're there.

Do you take advantage of that with tourism? Are these in all the tourist bureaus? Are they available to all tourism operators so that people know when they're coming in?

MS. BUTLER: Sure, and I should have mentioned tourism when I was rhyming off the departments. We also work with tourism - well, through the Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism, but also through the Tourism Agency. Actually each year we've needed to print more and more of these because every year we run out and different tourism centres are calling, saying we need more at the airport, we need more in Yarmouth. At Saltscapes, really what we tell people is to put it on the dashboard of your car and if you're out in another part of the province, you can find a market on your way.

One of the pieces is there's an interesting dynamic, many of the farmers' markets, their underlying value or their own mission is about feeding their local community and supporting self-employment within their local community. But there's also that aspect of tourism where for some people that's a seasonal population; the Hubbards farmers' market has a fantastic influx of cottagers who move to that area or the Pugwash market. Then there are also people just passing through and they're looking for that experience or taste of Nova Scotia. Certainly the farmers' markets are all set up to provide that, so you can buy your jams and jellies or a beautiful quilt or pick up your lunch or a bottle of wine. We're very fortunate in Nova Scotia that locally produced spirits and wine and beer are available in the markets, which is not the case in every province.

Yes, I think we are trying to take advantage of that. The Tourism Agency this winter is working on creating a spot on their website specifically to promote farmers' markets. We used to be included in other areas, either under events or under culinary. Now we'll have our own sort of showcase.

MS. MILLER: What advice would you give somebody who wants to start a farmers' market in their area? What is the best contact? Where can they get a groundwork of exactly what they need to do?

MS. BUTLER: When I was giving my presentation I used the term that our member markets tend to be the well-established markets, whether they're long-standing or new entrants. We're always thrilled when a brand new market joins the co-operative right from the beginning. We can offer a lot of support to them for starting that process and doing things right, even things like sharing existing policies and bylaws from other markets so that they're not reinventing the wheel.

So when someone reaches out to me about starting a new market, I have a standard email that I pass along, which gives them the steps I would recommend. Of course my suggestion is always that they also plan annual membership in the co-operative into their budget because of what it provides.

One of the key pieces of what we provide, which is actually another partnership with the government, which is through the Department of Labour and Advanced Education, is running workplace education programs. We actually offer 40-hour customized business training programs for businesses based in the farmers' market, and we run a separate one for staff of farmers' markets. So if a new market is joining, I would definitely say you want

to become a member for the sake of your manager being able to take that training and being able to network with the other managers.

It can be an isolated job at times and so we really try to build those connections. In Wolfville and Kentville, they're quite close together and the markets actually have a history of the Wolfville market birthing the Kentville market, so those managers are quite connected, but in other parts of the province you can be a bit isolated.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. MacMaster.

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Ms. Butler, it's nice to have you with us today. The question I have is related to farm markets, and certainly local food producers. I was at a conference at the Gaelic College a few months back, I think it was last Fall - or maybe it was last Spring now that I think about it - and one of the things they talked about there was the interest in getting institutional purchase of local food. Is there a role that farm markets could play in helping to coordinate that for all those food producers, for instance, to come to government to offer food to institutions like schools, hospitals, that sort of thing?

MS. BUTLER: In the province, the farmers' markets are very much a part of, and working with, the local food movement overall, although we're not just food. One of the questions that has come up in conversations with other local food advocates is that idea of how we bring institutional procurement in and what are the easiest ways - the low-hanging fruit - to do that?

One of the ideas has been having a farmers' market broker, so working with a well-established market or a market that's new and emerging and looking to try a slightly different model. We've also talked about ideas of using farmers' markets as food hubs. So Cape Breton actually - and I'm sure you've been very involved - beginning really out of Inverness, they've created a Cape Breton local food hub, which at this point isn't actually a physical space. It's a person and a concept and they're building that out to connect producers and restaurants and move food from producers to consumers in various ways.

We see these popping up all across North America with great success. In some cases they are a physical space where food can be aggregated by multiple small farms and then sold to restaurants or sold to grocery stores. So I think of certain farmers' markets that have a physical space, such as the Wolfville Farmers' Market, where they could be a physical space for that to happen. So they could have a farmers' market on Saturday and in Wolfville they also have a farmers' market on Wednesday, but they could also be on other days of the week aggregating food to be able to do larger scale selling.

I think there's a lot of possibility for things like that and probably the way to do that is to pilot that with one farmers' market that really has the capacity, and then be able to build out from there to say, does this work? Often in the food community in Nova Scotia, we're talking about the challenge of distribution - that small-scale producers are spending too much moving their food around the province. So how do we aggregate that to make

that more accessible so that these producers can be making a better living? I think that's part of it and there are a number of different options.

Another idea that has come up has been using farmers' markets perhaps in Halifax in particular as a bit of a wholesale market for restaurants where instead of the Saturday market, the restaurants would come Friday or Sunday and they could buy large quantities. It would be another great way for local producers to be moving a larger amount of food.

I'm personally very passionate about the idea of individual consumers making those purchases as well direct from farmers because I think that's where it starts from. Although we certainly have fantastic chefs in the province that have been encouraging and doing a lot of the legwork to bring individual consumers onsite. Does that answer your question?

MR. MACMASTER: Yes, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good question, good answer. Mr. Horne.

MR. BILL HORNE: Thank you for coming today. I am very impressed with the presentation and what the Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia is doing. I know there are many challenges, but I was wondering if you could think down to the future. You've already mentioned a lot of the things that are possibilities. Where do you see the farmers' markets going and how many might you see in Nova Scotia in the next 10 years? It has tripled in the last 10 or whatever. Maybe you could give us a little insight in what you think the future brings for the farmers' markets.

