

Developing NWT Agriculture

Mr. Speaker, residents of the NWT have told us that they want to advance food production in their regions and communities. With the support of federal and GNWT funding, community-based gardens, greenhouses, farmer's markets and other food-related businesses and associations are flourishing across the NWT.

Access to locally grown, locally sourced foods continues to increase for NWT residents. Small-scale entrepreneurial opportunities are becoming available through markets, festivals, and conferences.

While a few commercial food production ventures are gaining traction and presence in the NWT, expanding production and creating greater diversification within this commercial sector is our next objective. We have committed in our mandate to introducing a Strategy that will guide and support the growth of an agriculture sector for our territory.

To help inform the development of that Strategy, we have engaged with commercial farmers and others interested in seeing the sector expand – as well as with experts that work with various aspects related to food production. We have had conversations with colleagues in this House and within our government; and with enthusiastic residents.

We see the development of the NWT agriculture sector as a component of our government's economic development agenda - to increase economic opportunities and diversity at the regional level through the local production of food that can replace what is imported at a greater cost from the south.

Over time, the implementation of this Strategy will also support and advance commitments that we have made to address the cost-of-living, improve food security, foster healthy families and enhance capacity-building programs for our youth.

Mr. Speaker, many of the key resources to our agriculture sector are already in place, including keen, interested participants; strong community support; public and private investment; and market demand. But we have learned that there are still some critical elements needed to facilitate the safe, responsible and sustainable development of this sector.

We need to establish concrete regulations for the safe management and production of food and sale of agriculture products in the NWT. We need formal approaches for identifying and accessing land. We will also need to invest time and resources in building the skills, education, and infrastructure needed to realize our potential.

The Strategy that I will be tabling during this session will provide a plan to address these shortfalls and provide a blueprint to build our agriculture sector for the future.

This Strategy will set the stage for actions, investments and development of legislative tools that will advance the increased production of fresh, healthy, safe and more affordable locally grown food choices, and new economic opportunities for our people.

I look forward to the work ahead, and to delivering on this commitment of our government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.