

**The National Farmers Union
District 1, Region 1**

**Submission
to**

**The Task Force on Land Use Policy
Prince Edward Island**

The members of the generation which is in power must not treat the earth as something given by their parents, but rather as something borrowed from their children. (National Farmers Union Policy G-6 #1)

The land is only to be used and handed on in trust
(*No, No Don't Sell PEI*, song composed and sung by the late Reverend Andrew Macdonald)

Charlottetown, PEI
June 26, 2013

1.0 Introduction

The National Farmers Union (NFU) welcomes this opportunity to address the Land Use Policy Task Force. As you may know, on April 8, 2013, the NFU made a comprehensive submission to the Carver Commission on the Prince Edward Island Lands Protection Act. We refer you to that presentation and its appendices. It was notable that during the exercise of the Commission a wide range of community groups and individuals came out in agreement with the NFU positions on the land. In fact, it seemed as though a majority was of the same frame of mind.

We are convinced that the attitude/ideology of those who own and control the land is intimately related to how the land is used. Similarly the attitude/ideology of those who develop and implement policies, whether government departments or municipal planning authorities, is intimately related to how those policies play out. Sustainable development means different things to different sectors. We cannot assume that all policy-makers use the same “sustainable development” lens from which to form and implement policy.

We cannot assume that farmers all agree on the meaning of sustainable development. This is seen in our varied concepts of land ownership, land use, the role of the market, and the kinds of public policies we demand of governments.

2.0 The National Farmers Union Position on the Land

To understand the basis of the NFU stand on any aspect of farming and the policies it promotes for food production, food producers and the land, it is important to review the values stated in the NFU Profile (Appendix #1).

We quote here some pertinent National Farmers Union Policy, developed and re-visited each year at the national convention with democratic input from men, women and youth members from across the country.

We believe provincial governments should enact legislation restricting agricultural land ownership to actual farmers to ensure that agricultural resources remain in control of agricultural producers. (Land Policy G-1 #3)

We believe that those people who work the land should have control over the management of their food production unit. We view with alarm the encroachment of industrial corporations into the business of primary food production through direct ownership, vertical integration and contract farming. (Land Policy G-1 #4)

The members of the generation which is in power must not treat the earth as something given by their parents, but rather as something borrowed from their children. (Land Policy G-5 #1)

We need to develop a sense of stewardship in the concept that we never really own land; we use it carefully while we hold it in trust for those who must use it after us (Land Policy G-6 #16)

...provincial and federal governments should adopt and expand the Land Bank concept with an appeal procedure and no-purchase option and provide the necessary funding so the concept and principles of land without capital may be provided to those “who will till the soil” (Land policy G-6 #11)

The National Farmers Union strives for a system of food production, processing and distribution that is, in all stages economically viable, socially just, and ecologically sound, The current system does not meet these criteria and, thus, is not sustainable (Sustainable Agriculture Policy G-10 Preamble)

Sustainable agriculture must be based on a mutual understanding between farmers and non-farmers. Farmers have an obligation to provide safe basic foods and to steward the soil, water, and air. Non-farmers in return, must support farmers through fair prices and programs which protect farmers from loss of income and unreasonable eviction from their farms.(Sustainable Agriculture Policy G-10 Preamble)

3.0 National Farmers Union Engagement with the Task Force Process

In early May, the NFU called together a substantial meeting of its members to discuss the *Land Use Task Force Consultation Draft*. In spite of preoccupations about getting out on the land, our members took time to read the Draft and to produce an analysis of it.

In general we have a positive response to the work-to-date of the Task Force. The statement of Vision is comprehensive, attractive, refreshing, and hopeful. The Statements of Provincial Interest are very uplifting. Most of them are compatible with NFU principles. We hold that water, air and land are a unity best described as a basic source of life for individuals and the base of the formation of healthy, vibrant community life. We appreciate the interest in preserving rural communities, their landscapes and their productive capacities. We welcome all efforts to protect our more delicate land and water formations, and our coastal communities. We hold that rural and urban (or municipal) communities differ from each other in their diverse interests, purposes and cultural roots. They can, however, have peaceful co-existence as long as each recognizes and appreciates the “boundaries” of the other. We believe that land use policies must be accompanied by appropriate infrastructural supports. An umbrella over all this is that land use is a public good and that there is need for careful, fully informed, democratic involvement in the development of policies.

It is essential that what is expressed as “Provincial Interest” be spelled out to give us, farmers, and the whole community the assurance that farmland will be designated for farming and will be protected as farmland in perpetuity .

4.0 Our Specific Contribution to the Task Force

Always keeping in mind the above Vision and Interests, the National Farmers Union is zeroing in on two goals which have specific significance to our membership. We are commenting on Goal Two and Goal Five, hoping that these observations will give further direction to the Task Force.