MS. BUTLER: One of the ideas that has come up that we as an organization are really talking about, is having the co-operative become more directly involved in the operation of farmers' markets in the province. One of the challenges we currently face as a sector is there are a limited number of people who are actually employed to run a farmers' market. In Cape Breton, the entire sector is run by volunteers. One market typically has a manager, but they've been without a manager for about a year and a half now.

So the market is run on volunteers, and it's not that that's a negative thing. I mean, I grew up really believing that volunteering is an important part of our community, but I think that there is a need for staff and then the staff is able to utilize volunteers in the community. I think we all know that when an organization works without any paid staff, there is a really limited capacity to what they can do, especially because in the province many of those people running the markets are the vendors. So they're farmers who are also trying to operate that venue. It's just a very tight amount of time that they have to do all of those things. It is a limiting piece on what we're achieving.

So one of the ideas is actually - and we see this in other places, Vancouver has this system and many parts of the U.S. - where the industry association actually staffs people. So the idea would be that we would be paying a farmers' market manager who would run, say, the Wolfville and the Kentville markets. They're on different days of the week.

They're in a tight regional area, and they could do a lot by co-promoting and by sharing certain vendors and that type of thing. We could be doing that in regions across the province.

So one of our goals for the next five years is to actually pilot that in one region that is interested in looking at that model. Basically the idea being that we would maintain all the principles and practices that we're doing now, but it would be more professionalized by having paid staff who are trained and able to be retained year to year. So that's one of the pieces.

I'm also actually interested in working to create a bit of a formula. There are other parts of North America where they have a formula as to how many people in a community you need to have a successful farmers' market. We don't have a number like that here in the province and I think that would be good because at some point we will reach a saturation point where we could operate more markets, which would be more overhead, but there won't necessarily be individual businesses making any more money. So there is a balance between how far the producer needs to travel and how far the customer needs to travel.

I'm very interested in finding the right individuals - perhaps someone with a stats background in the Department of Agriculture, something like that - who could help us to craft that. That could be our guiding policy for moving the farmers' markets forward.

MR. HORNE: It must be a challenge for the owners or the farmers who are going to the markets. They must find it very difficult to expand their programs because maybe it's a husband and wife on a farm who are going to the markets. Are there challenges there for the farmer and how he or she can better demonstrate that they can get around to other markets?

MS. BUTLER: One of the pieces on that is, I always say to businesses, to farmers and to other small and medium sized businesses - the farmers' market is not the right marketing stream for everyone. It takes a certain personality and it also takes a certain business mindset to utilize the market to the best of its ability.

For example, there is a fantastic farm - two young people who moved from Ontario because of land prices being a lot more accessible here, and they farm in Cumberland County. Their farm name is Broadfork Farm. They're fantastic growers, that's without a doubt, but that doesn't necessarily mean that's enough to make a living. They do make a living, they make a very good living. Their message is really that for them it's all about the farmers' market. At the farmers' market they can draw the best possible price from their customers. They're constantly looking at how they can expand and then advertise what they are now offering through the farmers' market.

At times in the Spring they train others to put in small gardens, based on their farming principles, in their customers' yards and they advertise that at the market. So

they're using their time at the market not just to sell their product offering, but also to sell add-on or value-added service offerings. That's something we're really trying to teach within the sector, to make use of that time because you have a captive audience of people passing through the market, so there are opportunities like that.

You also see businesses like Ironworks, where they decide that what they're going to do is bring a group of individuals across the province to their facility in Lunenburg, train them there, and then have them represent them at markets across the province. We are seeing that model, as well, which is quite interesting.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Ms. Zann.

MS. LENORE ZANN: Hi, nice to meet you and thank you for coming today. As I said before, I'm the MLA from Truro. We've seen a great growth in our farmers' market there, going from being an outside market to now having our own building, and also the Tatamagouche market which I get up to quite a bit. It has grown as well, the Creamery Square itself, and it's really nice to see for all the farmers as well as the artisans, as you say.

I have a question for you - two questions, actually, if that's okay. One was, are the farmers still having trouble trying to get their wares sold to people and bring people in, rather than people going to, say for instance, Giant Tiger or Walmart or Superstore or wherever, to get cheaper product and all under one roof, everything they want? Are you still hearing any issues about that, with prices, sometimes people who aren't making as much money saying I can't afford to get it at the farmers' market, I can't afford it? Are you still hearing those kinds of things and have you had any thoughts on how we could try to help people and have more people able to shop locally for fresh food?

MS. BUTLER: Sure - a very important question. I'll sort of speak to the food security side of that at the end. One of the pieces in the province is the simplest thought that we need to get more people at the farmers' markets. We now know enough in the sector that there are two pieces to that. Of course we want to have more people visiting the farmers' markets and we really believe that when someone comes for the first time that if you make sure they have a really welcoming and positive experience, they will come back and you will build loyal customers. The markets are well-poised for those relationships to develop, that's what it's really about.

We also know now that it's not just about more people through the door, it's also about increasing the spending that people are spending when they are at the market. When we did the economic impact study, part of that was really to say we need a benchmark so we know what the average person is spending at the market, what that is in relation to stats information on the percentage of a family's food budget for a week, and then how do we increase that so we're not asking people to spend money they don't have or asking people to spend money in their local community instead of in a store where more of the money

leaves the province - certainly not all of it, local people are employed, but more of the money leaves the province.

We're really taking that two-pronged approach to our marketing efforts going forward. We want to figure out how we do both of those things. Just to give one quick example, one of those pieces of how you increase spending once you're in the market, what we're looking at is within the farmers' markets marketing efforts, so signage in the markets that can affect people. So once they're already in the door, how do we let them know all that's available and the value of them spending their money there? That's one of the pieces.

