

2019 Agriculture Debate Questions

Wednesday April 10th, Murchison Centre, 17 St. Pius X Ave, Charlottetown PE, 7:00pm

Attendees: approximately 300 present, 120 by live feed.

Moderator: Gary MacDougall (retired Guardian Editor)

Party Representatives Present: Wade MacLauchlan (Liberal)
Joe Byrne (NDP)
Dennis King (PC)
Peter Bevan-Baker (Green)

Order of Opening Remarks: Wade MacLauchlan, Dennis King, Joe Byrne, Peter Bevan-Baker

Time Given for Opening Remarks: 5 minutes

Time Given per Shared Question: 4 minutes

Time Given for Rebuttal: 1 minute

Time Given per PEIFA Question: 2 minutes, no rebuttal

Shared Debate Questions and Response Summaries (in order of responses given):

1) Land Access:

The competition for access to farmland continues to increase as farms have grown, consolidated, expanded or been sold to those moving to the Island to farm. Further compounding this issue is the Lands Protection Act (LPA). Enforcement of the LPA is important to ensure fair and equitable access to farmland which is capped to protect against the consolidation of large acreages controlled by the few. Our land is our largest resource as a province. It is the foundation of agriculture and the reason the industry has success over multiple generations. It needs to be protected and kept in agriculture production.

Given these factors, what will you and your potential government do to protect farmland on PEI and ensure a sustainable land base is there for future generations?

Dennis King:

- Take direction from agricultural organizations and industry in making decisions regarding Lands Protection Act (LPA). Review LPA and close loopholes; enforce LPA to the spirit in which it was designed.
- Lessen and stop the sale of farmland to non-residents by enforcing accurate advertising before land is sold and developing a PEI farmland bank.
- Separate departments of agriculture and fisheries to have a separate ministers and deputies
- Review Municipal Governance Act and follow up with key recommendations made to ensure a fair and equitable land policies.

Joe Byrne:

- Emphasized difficulties of land control in the past and importance of LPA; recognized issues with current letter of the law.

- Request transparency of decisions made at Executive Council level regarding land purchases.
- Emphasized importance of sustainable farming models to improve quality of life; and danger of corporate control over farms.
- Take direction from farming community to shape legislation.

Peter Bevan-Baker:

- Emphasized importance of diversity of farms, and the need for more farms and farmers.
- Committed to an independent review of LPA in consultation with those most impacted (the farming community)
- Recognized that Executive Council has been upholding questionable land decisions, emphasized need to consistently enforce LPA.
- Formation of a land bank and making land available to farmers affordably; will spend first year figuring out what the best model for a land bank would be and then lay aside \$4.5M/year after that to help with acquisitions.

Wade MacLauchlan:

- As government they had a review of land holdings in Province and an interim report was produced showing no increase in purchase of non-resident land in recent years, and approximately the same amount of acreage is in agricultural production in recent years.
- Developed a farmland financing program aiming to deliver ownership to hands of farmers, providing \$10M which is not fully utilized.
- Current loan portfolio of \$35M, which could expand, as well as a current livestock and equipment loan program in place.
- Aims to lighten red tape.

Rebuttal:

Dennis King:

- Emphasized frustration in agricultural community regarding this issue and importance of keeping land in the hands of Island farmers

Joe Byrne:

- Argued that if current systems in place were working so well, they wouldn't be hearing complaints about them from the agricultural community. Emphasis on breaking the cycle of diminishing profits.

Peter Bevan-Baker:

- IRAC has never provided the mandated reports regarding on-resident land holdings, expressed dissatisfaction with this as the current government has had ample opportunities to address this.

Wade MacLauchlan:

- Argued that the Green Party previously produced a \$150,000 policy for a landbank which has now increased to \$4M, suggested that it had been developed on the fly.

2) Land Use/Public Trust:

The farming community has seen the clear evidence of climate change and the associated weather pattern changes. Extreme weather such as drought, heavy rain fall, and unseasonal temperatures has created problems that have required the farming community to adapt. Island farmers are working hard to meet these ongoing challenges, but it is difficult to fully protect one's business when the extremity of the weather is sometimes severe.

