



PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND
FEDERATION OF
AGRICULTURE

**Legislative Standing Committee of Natural Resources
and Environmental Sustainability**

Presentation Remarks

September 17, 2020

SLIDE 1

- Introduce yourself and your farm
- I farm the same land my family has been farming since 1822.
- I want to thank this Committee for the invitation to share this presentation.
- We live in extraordinary times:
 - COVID-19
 - Driest summer since 2001 - extreme
- The impact of the Water Act and the regulations this Committee has been tasked to review, will impact how we deal with the changing climate in the context of water.
- This presentation will focus on our submission to the Government regarding the draft regulations, and lay out a suggested path forward, particularly on the need for research to begin immediately around the issue of supplemental irrigation for agriculture.

SLIDE 2

- The PEI Federation of Agriculture is the largest general farm organization in the Province.
- Made up of 550 farming operations as well as 16 different commodity associations covering the wide breadth of agriculture.
- Membership includes
 - Large commodity groups such as Dairy Farmers of PEI, and the PEI Potato Board;
 - Medium sized organizations like the Certified Organic Growers Coop, and the PEI Young Famers;
 - Small organizations like the Strawberry Growers Association and the Sheep Breeders Association.
- As the united voice of the industry, we are speaking for over 85 percent of PEI producers.

SLIDE 3

- Agriculture is by far the number one economic driver in the PEI economy
- After factoring in the multiplier effect and the spin offs the industry creates, we are talking for a \$3 billion dollar industry in a \$7 billion economy.
- The success of our farming community has a direct and undeniable impact on our Provincial economy and our Provincial coffers.
- With COVID-19, we will drive the recovery

SLIDE 4

- The farming community is often criticized that we are not being responsible stewards of our land. That we are not doing our part environmentally.
- The fact is, farmers in this Province have continuously been trying to “raise the bar” when it comes to farming more sustainably
- I want to highlight a few things as a background for this Committee to know.

- In late 2018 and early 2019, the PEIFA and the PEI Water Alliance were both meeting with Government talking about issues with our waterways and the utilization of government resources
- PEIFA met with the PEI Water Alliance and discovered we shared goals and this led to the creation of the Agri-Watershed Partnership.
- In March 2019, PEIFA partnered with the PEI Water Alliance to tackle run off and erosion issues facing Island waterways.
- The makeup of Partnership includes:
 - PEIFA
 - PEI Watershed Alliance
 - PEI Potato Board
 - Department of Agriculture and Land
 - Department of Environment, Water and Climate Change
- As the accompanying slide reads, the Partnership has very specific goals:
 - Mitigate (eliminate) fish kills and run off events
 - Keep soil on the fields
 - Develop an Industry Standard that will increase sustainability measures and serve as basis for “Due Diligence” if faced with an extreme weather event that results in environmental damages
- The Industry Standard relies on management practices that will help fulfill the goals of the partnership
- The Standard has been recently supported by the Boards of both the Federation and the PEI Potato Board
- It is now before the PEI Water Alliance Board of Directors for review and we expect to push this document out to the growing community this winter
- It will improve how we farm around waterways and further our goals around sustainable farming here on PEI

SLIDE 5

- There really is a great deal of work being done to ensure we are doing more – around the health of our land and the protection of our water.
- **We recognize that there is no simple silver bullet to solving some of the challenges the agriculture industry faces on PEI. We need a holistic approach – like a toolbox, using multiple tools to grow food in the most sustainable and socially responsible way possible**
- In that spirit, this slide points to some of that:
- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada created a Living Labs research project here on the Island, investing \$2.4 million centered on soil health. We know that by improving organic matter and making our farms not only more sustainable, we also make them more profitable. We need a healthy environment in order to remain profitable.
- The Federation completed a report in 2019 that looked at Best Management Practices that reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions. Many of these practices also improve soil health.
- Dr. David Burton – a member of Dr. Michael Van Den Heuvel’s research team you just heard from was one of the authors of this report.

- Many of these are found in the Industry Standard I addressed on the previous slides
- The Federation also administers the Environmental Farm Plan for the Province. These plans are a practical plan for operating a farm in a way that is “environmentally sustainable, socially acceptable and economically viable.”
 - There are over 500 of them in operation on PEI. The vast majority of farms has an Environmental Plan
 - They are renewed every 5 years
- 4R Nutrient Stewardship is an initiative between industry and government that looks at the efficient use of fertilizer. The 4R’s:
 - Right Source
 - Right Time
 - Right Place
 - At the Right Rate
 - PEIFA actually chairs this initiative and all three major retailers of fertilizer have also joined in recent years to promote this initiative to our growers in the Province.