The Wolfville market actually is doing a very exciting project right now where they're building an online ordering system. With that they're looking at that as one way to increase sales. There are some people who come to the market and are affected by the fact that you pay for each item in cash and you move from one vendor to the next. So you come with cash and then it's gone and you stop spending, even though we certainly have banking machines in the markets, but the Wolfville market is looking at an online ordering system where you have one checkout. Some basic financial policy or research says that has a positive effect on people's spending habits. They're a market that has the capacity to pilot and try something like that and so that's what they're doing now. It will be very interesting to see if that increases overall spending by families at the market.

The other piece of that as well is it's not always about price so, again, that farm in Cumberland County - Broadfork Farm - one of the things that they talk about, the two farmers there, is they really try not to make it about price. They try to make it about everything else. They make it about the taste of their vegetables, about the colour of their vegetables, about the relationship that they have with their customers. They actually find that by doing that very consciously - of course that's not where everyone at the market buys their vegetables, but for the customers that they want to cultivate, it's not about price. So no one says to them at the end, oh, that's more than I thought. They're very happy to have that relationship and buy that beautiful food.

I am also not oblivious to the reality of food security and to poverty - that is to say that there are people in our province who are buying their food at the dollar store, who are not eating fresh food, and that is far from this reality. I think there are multiple things that we need to do with that. One of the realizations of the farmers' market sector is that, one, we need to break down the barriers on who feels welcome at the market. We need to break through the myths about markets being more expensive because that's not necessarily true. There is a range of prices at farmers' markets. We also need to know what we as a sector can do in the province in terms of positive work and what is outside of our influence at this point.

There is a reality that for people who are currently only able to purchase food at dollar stores, we don't feel that the farmers' market sector can necessarily do that on a weekly basis. There could be efforts like - the Windsor Farmers' Market once did a food drive which they called Farmers for the Food Bank where customers were invited to come

and buy fresh food from the farmers. The farmers were not donating their food because they are not necessarily in a position to do that either, but people would buy fresh food and then the local food bank was there accepting it and then immediately getting it out to families. I think that's a great way to have people who are able to contribute to still buy from a farmer, but to move that food to people who need it. There are efforts like that that we might be able to be involved in and use the markets in that way.

MS. ZANN: So along that line then, has there ever been any chat back and forth with government to talk about possibly subsidizing some food for the poorer families? The other thing would be - obviously in the regular stores, if there is a product like bananas or vegetables that are a little older than some of the others, they put the price down cheaper so people will buy them. Is there that possibility, perhaps?

MS. BUTLER: Two things come to mind. First, one of the messages that we teach in our business training course is that often farmers or other vendors at the end of the day - especially farmers because they have a perishable product - they want to move that food. So at the end of the day they'll drop their prices a little bit and move it, but some producers were saying to us, I have people who wait until I drop my price and then they buy it and at that rate I'm not making my labour back. So our very clear message now is there is more value to donate that food to a local food bank and get the social currency for that. Let others know that you do that good work and that matters to you, than to drop your prices at the end of the day, and what that says about your business. So that's our message.

We're actually encouraging markets to suggest that to their vendors and then potentially a market could say, this year collectively our vendors donated this much food directly from the farmers' market to our local food bank. That's another great service that a farmers' market would be providing to its community. So we do have suggestions along those lines.

In terms of subsidy, the closest thing that I have heard of is, again in Cumberland - there are interesting things happening up there - there is an effort - and I'm not exactly sure where the funding is coming from. I think it's more localized than provincial government, where there are a couple of farms that have joined together with some local food advocates and they're aggregating food and doing a food box or a community-supported agriculture program. Families that are in need are paying a reduced price for a weekly delivery of fresh vegetables. The money that farmers would be losing is being topped up through a subsidy. I'm not exactly sure where that money is coming from but they're piloting it there. The biggest thing they're finding is that they're having families who weren't in the habit of eating fresh food, eating fresh food, so it's really a health thing in that way.

The secondary piece is that it's coming from local farmers instead of from away, so there's that reverberating effect in the community.

MS. ZANN: Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: I want to talk about two things. The wholesale thing interests me so I'll talk about that one in a minute. I want to talk about the inspections of things. Of course we've got meat and we've got other products around the farm markets. I'm just wondering, how is the Department of Agriculture, the Food Safety Branch, how are they treating you and how are you finding that work going on?

MS. BUTLER: We do have a very positive relationship in terms of my organization to the department. We have a minimum of one standing annual meeting where we just use that time to check in and see what are the concerns that they're seeing, how can we sort of put that information out to our members, is there a need for a food safety workshop in the province, and what is the cost that we think is a fair price - those kinds of things. They've really positioned themselves to deliver on-the-ground training and workshops, which is fantastic.

The way that it works generally is that markets are expected to do their due diligence but the reality of markets having all volunteer staff, basically when a vendor who has food applies to a market, each market has an application and that will include information about food safety. The market says, you need to sign this saying that you have reached out to our local Food Safety officer. So they're doing what I would say is their due diligence without being enforcers, because that's not their role.

At the same time also within their due diligence, if something within a market is seen by another vendor or by a manager or by a customer, we would encourage them to contact Food Safety. It would be Food Safety that would always handle any sort of potential issue. So the on-the-ground piece is very important and we really appreciate that.

Our other message to farmers' market-based businesses is that it's not an adversarial relationship. Ideally if you're starting a new business, you reach out to Food Safety from the beginning. We want to cultivate that idea that we're in a partnership and it's not some sort of negative enforcement, that it's very clear. That's what we've been working on.

There are still realities, there are cases where farmers' markets push the line and they have to find out whether there's room for policy change and if it's time for policy change or if that Food Safety rule is there and limiting them for a very good reason. One example would be in Cape Breton, there was a fisherman who fishes oysters. During the oyster season he sells at the market and you can buy oysters to take home, which is not a problem under Food Safety, or you can eat a shucked oyster - he'll shuck it and you eat it right there. You should see the lineup. Cape Breton oysters, he sells them for \$1 apiece, it's a steal, and he's the fisherman right there in front of you.