What program or policies will your potential government enact to help farmers have confidence in their ongoing efforts to mitigate against climate change and the changing weather patterns we are finding here on PEI?

Joe Byrne:

- Improve crop insurance plans.
- Review Land Development Corporation (LDC) to avoid soil mining, LDC could potentially acquire land for landbank with attached stewardship criteria.
- Stop allowing market to hold sway with price.

Peter Bevan-Baker:

- Focus on climate change by using mitigation techniques such as carbon pricing, import substitution (focus on local and regional markets to reduce carbon footprint), and reforestation marginal lands (getting credits for sequestration).
- Implementation and expansion Climate Action Plan of funding through ALUS and the forest enhancement plan.
- Customized width of buffer zones using LIDAR and drone technology.
- Reforestation and replacement of hedgerows.
- Provide adequate funding for Government programs to mitigate climate change.
- Increasing funding to support community lead outreach programs

Wade MacLauchlan:

- Committed \$1M investment in forestation to assist with carbon sequestrations, \$1M fund to work with farmers to improve soil health
- ALUS program currently covers 10,000 acres
- Focus on change sources of energy running agricultural businesses; they currently have an ongoing research project regarding agricultural energy generation (solar power, wind power, and biomass)
- Current government put in place cables from NB to meet energy demands.

Dennis King:

- Focus on working with and consulting farmers to deal with changing circumstances using realistic options, as sometimes there are no mitigation measures that would work to prevent certain environmental issues.
- Introduction of new crops that are economically and environmentally viable and emphasized importance of diversity.

Rebuttal:

Joe Byrne:

- Emphasized importance of consulting with agricultural community, and expansion supply management

Peter Bevan-Baker:

- Focus on electrification, and suggestion that the current government has failed in this respect by removing rebate for electric/hybrid vehicles and installation of solar panels. They would bring back the removed rebates and develop incentives for solar panel installation as well as vehicle chargers, and expand availability of public transport.

Wade MacLauchlan:

- Emphasized importance of working together and consultation with the agricultural community.
- Current government has been active in the Canadian Agricultural Partnership as a joint initiative with the federal government, and outlined federal initiatives for clean energy funds.

Dennis King:

- Emphasized importance of realistic adaptation going forward.

3) Labour:

The PEI agriculture industry continues to face a labour shortage that is expected to grow exponentially through to 2025 according to recent studies conducted by the Canadian Agriculture Human Resource Council. These shortages include both lower skilled and highly skilled workers necessary for the continued growth of PEI's number one industry.

What program or policies would you and your potential government offer to ensure a strong and reliable workforce for the agriculture sector today and into the future?

Peter Bevan-Baker:

- Focus on working with farmers to improve quality of life for farmers. Putting in place necessary services (medical, recreational, educational, etc.) to attract labor by creating vibrant rural communities.
- Inclusion of agriculture sector in the critical worker stream.
- Shift focus from investor stream to give temporary foreign workers a path to citizenship.

Wade MacLauchlan:

- Get the word out that there are job opportunities in agriculture.
- Proposed a PEI Worker Benefit, in which the Province would put \$4.5M annually into a program to supplement low wage workers to have enhanced income through the income tax system.
- Proposed a health and social benefits program for seasonal workers.
- Atlantic Immigration Pilot is currently providing a faster stream for foreign workers to come to PEI.
- Continue to provide a Farm Team Bursary, and support the career connect program (allowing students to collect EI while attending post-secondary).

Dennis King:

- Tackle rural decline and provide reliable services like high speed internet
- Continue Farm team initiative
- Tap into senior who are retired and still want to do a limited amount of work.
- Support priority application processing for temporary foreign worker program, and a decrease in application processing cost.

Joe Byrne:

- Consult with farmers as to why farm positions aren't filled, determine what is causing this in rural communities.
- Fully discuss wages and quality of life on farm.
- Work on the division of profits between large corporations and farms to rectify socialized labor costs.
- Improve public access to high speed internet and public transit.
- Remove language barriers to immigration.