SLIDE 6

- The Water Act is a foundational piece of legislation.
- Its importance is undeniable and therefore of great interest to all Islanders. We all drink water; we all use water; we all want to protect it.
- I want it to be very clear that the PEIFA supports the Water Act.
 - We believe in the need for water for future generations,
 - we think monitoring is important and
 - use of this precious resource must have adequate levels of control.
- Also want it to be clear that we have a long history of working with Government and this legislation will be no exception –
 - want to work with all parties to make some revisions which we feel are needed within the draft regulations.
- The PEI Federation of Agriculture has examined these regulations in great detail.
- To be quite forward with this Committee, we have found them to be discriminatory towards food production.
- Agriculture is singled out as the lone industry where the regulations deny access to water for specific purposes.
- We believe this is unfortunate, and we are frustrated that this continues to be the case despite repeated discussions about this issue.

SLIDE 7

- Today’s World is extraordinary as we continue to face the threat of COVID-19, we deal with the aftermath of the economic fallout of dealing with that crisis and one of the driest summers anyone can remember in the agricultural world.
- Everyone in this room knows that agriculture is the cornerstone of who we are as an Island – the foundation of our economy, the backbone of rural PEI and central to our food supply.

- PEI is well positioned to continue growing so long as we have a robust agriculture industry underpinning the economy.
- We truly are facing a crisis. Without water, food simply does not grow
 - Without water, family farms – who have farmed generations like my own – could be lost. We will lose farms because of this drought
 - Without water, we do not have reliable access to safe, healthy, local food here in the Province.
- This is a trend we can stop in its tracks if we have the courage to take necessary actions

SLIDE 8

- This slide was prepared by Don Jardine of the UPEI Climatology Lab
- It illustrates just how hard it has been to grow food on PEI in the last 6 growing seasons.
 - No rain in July
 - Little rain in August
 - No rain inside the 2020 growing season that even comes close to the 30 year normal
- The numbers are facts, based on numbers that do not lie. This slide is irrefutable.
- It matches what UPEI Climatologist Adam Fenech has found in his climate models:
 - PEI will experience more precipitation overall
 - This will fall in the winter, spring and fall – and we can expect dry summers for foreseeable future
- These are facts that unfortunately, cannot be denied. This is climate change and it is here now

SLIDE 9

- Action is required. Supplemental irrigation is needed. Some producers want the ability to do so when needed.
- The benefits are clear:
 - Improvement in product quantity and quality
 - Less stress, less disease
 - This allows for fewer pesticides, less field management
 - Increased efficiency of fertilizers –
 - This is important and I want to stress this
 - Without water, nutrients are unable to access the plant
 - In August – when fertilizer should have been utilized by the plant, we have found residual fertilizer sitting in the field that will remain there until the rain this fall and winter happens
 - No place to go but down
 - This is one main reason we have nitrates in our groundwater
 - Further – irrigation promotes plant growth – a great contributor towards soil health and organic matter
 - The bottom line – irrigation actually improves the way we manage our crops and can allow us to have a positive environmental impact

SLIDE 10

- This data you have seen before. It is part of the Government's own research that was presented to this Committee in January of this year, and has been a part of Government presentations since the inception of the Water Act began.
 - **2.4** Billion cubic meters of water is replenished annually. – through precipitation
 - PEI uses a total of **1.5%** of the replenish rate.
 - Only **2%** of the **1.5%** of used groundwater is used for irrigation, a portion of which is used for golf courses.
- George Sommers and Bruce Raymond presented these figures to you on January 30th 2020 a
- They told this Committee that PEI has an “abundance of water” and there was great discussion over the figures on this slide that pointed to the very low amount of water currently being used by the Province of PEI as a whole for a variety of reasons.
- These figures were determined through a scientific methodology that you would think would be irrefutable. We have contended for years that these numbers provide a solid case against the current moratorium.
- We continue to argue that the case is clear and the water resource is there for supplemental irrigation

SLIDE 11

- These photos were taken August 20th, 2020 in a field in Argyle Shore.
- The difference is remarkable
- It clearly illustrates the case for why PEI agriculture is asking for irrigation. We simply cannot grow food in PEI by hoping and praying for rain.

SLIDE 12

- Mr. Raymond presented many of the same facts he provided this Committee to the PEI Federation of Agriculture's Annual General Meeting in January 2014.
- The following resolution was unanimously passed by the Members that day, and has since been unanimously reaffirmed by the current PEIFA Board of Directors:

Whereas the Department of Environment has reviewed all available scientific data and determined that there is adequate water available for long term sustainability;

*Be it resolved that the PEI Federation of Agriculture request the Department of Environment remove the moratorium on new wells for supplemental agricultural supplemental supplemental irrigation **provided that the scientific data shows that it will not negatively impact the environment and that the PEI Water Extraction Policy [Water Act] provides the adequate controls for the siting and operation of any new wells.***

- PEIFA stands by this resolution today.

SLIDE 13

- While we do believe the science is there – we certainly understand the concerns of Islanders. It has been expressed by many throughout the consultations on the Water Act legislation, and again now during the consultations on the Water Act regulations, that the science is not adequate or not detailed enough to support the lifting of the moratorium.
- If that is the position of Government, then PEIFA recommends we study supplemental irrigation directly.
- You heard earlier this morning from Dr. Van Den Heuval. His team is impeccable. His research will be the same
- Allow him to prove or disprove the current science – give him the green light as soon as possible.