It became an issue because a Food Safety officer said I'm not actually sure if this is allowed or not. When they read through the rules it seemed as though it really wasn't

allowed so he was stopped from attending. For him it was his livelihood so he brought it to the market and others within the market. They decided it was worth them going to the government, going to their local representatives and saying, we really want this reviewed because we think we can do it safely and, if so, this is important to us. So it's a very small example, but in the end the government was very responsive and they were able to clarify the rule, is really what happened, so that it's obvious that if you are the fisherman, you can bring those to market and you do have this breadth of room, I guess, to sell and to shuck and that kind of thing. It is still essential that you are the producer so we're coming up to those pieces.

As an organization, as FMNS, we don't tend to do a lot of policy. We inform policy, but we haven't been advocating on policy and that has so far been a choice on where we use our limited resources, so we're happy to be a voice that's listened to, but we haven't taken stances as an advocate on items like that.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: I was always wondering on this one, when you go there you can buy pickles, pies - you're wondering, do they have the correct food handling methods in order to bring those products for sale? In some cases it's just ma and pop or personal individuals who are interested in selling their products. I'm just wondering, how far does that reach go when they come and bring that product to you?

MS. BUTLER: It is true, there is a wide breadth of businesses within the farmers' market sector. You have your Ironworks, you have the Flying Apron Inn, you have very professional businesses and you also have ma and pa businesses, which may be as a supplement to their income or maybe they're new and they're going to build to be an Ironworks, but that takes time.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: My second point on the wholesale issue . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would say it'd be your third. (Laughter)

MR. D'ENTREMONT: My third supplementary, sir - is the whole wholesale idea. I like the idea because the example that I've used before revolves around the City of Paris. In the City of Paris, the restaurants are not allowed to sell frozen product or pre-processed product, for the most part. So there is no such thing as a Cisco going in and delivering food to the local restaurants.

What the chefs have to do is get their products from a market or from a farmer or what have you. The majority of them go to a market called Rungis, which is sort of to the south of Paris near the Orly airport. I forget how many - it's like a seven hectare or even larger facility, there are like 30 buildings on it. Most of them look like airplane hangars. This one is meat, this one is fish, this one is vegetables, this one is fruit. The chefs at the end of their shifts go to Rungis and pick their products, and then the truck delivers them in the morning to their restaurants.

Not that I'm saying that Halifax should ban frozen food or what have you - there would be an absolute revolt - but I like the idea of using the Seaport Market, say, as a wholesale centre during the week maybe. Has there been some real thought around that because I think that's a great opportunity to use these facilities more than they're being used today because we see them on Saturday or we see them on a Thursday, but they're not really being used the rest of the time. It's just a thought to throw out because there are models - maybe not as big as that, but there are models that we could actually adopt or use.

MS. BUTLER: The closest thing that I have heard of is that a few years ago a staff person within the Department of Agriculture, who is still staff and is actually a farmer - she and her partner are farmers as well, which I often think gives you a lot of background information if you're a farmer. She did some research into the idea of having an auction, much like the Truro livestock auction, but for locally-produced produce - more along those lines. So there is that study out there somewhere and it wasn't something that was adopted. I think actually in the research they thought at that point, which was a few years ago, we didn't necessarily have enough restaurants or grocery stores looking to purchase local to warrant the infrastructure of doing that, but that may well be different now.

Being a seasonal part-time farmer myself, I know some of the challenges of delivering very small orders to restaurants. It's a bit of what you have to do almost, but you're driving into the city to deliver \$100 to one restaurant, \$150 to one restaurant, \$100 to another.

Of course each individual business has to make those business decisions and that's up to them, but where we can in a more organized way provide the infrastructure and find a way to move larger quantities, it seems like a no-brainer - along with institutional procurement. It's not that that's easy, but that's a potential way to switch where we're getting food to make it actually have a greater impact on our province, but not that that's easy. Of course that's going to take a lot.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Because the point is that one farmer can't necessarily supply all the product that they want, but if you put five farmers together or 10 farmers together, then they can. If you give them a facility to do it in maybe that might be an option later on, so something to think about.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I believe maybe that touched on the question that Mr. MacMaster asked earlier, she had mentioned in regard to a pilot that you were going to operate maybe outside the normal operating hours of the farmers' markets where collectively they could do that. Mr. Hines.

MR. LLOYD HINES: Ms. Butler, thank you for your enthusiastic presentation here today. It's my recollection that there was a good relationship between the former regional development authorities and the farmers' markets across the province - certainly across the part of it that I was familiar with. I'm just wondering if that could be taken up or if you have any intention to take that up with the regional enterprise networks which are emerging

now as the local economic development mechanisms to replace the regional development authorities?

MS. BUTLER: I think that's a fantastic idea. Natalie, who Mr. d'Entremont mentioned, she has brought it up in regard to the Yarmouth area. Certainly what would be fantastic would be the opportunity to sit down with the collective group to sort of say this is what the farmers' markets can potentially offer, whether you have one already and how can we leverage that, or is your community well situated to actually create a farmers' market and have that venue for other small businesses? I think that would be fantastic. That's housed within Economic and Rural Development and Tourism. Wonderful, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. MacMaster.

MR. MACMASTER: One of the things, and you mentioned about the oysters in Mabou, I remember when that was going on, how are these things best resolved? They do come up from time to time. Rules are generally very black and white and they're there to protect people's health and their safety.

At the same time you have people who are trying to work with them practically who are trying to produce food, make food - I think of baked goods as another example. I had somebody in my area who baked goods in her kitchen. People loved them, she's obviously very professional in what she does, but she had to discontinue selling them. I think she can still sell them in farmers' markets, so that's a solution there to some degree, but there was a requirement, for her to be able to sell them anywhere else, that she would have a separate kitchen in her home.