Rebuttal:

Peter Bevan-Baker:

- Would like to create an agricultural community on PEI that is more removed from global markets by focusing on import substitution and regional supplies, and a move towards small sustainable farming.

Wade MacLauchlan:

- Focus efforts into the Future Farmer Program, gender diversity and inclusion program, 4H, school food program, and public trust program.

Dennis King:

- Continue to tell the story of agriculture through events like Open Farm Day and Farm Day in the City. Stronger incorporation of agriculture into high school programs.

Joe Byrne:

- Acknowledgement that tax funds are going to fund corporations who do not need it.

4) Economics:

On April 1, the price of fuel rose across the Island in order to comply with the Federal Government's legislation compelling provinces to implement a carbon tax. Fuel is a vital input that is integral to any farm, regardless of commodity. It is also a cost that cannot be passed on to buyers. Many of you have stated publicly that the carbon tax should continue to exempt marked fuel – and this is good news. But a great deal of unmarked fuel, which is subject to the tax, is used on farms.

What are you and your potential government prepared to do to help farmers deal with the carbon tax that will rise annually further exasperating this issue and what will you do with the revenue?

Wade MacLauchlan:

- Currently exempt marked fuel at a cost to the province of \$7M/year. They contended successfully that the federal regime for carbon tax should exempt marked fuel, saving PEI farmers \$5M over the next two years.
- Argues that the \$6M involved in a further exemption would be used to make farms more sustainable in other ways, such as the CAP program and decreasing the carbon footprint.
- Suggested these funds are better spent on a \$5M into an export growth fund and product development fund to find new markets for local food products or on growing the agriculture employment pool.

Dennis King:

- Will allow use of marked fuel for all farm plated vehicles to recirculate funds throughout economy.
- Recognized the unintended consequence that carbon tax penalizes farms in rural areas who need to drive and are unable to reduce that cost.
- Initiate discussion with Federal government on best way to achieve costs without adding to the goal of reduction of carbon footprint.

Joe Byrne:

- Will allow use of marked fuel for all farm plated vehicles.
- Initiate a much broader discussion to address power imbalance between farmers and those who provide multiple inputs, not just fuel.
- Invest in development of new technologies to find cost efficiencies in farming operations.

Peter Bevan-Baker:

- Recognized the cost of inaction and the researched value of carbon pricing in an effective and fair manner, and suggested that revenues collected should be distributed directly to individuals in the form of a rebate of tax cuts.
- Will give farmers the opportunity to adapt to carbon pricing by implementation of alternatives, such as use of new technology (precision agriculture), sharing best practices, exploring carbon offsets and sequestrations, reforestation of marginal land, exploring bio-diesel options, and carbon reductions in food processing facilities.
- Implementation of import substitution, support in transition to organic agriculture, and small business tax cuts

Rebuttal:**Wade MacLauchlan:**

- They have responded to climate change this year through crop insurance payouts of \$49M, and are currently changing aspects of the plan to steady the situation.

Dennis King:

- Reiterated that the rebate is a help to farmers and common sense and profitability were emphasized.

Joe Byrne:

- To ask the farmers to pay the full cost when wealth extraction in agriculture is unbalanced is unreasonable, corporations should be approached to pay the price.

Peter Bevan-Baker:

- Argues that it is unacceptable to argue against carbon pricing with no alternate plans to mitigate climate change, and recognized that there has been to PC platform released yet.

PEIFA Debate Questions and Response Summaries (in order of responses given):

1) Municipal Government Act

The recently passed Municipal Government Act in December 2017 requires all municipalities to put in place a land-use plan by the end of 2022. There is a fear that farmland will be subject to many different land use plans across the province as municipalities look to grow their community by developing farmland. Many farm operations farm across municipal boundaries and are fearful of what this may mean by the end of 2022.