4.1 Goal Two: Protect Prime Agricultural Land

In the NFU membership meeting, one of the first comments made was that this goal seems to create a disconnect between land and farmer. One could easily miss the fact of the *interaction and inter-relatedness* of the farm family and the land. To us, the land is *not a lifeless implement* in our process of producing food for people and animals. Nor is it merely a *potential* source of our livelihood. The land is living. It is part of us. People who understand why farmers continue working the land even when they make a meager living at it will say “the land is in their blood”. And so it is.

We have no quarrel with the five objectives presented. Some of them, however must be made more specific to indicate the measurable actions to be proposed.

It is essential to be clear that the main motive for protecting agricultural land is not its role as economic driver of our economy, as important as this is. Rather we protect farmland so that we can continue to produce safe, healthy food for all the people. We challenge the Task Force to engage the community and to identify some of the basic problems in the current food system. This is a system which is predominantly situated in a merely-economic framework of maximization of profits. The industrial agriculture model actively promotes practices which are abusive to our already fragile soil base. We need a new system of identifying the real costs of industrial style production. Land which has lost its growing power is a cost, an irreversible loss. If agricultural operations make a profit by using methods that exhaust the land, it cannot truly be considered a profit.

The community, including farmers, should be horrified by the amount of good productive soil that ends up in ditches, woods and rivers. We have only a few inches of fertile soil. What is washed away or blown away will never come back. On highways beside intensive farming fields, there are often clay storms. In the winter, in some parts of PEI, the snow is red. The result for the rivers is a catastrophe for fish and their habitat and every living thing that depends on a clean aquatic environment.

We agree, and have promoted for years, the implementation of sound, enforceable land zoning policies, which identify and protect agricultural land, prohibiting, once and for all, the use of farmland for non-farm purposes. The NFU is alarmed by the amount of land, much of it historical or potential farmland, that has ended up in the hands of developers. This has happened because of short-sightedness on the part of legislators, which is fuelled by insensitivity to the vital role farmland plays in the the life and economy of PEI.

This brings us again to the contradictions of the current system in which farmers try to survive year after year on low returns for their products. When they reach the age of 55-60, many committed and sincere farmers feel pressured into selling off farmland for whatever purposes in order to retire with dignity. Protecting prime agricultural land over the long term means enacting policies which ensure cost of production to farmers. This will, no doubt take a lot of time and major changes of heart, mind and policy. In the meantime, policies are needed involving, for example, greater investment in land banking and land trusts. As well, we would urge governments to establish a well-run and trustworthy agency such as a land use commission to purchase and hold land for future farmers.

Concerning Objective C: It seems that “support activities that achieve greater food independence” is somewhat simplistic. Greater food independence should be understood as PEI-grown within the principles and processes of food security and food sovereignty. This cannot be accomplished without major changes. Otherwise we are accepting to merely play at the fringes of the system. While we accept policies and practices which are based on exporting most of our food products and importing the food that we eat, we are taking trivial steps toward “food independence”.

We will expand and diversify farms by providing needed support to farmers who opt for diversification. We are particularly concerned that young and beginning farmers also get special incentives to engage in mixed, and even organic, farming.

While it is important to penalize operators who do not abide by existing land protection legislation and regulations, it may be productive, as well, to create incentives, rewards for good stewardship. At the same time, every effort must be made to stop soil erosion by offering better soil management services.

4.2 Goal Five: Protect Land for Resource Production

The objectives listed under this goal tend to be couched in language that leave more mystery than clarity. For example, it is not clear first of all what is meant by “resource production”. Besides forest land, to what renewable resources does this section refer?

It would be helpful to identify alternative electrical power production (wind, sun, water) and how these would be promoted and regulated. With the current increased scientific knowledge of the potential of hydraulic fracturing (fracking) to destroy the land and contaminate our water in PEI, it seems insincere to ignore the threat posed by oil and gas interests. The final report of the Land Use Task Force would be remiss if it did not include the full presentation of the group, Don’t Frack PEI. Fracking cannot be treated as an inevitability.

The NFU would favour a position of identifying “resource land” which has been taken out of traditional farming in order to put it back into food production. Island land acreage used in farming decreased by almost a half from 1921 to 2006. We also know that patterns of land usage have changed. The amount of land in crop production has declined. The most

significant change in land usage is the decrease in land used for pasture. This relates to a steady decline in beef production and sharp decline in the hog production. We promote efforts that will result in more land in diversified farming which can restore and create an increase in organic matter in the soil.

5.0 More questions than answers

Our meetings on the Land Use Policy Task Force mandate and work resulted in some up-beat and lively discussion about *what could be*. There was a feeling that the Task Force is serious and has the capacity to delve more deeply than usual into the specifics of land use in PEI. It is high praise for a task force to be told that you inspired a lot of questions.

The NFU feels that the Land Use Policy Task Force could have a creative in-depth impact on the future of land in PEI. It is important to take the time needed to fully engage the community, whether geographic or interest-based, in knowledge creation and knowledge sharing relating to land-problem-solving and prevention of further land destruction. The people know. It would be interesting and productive to have community-driven land use policy designed through democratic processes.