Anybody could have a separate kitchen in their home and it could be dirty and unkempt. Of course it wouldn't pass inspection if somebody came by, but my point is that you could just have one kitchen in your home and if you looked after it properly, I would think it would be - so there are many different examples of this.

How are these issues best resolved? I expect a lot of the vendors that come to the markets, because I know they've come to me in the case of Mabou about a couple of instances like that, how do you see these being best resolved? Are they one-offs? I'll let you answer.

MS. BUTLER: I think this is a great example of one of the places where it just makes sense to work with the Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia as a co-operative. One of the challenges we do face is certainly much of the work we do benefits all markets in the sector.

In terms of the training programs we run - you have that booklet there, the six-month calendar - those are accessible in some cases only to our members or for a fee or a higher fee to non-members. Certainly when we run a marketing campaign or when we meet

with individuals like yourself, we're serving the whole sector. In that way we have become that sort of go-to. So even though not every market is a member of ours, we are very well positioned to be the sort of the - not negotiating point but the resource there, so I do think that's an important way.

For example, in Mabou, although they're not a market, when this issue came up they approached me and said, what do you think we should do? I sort of gave them my advice, and based on the situation of not having the capacity - we're a one-staff operation most of the year - they were able to lead it on their own, which was fantastic, and they were able to make that change. Then what they did affects all the markets in the province, so now any market - because many of the markets are hoping to increase the amount of seafood they have there, because it is one of the areas where the farmers' markets are lacking and one of the areas in the province, as I'm sure many of you know, that could really use an influx of local interest, I think, much the way farmers and chefs have become a bit of a celebrity in the food world, we really want to bring fishermen up to that status as well.

I think the point being that just working with the Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia in that way is the most logical - it's a one-desk operation, sort of that way. But the reality is where our capacity is lacking sometimes in those areas. When I meet with Food Safety annually this would be one of the things we talk about, are there certain pieces that are a constant issue in markets? Is there an issue around eggs that keeps coming up and up and let's talk about that. How do we either enforce it or how do we adjust the rule?

Of course adjusting a rule is not a quick and easy thing but if there's good reason, it certainly can happen. Does that answer the question?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Miller.

MS. MILLER: A couple of things actually, a couple of questions. One is I was thinking about young people, talking about young people getting involved as entrepreneurs or even as farmers or as producers, is there an option in any of these farmers' markets, has anybody ever thought of doing something to have maybe a booth available for a young person or something, showcasing young people who are - some of them are such creative thinkers. The more young people I talk to, the more I'm encouraged about the future of Nova Scotia. Is that opportunity out there in farmers' markets, that markets would sort of think about sponsoring or something like that, a certain section or a booth or something like that that might encourage young people to come in for the day and show off what they do and what they can sell?

MS. BUTLER: This is a great opportunity for me to give you two very brief, little stories. The New Glasgow Farmers Market has, in fact, for their length of season they have a table available, a booth available. I think they charge \$10 or \$15 to rent that booth where their normal table fees would be - I think at New Glasgow it's probably about \$35 now, it's a very strong market and they're full to the brim.

They make the space for that and the idea is that it's someone under the age of 18, I believe. They still need to meet the criteria, they still need to show up with a nice display and handle themselves professionally, but it gives them again an even easier access.

One of the realities of the farmers' market is it's a very low start-up cost for a business and it's a great way to do market testing. Some businesses start at the market and then move on from it, and we're happy with that as well. So there is that in New Glasgow, which is fantastic.

My favourite is actually from Mr. d'Entremont's area, at the Yarmouth farmers' market, another fantastic market. He's not there anymore, he's away at university, but Sushi Phil was a young guy in the community there. He had been with family, had had sushi in other communities but there's no sushi in Yarmouth, or there wasn't at the time. He practised and practised and started making - I think it was all vegetarian sushi, no fish, probably just for food safety reasons. He would bring sushi as a prepared food to sell at market. It was really interesting, it became his passion. I believe he has gone on to NSCC for culinary school. It was also an interesting service to the community, so bringing something that wasn't there otherwise - he became known as Sushi Phil. So there are some examples.

But I'm sure that at the same time we could be doing more, whether that is sharing those stories so more young people sort of know that it's a possibility.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. I believe Mr. d'Entremont has a little follow-up on that.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Sushi Phil - Phil D'Eon is his name, he's from West Pubnico. In the latter part of Grade 11 he just had a passion for sushi and he learned how to make it. All through Grade 12 he went to the farmers' market every Saturday morning with his big thing of sushi and would sell out by lunchtime, there wasn't a bit of it left anytime. If you got there after about 11:30 a.m., forget it, you weren't getting any anyway. Since that was his passion, he could do it and he was very good at it.

He got accepted - I don't know if it was NSCC culinary school but I think he went to P.E.I., to the Culinary Institute, and that's what he's doing now. It wasn't the farmers' market necessarily that said, hey, you should do this but he used it as his avenue to make a little money, develop his skills and move on to a career that I think is going to be a very good one, so kudos to the farmers' markets for that one.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Belliveau.

MR. BELLIVEAU: I was interested in your comments. You talked about the lack of seafood at your markets. I'm not going to take the bait because I'm not going to take the bait because I'm going to stick to my original question. (Laughter)

In your model you talked about three points - bake it, grow it or make it, and I wanted to kind of go in a different direction here because there are a lot of craftspeople across Nova Scotia, particularly in the areas that I frequent. These craftspeople are not usually, I observe, out in the public on a general basis. They're not aggressive and they sometimes live in a remote area. I question how many opportunities they have. They don't frequent the farmers' markets aggressively and they're not that type to be aggressive salespeople. I'm saying, there must be some way of recognizing it and improving that particular scenario so we can bring people to them, to their products.

You mentioned in your presentation, you talked about creating a food hub. Is any work being done trying to address the issue? I'm saying there are a number of these artists out there, but there is a lack of bringing the population or the consumer to these people.