SLIDE 14

- This is an open and transparent exercise that gives the Government the opportunity to test and monitor supplemental irrigation in a responsible way that is wide open to the public
- Dr. Van Den Heuval has been critical of the agriculture industry in the past – we know he will follow the science wherever it leads him and will provide this Committee and Government with the unbiased facts – clear and simple
- The initiative will explore the issue of supplemental irrigation for agriculture – to study the issue in-depth and develop the science many people contend does not exist. We see it as an opportunity to evaluate what is known and supported by the Province's experts, and make sure supplemental irrigation is possible and that it can be done right. And we stress that if supplemental irrigation goes forward, that it must be done right. We do not want to get it wrong. No one in the farming community is interested in risking the long term supply of our groundwater.
- We also believe this study will provide an opportunity to measure the agronomics, economics and environmental impacts supplemental irrigation will have on individual fields and individual operations.
- I also want to point out that the current draft regulations do not allow for research and this must be changed.
- But we do want you to recognize that these sections of the draft regulations are discriminatory towards the industry and should be reviewed with a critical eye because producers need water today
 - There are many concerned about what to tell their financial institutions in the spring on why they should be financed to plant another crop.

SLIDE 15

- All three parties represented on this Committee speak loudly about their belief in science based decision making.
- All three are reasonable and sensible when it comes to science when it is presented to them. PEIFA shares this view.

- We understand water, as a public resource, can evoke emotions and fear that drive our decisions. It is why the issue of high capacity wells, and supplemental irrigation is so contentious.
- Science should lead – to help agriculture and protect our water.

SLIDE 16

- Access and allocation of a resource as precious as water should be made using science based methodologies developed by independent experts like Dr. Van Den Heuval and his team
- We are prepared to help ensure this take place.
- Approve the project as a pilot research project.
 - If the science disproves what we know today, the well casing will be cemented and the wells decommissioned.
 - If the science holds true, move forward - This Committee and Government need to be committed to following the science and approving this as a pilot shows that

SLIDE 17

- Location of High Capacity Wells
- Spread across PEI
- This plus domestic supply still only amounts to 1.5% of all of the replenished or recharged water we get every year.

SLIDE 18

- When we speak about transparency for the pilot project – we point to Section 7 as a unique requirement that ensures any water withdrawal permit holder provides the Minister with data “from any flow measuring device or water level measuring device”.
- The PEIFA believes this regulation’s intention is to ensure the permit holder is adhering to the law and the water extraction is sustainable.
- However, this regulation must be expanded.
- What if the data for high capacity wells were to be put into a database that was public?
 - Provide Islanders with a clear picture of how much water is being drawn down and by whom?
 - Include municipal wells, golf courses, aquaculture, hotels and others who use great volumes of water throughout the year.
 - It would also include the 35 existing high capacity wells currently in place for supplemental agricultural supplemental irrigation.
- Let Islanders get a true understanding of who is using water and how much is being drawn down.
- To compare agriculture usage over the course of two months to the rest of high capacity permit holders certainly would put the issue in context for many Islanders.

SLIDE 19

- PEIFA watched with great interest this past spring as a non-binding motion passed in this chamber related to a moratorium on holding ponds.
- Another potential moratorium – another potential discriminatory measure further limiting agriculture's access to water resources – was extremely disappointing
- To know this after the four summers prior and now here today after the past summer we have had with rainfall – gives us great concern
- We ask that all three parties take a responsible view of these ponds. They need to be a part of a larger Irrigation Strategy – based on the Research
- These ponds serve as purposed. They can act as catchment basins to prevent run-off and collect water through rain and snow melt – as well a source for irrigation.
- This Committee needs to start by recommending that the current ponds be grandfathered.
 - Legally constructed at great cost
 - Without this measure, litigation is likely
- After Dr. Van Den Heuvel finishes his work – bring Government and industry together to put together a responsible and science based irrigation strategy that includes the use of holding ponds.

SLIDE 20

- The moratorium was always meant to be temporary. However, it has remained in place for 18 years while other industries including golf courses, car washes, and others have had access to high capacity wells
- The Water Act should be used to level the playing field – not discriminate against family run farms across PEI
- This Committee needs to recommend to Government to follow the science – and if they do not want to trust their own – then approve Dr. Michael Van Den Heuval's project as soon as possible.
- As stated earlier, there is no silver bullet and all tools must be used to grow a sustainable set of crops on PEI
 - Irrigation is one important tool within a large toolbox that farmers need to grow safe and accessible local food
- In an age where we are examining the potential diversification of agriculture on PEI, certainly as we face warmer weather – we are denying the entire industry one tool that is available all across other jurisdictions around the World.
 - Will be very difficult to attract niche industries to PEI when they know they will not have access to water
 - It is important that this consideration be taken into account as this Committee moves forward with its important work
- We are willing and eager to develop strong partnerships with research, government and industry to protect our water resource and preserve the viability of our industry.

SLIDE 21

We are prepared to answer questions.