The following are some basic questions:

- How would people describe the “best interests” of the ordinary residents of PEI?
- What do we need, what do we want, what are we able to do in our own “best interests”?
- How could we define and describe what it means to say that land and its use is a public interest, that it is a community-wide interest?
- What would a proper land-healthy zoning look like for PEI? How can communities be a vital part of the design of land zoning?
- What would be involved in adopting a plan to re-develop our rural communities?
- What can be done to return some of the subdivisions to food production?
- What would be the ingredients of a policy and programs to ensure that retiring farmers would have a livable income without having to sell their land for non-farm purposes?
- What would be the ingredients of a policy and programs to provide beginning farmers with sufficient land, operating capital, and income from production?
- What would be the ingredients of a policy and programs to establish a progressive and transparent land banking system?
- What new policies and practices are needed to reverse the damage already done by intensive farming to the land and rivers?
- What would be the benefits of PEI becoming GMO-free?
- What needs to be done to ban hydraulic fracturing (fracking)?
- What concrete land policies are necessary to take a new direction in protecting the land?
- What needs to be done in the community and in government to introduce 21st century mixed farming as the predominant form of agriculture in PEI?
- How could Basic Income Guarantee (Guaranteed Annual Income) be designed for PEI to serve as a protection for retiring farmers and beginning farmers?

6.0 Formal Recommendations

The National Farmers Union urges the PEI Task Force on Land Use Policy to make the following recommendations to the PEI Government:

- 6.1 that the **Government of Prince Edward Island** enact legislation to establish a system of land banking with the power to purchase land at a fair price from farmers wanting to retire and to make that land available to beginning farmers, preferably for leasing
- 6.2 that the **Government of Prince Edward Island** develop a system whereby some form of government (federal, provincial or municipal) which would protect all PEI farmland, that could attract a better price for selling it for non-farm usage, by making a one-time premium payment to the current owner with the proviso that such land be kept as farmland in perpetuity and that it would be protected from all forms of future speculation
- 6.3 that the **Government of Prince Edward Island** give priority to the enhancement and/or development of sustainable mixed farming as the predominant model for PEI agriculture
- 6.4 that the **Government of Prince Edward Island** establish enforceable environmental standards, including a ban on hydraulic fracturing for natural gas, in order to protect the health of the land, air, water, humans, and all other species
- 6.5 that the **Government of Prince Edward Island** ban all future GMO production and reverse the negative effects of the current use of GMO seeds
- 6.6 that the **Government of Prince Edward Island** enact legislation to protect heritage seeds and to promote farmers producing and saving seed
- 6.7 that the **Government of Prince Edward Island** withdraw its support of exportation of food products and the importing of Islanders' daily food needs, developing a sustainable "eat local" model which is based also on paying cost of production to farmers and fishers.

7.0 Conclusion

The NFU welcomes further questions and dialogue about the above points and/or any of the other six goals.

The National Farmers Union thanks you, the members of the Land Use Policy Task Force, for this opportunity to provide input in your deliberations..

Respectfully submitted,
The National Farmer Union District 1, Region 1

Appendix #1

National Farmers Union Profile

Some of the members of your Government may not know much about the NFU. The National Farmers Union was established as a national farm organization by Charter of the House of Commons in 1969, the only farm organization to have had such an honour. Its predominant mandate is to promote and protect the interests of farm families in Canada, not excluding or competing against those same interests in other countries. The NFU is best known for its policies and actions based on the following principles:

- farmers (and people in general) are meant to live with one another and not off one another
- to be truly human, cooperation is preferable to competition as a way of life, as a behaviour pattern and as business ethics
- land is a resource which we borrow from our children rather than a commodity to be bought and sold for profit in the market place
- people have the right to respect, effective voice, and full livelihood regardless of race, gender, age, ability, or class
- the family farm is the most appropriate unit for the production of food both in terms of food security, ecological protection, and a supply of safe food for consumers
- farm families have the right to receive full cost of production, which besides capital and inputs, includes full payment for the hours of work which women, men, and children put into the farming operation
- a system of equitable supply and market management for farm products is required to provide adequate prices to farm families
- every nation has the right and responsibility to be self-reliant in food
- every person in the world has the right to adequate healthful food
- engagement in international food trade has a place only after the nation's own needs are met.

The National Farmers Union is made up of voluntary family memberships. It is a grassroots organization, which develops its policies through democratic processes on the local district, regional, and national level. It promotes in its members a concern for all commodities and rejects the separation of farmers into divisive commodity groups. The NFU has maintained an involved membership. We have found that farmers are hungry for a family -farm vision of agriculture. The faith which many farm families have in the NFU impels us to continue lobbying policy makers, protesting unjust policies, educating the public, and proposing viable alternatives.