Will your potential government be prepared to utilize the Planning Act to protect farmland from municipal growth and ensure agricultural zoned land be handled by the Province and the Province alone?

Dennis King:

- Committed to review of Municipal Governance Act (MGA), develop a provincial regulation for all farmland in consultation with agricultural organizations.

Joe Byrne:

- Committed to review MGA and determine limitations consistently as a Province, possibly put restrictions on individual municipalities.

Peter Bevan-Baker:

- Emphasized importance of moving input of land development to local community while protecting the right to farm, and encouraging the harmonization of regulations between municipalities.

Wade MacLauchlan:

- Encouragement of developing municipal plans supporting agriculture rather than viewing municipalities as a threat.

2) Land Use

On Prince Edward Island, we have a mixture of organic and conventional farming operations that both add value to our economy. Both systems of farming are important to the Federation and our Members and make up the 575,00 acres in production across the Island. Farming in a sustainable manner regardless of cropping systems, whether organic or conventional, can be challenging

How will your government work with the farming industry in assisting them in maintaining healthy soil for future generations regardless whether or not it is organic or conventional?

Joe Byrne:

- Consult with a diverse agricultural community to develop a target and a plan.
- Incentivizing benefits of hitting targets, and reduction of inputs.

Peter Bevan-Baker:

- Review Crop Rotation Act.
- Review suitability of certain crops in rotation with potatoes.
- Diversify options for farmers in regard to market access.

Wade MacLauchlan:

- Current government has been active in 4R Nutrient Stewardship, the Agriculture Stewardship Program, Nutrient Management Planning, and the work of the PEI Analytical Lab.
- Current government has provided support for farmers who want to grow a winter cover crop, and a livestock program to enhance availability of manure. They have also supported a financially successful beef plant, allowing farmers to produce more manure.

Dennis King:

- Partner with agricultural community to find economically viable rotational crops. Capitalize on the growing markets such as veganism.

3) Trade:

As you are aware, over the last number of years the federal government has signed on to three new trade agreements: Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement with the European Union; Comprehensive and Progressive Trans Pacific Partnership; and most recently the Canada United States Mexico Agreement. These three trade agreements have provided additional market access for our export-oriented commodities and this is a great economic boost for those industries. However, it has also led to significant additional market access to the Canadian market, which will have a negative financial impact on the supply managed commodities in Canada and Prince Edward Island.

How will your government work with the Federal Government to ensure a balanced trade position is advanced by Canada that ensures increased market access for our exporting commodities while also ensuring no further access is given up in future trade agreements around our supply management commodities?

Peter Bevan-Baker:

- Recognized relative impotence of the smallest province in dealing with federal government, however will continue to lobby as hard as possible for, supply management.
- Redirect economy focus from export to regional and local markets.

Wade MacLauchlan:

- Committed to support of supply management.
- Continue to tell the story of agriculture while supporting high quality product development.

Dennis King:

- Committed to continued support of supply management.
- Continue to support local high-quality dairy products, and tell the story to sell the product.

Joe Byrne:

- Support for expansion of supply management.
- Support for agricultural production subsidies in other areas of agriculture.
- Support for trade agreements that allow governments to support and defend local productions.

4) Public Trust:

Prince Edward Island is the most highly densely populated province in Canada. The farming community represents less than 3 per cent of the population. There is a growing generational distance between the general population and the farm. People are questioning the way we farm on the Island and there is a perception among farmers that there is a lack of trust between our valued consumers and the farm gate.

How will your government assist all Islanders, including the farming community, understand and appreciate the importance of working together in embracing agriculture on PEI?

Wade MacLauchlan:

- Introduction of a more comprehensive school food program with a focus on local food.

Dennis King:

- Build upon current initiatives, tell the story of island agriculture.

Joe Byrne:

- Emphasized importance of Farm Day in the City and Open Farm Day.
- Developing alternatives to promote agriculture
- Focus on local procurement in things like nursing homes, schools, etc.

Peter Bevan-Baker:

- Expand to a universal school food policy to build trust.
- Local procurement with built-in sustainable criteria.