MS. BUTLER: I think one of the pieces is - there is a lot of room for growth in marketing of the farmers' markets so we certainly see that as a job of ours, but the reality of our budget has been that actually the first paid ad that we've run in the last five years was this ad that we did, which was basically the map of our markets. We did that this summer, thanks to some great support from the magazine giving us a great deal.

We're also currently working through the process of potentially running a large-scale Spring provincial farmers' market campaign through Select Nova Scotia. So we're working further and further towards that. The way that came about - and I do have a copy here if anyone wanted to take a look. It's a really neat idea, but the way that came about was because Extreme Group - an award-winning marketing company here in Halifax actually approached us and said, we want to do this pro bono and create a campaign, but you'll need to pay to run it.

Unfortunately our reality is not only do we not have the money to pay to create it, we don't have the money to pay to really run it and so that's where Select Nova Scotia had said, we intend to run a campaign - it may be that we could partner and do this. Certainly Select Nova Scotia is not only about farmers' markets, they have a wider view than that, but the idea being that this could be a campaign they do run as we open up the start of the season. So I think marketing is a big piece of that in terms of getting the word out.

I sometimes think of our farmers' markets as a best-kept secret in the province, but not a secret I want to keep. When it comes to artisans, producers, farmers and fishermen, maybe this takes us a little bit to the touchy and feely side, but a lot of it comes down to confidence. A lot of these people are starting new businesses, and some start as true entrepreneurs and they get in and they know what it is to run a business, and that's a certain confidence, but there are also people - especially artisans - who start because of the passion for what they do. That is just as important but it doesn't mean that they come with any business skills. Those are the folks who do find it more challenging to find avenues to sell.

I do see, for example in Lunenburg, there are just fantastic artisans and the culture that has been created there is fantastic. I think that's spreading along the South Shore, but

on that note, I would say our biggest asset is the 40-hour training program that we run. I do have a poster I'll just slip this way. We run these in each region and because of the partnership with the Department of Labour and Advanced Education, they're actually free for our members, but it does require you to be a vendor at one of our member markets. This is for farmers, for prepared food, for artisans, and it's really the business side. So you know how to produce it - we're not going to talk about that, but let's talk about how you actually sell it. That's a big part of what we do really.

We're now being asked to sell the curriculum we created to other provinces, which is really exciting. So our lead trainer is going out to Toronto to train someone there and to teach the program. The Alberta association wants to buy our curriculum. It's really exciting and we know we're doing a good job on that, but then there are other areas where our capacity needs to grow, marketing being one example.

I also wanted to mention that I am a big fan of puns, they say it's a Cape Breton thing, so I appreciate that you led with the "bait".

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Mr. Irving.

MR. KEITH IRVING: Thank you, Ms. Butler, for your great, youthful enthusiasm, it's very welcome around tables like this. I'm a big fan of farmers' markets. Every Saturday for eight years I've been going to the Wolfville Farmers' Market and I describe it as a treasure to the community.

Just a couple of comments, I guess. I think one of the wonderful things I've seen with the Wolfville Farmers' Market is the expansions and growth of these businesses. You've alluded to that and I think it's worth celebrating the role that farmers' markets have had in like Pie r Squared moving out of the farmers' market and becoming, after five years, quite a viable and growing business. Joseph, who I get my sausages from, I eat sausages like four times a week now.

I say that that should be celebrated in terms of the work that you and farmers' markets are doing, in terms of its role in developing businesses. We probably shouldn't get into this but the work of FarmWorks in helping businesses like getting Pie r Squared moving and the dovetailing of FarmWorks, which might be something for a future meeting, in getting local people to invest their money in local businesses is a tremendous piece of work and it dovetails nicely with the farmers' markets.

I don't know if you want to comment on that at all but it is something I think we should be replicating in terms of taking CEDIFs like FarmWorks - I call FarmWorks a sectoral CEDIF because it's really broadening, like a mutual fund, the investment in a number of businesses.

After that long preamble to my question, the potential for growth is astounding you say. Do you have a strategic plan on where you're trying to get to? Obviously there are so

many areas to work on and you say, well, we're concentrating on this but we're not doing that because of resources. Do you want to comment about your strategic initiatives, whether you have a strategic plan that is focusing you on your limited resources? How do you envision the growth of this sector? Have you a formula that you're supporting through the development of each one because you've learned from Wolfville and you can allocate those lessons? Are we trying to grow the number of farmers' markets? Are we trying to grow the number of vendors at the 52 farmers' markets? Are we trying to grow the number of days? Is that feasible? Do you have a sense of where we could be if we continue to support your work or support it more, where we'll be in five or 10 years?

MS. BUTLER: What I would say is myself and my board of directors, we get together once - well we get together a number of times but we get together once a year and we spend the day actually in a farmhouse in Lunenburg County. It's a beautiful place to be - a little short of your area maybe but a nice area - and we spend the day doing strategic planning. We always face that challenge of doing strategic planning for our organization and doing strategic planning for the sector and where the line is. So it's constantly something we're sort of playing with.

I think what you bring up really brings the realization to me that we need some support to do that in a bigger way. So being the voice of the sector, the industry association, what we could really benefit from would be to have a professional come in and facilitate that in a bigger way, so with the board but also gathering some information from within the sector to find out what that is.

We know many of the challenges that we're currently facing. For example, there can be some tension when a new market starts up close to another market and we sort of do our best to navigate that situation, but I do think - and I mentioned it earlier - that it would be of great benefit for us to be able to craft a formula that says, in our experience and in research from elsewhere, a farmers' market can be successful when you have a population reach of this area.

One of the pieces that research from the U.S. shows is that it's not that you want an isolated market so everyone has to go there; you actually want to have markets within a reasonable distance operating on different days. So if you don't make it to the Wolfville Farmers' Market on Saturday, you can get to Kentville on Wednesday, and you don't just give up and go to the grocery store or buy elsewhere.

