

Election questions out there for the asking

by Wendy Elliott/The Advertiser

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Elections are always an opportunity for the public to ask questions of those who would like our vote. The upcoming provincial election seems to be eliciting weighty questions from various activists.

The Friends of Agriculture Nova Scotia (FANS), a locally-based coalition of farmers, public policy advocates, ecologists and others started out challenging all political parties to address food security as a top priority.

Linda Best of Greenwich, a spokesperson for FANS, wants every party to describe how their programs address the need for a safe, secure, sustainable and local food supply for present and future generation of Nova Scotians.

It's a good question since this province currently imports about 90 per cent of its food requirements. "In the short term, our food supply is vulnerable," she says, and so are our farmers.

Given there is no way of ensuring the quality and safety of imported foods that come from jurisdictions that may have less stringent standards, Best wants to know how each party will go about ensuring a vital and secure food supply.

Anyone reading this newspaper in recent months knows that the continued availability of agricultural land, a dynamic farming community, an infrastructure for processing and marketing locally grown food, and pricing policies that ensure a fair return for farmers are key issues for many Kings County residents. Best even uses the term 'tipping point' when speaking of the immediacy of these concerns.

Beating a drum or two

Environmental groups have also started beating a drum or two. The **Nova Scotia Environmental Network** plans to rate politicians based on their stated commitment to the environment.

Among the list of 25 important questions is the suggestion of creating an environment watchdog. Biosolids, forest conservation, climate change and green jobs are all included.

I was interested in the query about party willingness to adopt and use the Nova Scotia Genuine Progress Index as a core measure of progress for the province. It's a good alternative to our traditional thinking and backed up with ongoing research.

The Network also points out that this province's funding for sustainable transportation has been pretty embarrassing. It's approximately \$1 per capita, less than 10 per cent of the Canadian provincial average. The group supports the creation of an annual fund for sustainable transportation that at least matches the national average.

The Uranium-Free N.S. Coalition hosted a press conference in Halifax last week to call on all three major political parties to clearly indicate their position on this issue. The coalition, which unites six environmental and public interest groups, had Valley representation by Bill Zimmerman.

The Wolfville councillor told me Radio-Canada was the only media service that turned out to the press conference and Liberal leader Stephen McNeil scheduled a press conference of his own at the same time.

There are nine municipal councils across the province that want a uranium mining ban and 90 per cent of folks who made submissions to voluntary planning want a ban also.

The NDP are on board, but the other two parties have been silent on the topic of the serious health risks of uranium mining.

"We don't want this to be left up to the whim of cabinet," Zimmerman says. "We don't want any more backdoor deals."

Fair enough. All this is to invite readers to attend the three upcoming public opportunities to put the questions out there. The Kings County Advertiser and Kings County Register are sponsoring candidate forums in Greenwich, Kentville and Auburn. Attend; get your questions on the table and the answers on the record.