So there are all these factors and there is research - particularly from the U.S., there is some great research done there that could be brought together - but I would say that unfortunately I can't say that we have a clear picture of that. When we talk about the growth of our organization, we certainly talk about having a second staff person and the capacity that would make. We also talk about - a key goal is just to expand our membership because we know there are markets that could be so much more if they had some of the resources and the training that we're offering.

The fee to be a member is so small it seems like such a silly obstacle point, so really increasing our membership is a key point for us - also because that will increase our capacity and our financial budget, but that's a key piece. I'll just say on that note, in your folder you will see this little card. These we created when Natalie, our board president who is not here today, spoke to the conference of municipalities - there's a correct term . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: UNSM.

MS. BUTLER: Thank you. She spoke to them. Part of what we wanted to do was to let all of those individuals know about farmers' markets in their areas and about the potential that they offer. On that little card, on the back it talks about a few things that a municipality or someone representing their riding could do for their market - one of those things being to make sure that their market is a member and what that would mean.

Getting back to that point on the strategic plan, I think that's an area where going forward is clearly something we need to do so that we can say this is what we envision. Do we see 50 farmers' markets? Are we at capacity?

In terms of the growth of vendors, one of those pieces would be to say there are categories of vendors. We typically organize vendors in categories in Nova Scotia and so the category of farmer or primary producer, there is room for growth and we know that. We're very happy that a lot of new entrants come through the farmers' markets, but we're also interested in accessing farms that are existing and are using other avenues but maybe want to add a farmers' market stream to their sales portfolio.

MR. IRVING: Just one quick follow-up and you don't need to respond to this. The whole element of evaluation and the work that you're doing in terms of getting baseline and data is extremely important in terms of your strategic directions, but whether you're evaluating yourself as an organization, the industry as a whole or whether individual markets are kind of evaluating in terms of what they're doing well - I'm just a big fan. We don't do enough of it in government. Let's take a look at where we are because we all just get so busy and there are so many ideas out there. I offer that up as sort of a comment more than needing a response - unless you want to.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: I know we're getting toward the end and there are a couple of questions left, but I thought I would ask this, and it's not necessarily in your presentation anywhere - a great presentation and thank you for your insight on this - but since we're here in front of government, if there was one thing or two things that you were going to ask for from government, what would they be? A simple question - big answers sometimes.

MS. BUTLER: It's a tricky thing because I feel very confident in what I would ask for if I was granted that one wish, but I also know that in the current climate of how

government works, which certainly has its reasoning, I don't know that it's a possibility but I'll throw it out there and then maybe I'll think of more possible.

I do think that the one thing that would make the greatest impact would be for Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia to be a line item in actually a number of departments. It shouldn't really just fall to the Department of Agriculture - even a small line item, but annually. Now I know that core funding is not something that's talked about. I don't want to call that core funding - I want to call that investment, but what I see is that would increase our capacity in certain ways that we're thus far not able to do on our own.

On the other hand, two points that were raised by individuals today would be to actually have a partnership with a few departments and to sit together and actually maybe do a strategic plan in that venue. I think that would be of huge impact to the farmers' market sector and to our province and to each of those departments. I also think, on the small side, I would love to have that sit-down with the new version of the RDAs.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: RENS.

MS. BUTLER: RENS - so a sit-down with the individuals involved in that. I guess those would be a number of those pieces, yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's the end of our speakers list. Fortunately, I sometimes get a chance to ask a question myself. One thing that wasn't mentioned that I just want to throw out there, I think the whole move towards farmers' markets is a cultural shift in the way a community works. You can see it in Mexico, Paris, different places, and that's ultimately what we want to do, so exposure to the fruits of farmers' markets is certainly a place that we would like to go.

Farmers' markets seem to be stationary items. They're entities that live within certain pieces of infrastructure. Has there ever been any consideration on taking advantage of some of the large mass gatherings that we have throughout the communities? Wharf Rat Rally, for example, would be one - where there would be a farmers' market established at that event for locals. Probably - I'm going to throw a number out there - 60 to 75 per cent of the people who attend that event, for example that one, aren't on motorcycles; they're travelling public that comes in, so they have a lot of room.

Also, I looked after the vendors there - I did for a few years - and I can never remember produce being sold by any of the vendors. Mind you, the entry fees at the rally itself were quite substantial but I think if there was an area set aside - and that's just one example - but some kind of model around that would be an interesting one to, again, expose people to it more than anything.

MS. BUTLER: The first one that comes to my mind is Bridgewater does a Growing Green Sustainability Festival every year - a bit smaller, I would guess, than the Wharf Rat Rally. They find a way each year - it has looked a little bit different - to bring the farmers'

market into that in different ways. So I think there's the possibility of, on the simplest side, co-promotion or cross-promotion. The Town of New Glasgow is an amazing example of this, but I don't want to give the impression that it needs to be on a municipal level because I don't think it does at all. It could be on various levels. The Town of New Glasgow doesn't publish anything promoting their town without mentioning the farmers' market because they understand the asset that it is.

I have some examples here. I'll just pass a few each way. Just the idea that they always include the farmers' market in their materials. That could be because the farmers' market is going to set up at their event or it could be because the farmers' market is nearby or just because the farmers' market is a great place to be and is an event on its own - so the cross-promotion side of things.

Then I think there's actually the opportunity, depending on the capacity of the farmer's market, for the farmers' market to do what we often call in the sector a pop-up market. That market could develop a general list of their vendors who are up for that kind of an opportunity.

One of the realities when you say the entrance fees are quite high is that farmers' market table fees are very low and so that can be a shocking transition. It's part of the reason why very few farmers' market vendors sell at Saltscapes or set up at Saltscapes. Some of the wineries definitely do but for individual vendors it's outside of their range. So in the province farmers' markets table fees range from \$15 in very small communities - well the Seaport would be highest but before the Seaport, I think \$65. That's kind of a reality so we do get some pushback, I'm sure, from vendors when they're invited to participate in something that would be a lot more expensive, but many artisan vendors do craft shows come the holidays.

Yes, I think those are really important partnerships. What that does is you get people who are at the Wharf Rat Rally who actually still don't know about the local farmers' market, so we often are in our bubbles, we think everyone knows about the market in our community but that's really often not the case. I think that's kind of the biggest piece. It not only tells them about the market but it gives them sort of a taste and understanding of what it would look like in another venue.

I think that yes, it can be a great promotional method for our market, as well as a community service, to have those ingredients there.

When you talk about the culture as well, I think that's a huge part of it. Changing the culture we have around food, and I have just two copies but I'll pass them as well. This is one of our ideas which isn't set into the calendar yet. The idea is to actually ask people - this was a photographer who was based at the Kentville Farmers Market. She asked people a question each week at the market and has a little chalkboard. She writes their answer on the chalkboard. This particular week she asked I think, what does your farmers' market mean to you, or what do you love about your farmers' market? Then people wrote that.

We had this idea that one of the things we would love to do is to start asking Nova Scotians and collecting these images, sharing them over social media, asking people what does your farmers' market mean to you? What does your kitchen table mean to you? What does your backyard garden mean to you, those sorts of things so that we're talking about food culture and hopefully bringing it up. That's one of the ideas that has sort of been floating around because I think that culture piece is so important.

As Mr. Irving mentioned about FarmWorks - FarmWorks is an investment co-operative in the province, so private investors contributing to agriculture-based businesses. I'm not actually sure off the top of my head how many businesses they've invested in but the majority of those businesses are all farmers' market-based businesses. The Flying Apron Inn & Cookery, which now is a full restaurant and inn in Summerville, they have received funding through FarmWorks to do what they're doing.

I think farmers' markets, we often talk about them as business incubators and then when you have a business incubation plus a private investment opportunity like that, I mean you have a perfect combination. We're very fortunate to have FarmWorks in the province.

One other thing that popped into my head as things were being mentioned, one of the examples of how I think on a provincial level we can do what New Glasgow is doing to promote their market would be to have something like this, a two-page spread - this is a big ask - in the Doers & Dreamers Travel Guide. Now of course in the Doers & Dreamers Travel Guide, advertising is a huge piece of their revenue and it isn't something we're able to pay to participate in. At the same time they have been very good to us and under each region they do list the markets in that area that you should definitely stop at.

I think something like this would just be a huge - it's the equivalent of tucking one of these into every Doers & Dreamers Travel Guide. This is a way that our province can say, we know the value of our markets and they're a promotional tool, good for all of us. I think that's a great example of how we could do that, just as New Glasgow is doing that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Ms. Butler, the Farmers' Market of Nova Scotia Cooperative is extremely lucky to have you, I believe. I don't know the Natalie lady who was supposed to be here but you did a tremendous job on promoting and educating us on this and answering those questions, and I appreciate it very much.

MS. BUTLER: Thank you very much for inviting us to speak.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll take a five minute recess, at the most, if everybody is okay - three and a half - and allow us to have our guest leave and we'll reconvene in five minutes. Thank you.

[10:35 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[10:42 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, please. I call the meeting back to order.

I believe the next order of business is committee business, with a response from the Department of Agriculture regarding statistics. I think everybody saw that. That's the only correspondence that we had.

The other order of business that we have is the scheduling of our next meetings and if you could indulge me for just a minute, we have two things that have recently been brought to my attention. The clerk and I have been chatting - in March our usually scheduled meeting is during March break, which typically we don't have. The other thing that came up is our next scheduled meeting that we have for February 19th - unfortunately I am not going to be in Nova Scotia. Actually I think there are a few vacancies that we're going to have on that date. It is an area of interest - the Geoscience Research for Nova Scotia's Offshore Growth - that I would certainly like to be here for.

The clerk and I have been looking at some different dates. My recommendation would be I'd like to see it moved to potentially the week before the March break, which is a spot that is not usually occupied by us. I believe there's another committee that tentatively might be scheduled. (Interruption) It's confirmed is it? No, I'm thinking March 12th, sorry.

We have conflicts before our Resources Committee meeting, the next one. So if at all possible, if you folks wouldn't mind leaving it at the discretion of the Chair and I'll get back to you in the next week - I'll talk to the other committee Chairs, but the worst-case scenario I'd like to throw out there would be moving the Geoscience Research one to March 12th, which would be just before March break.

We will correspond that back to everybody within a week. Ms. Zann.

MS. ZANN: So what are you saying is happening with February?

MR. CHAIRMAN: We would cancel that one on the 19th and move it. We would still keep with that witness.

MS. ZANN: When would that one be?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Potentially on March 12th. We don't want to lose the witness.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: And cancel the March 19th one.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The March 19th one, typically we don't sit during that anyway.

MS. ZANN: So all I'm saying is - so there would be no meeting in February?

MR. CHAIRMAN: No.

MS. ZANN: Okay, that's what I mean - so no meeting in February and then one on March 12th?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MS. ZANN: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just to clarify that, if we can't find an open spot in March, we'll find an open spot somewhere. I'm not sure right now where it will be but we're going to try to stick with March 12th, I believe, at this time.

MS. ZANN: Then April, I take it, will probably be gone because we'll be sitting in the Legislature.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are we?

MS. ZANN: I imagine.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: It's up to you guys.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes. We might forgo the Spring sitting.

MS. ZANN: I doubt it - I know you might like to. (Laughter)

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'll get back to all the committee members within a week on the next date, the clerk and I will work that out.

With that, we are adjourned. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 10:46 a.m.]