

# ***‘Growing the Island Way’ and the Malpeque Bay Official Plan***

by Hal Mills

**Introduction** The Malpeque Bay Planning Board began work on a proposed Official Plan earlier this year. During public meetings over the summer it was recognized that many farmers were too busy to attend, and that a special meeting with the agricultural sector was required at a time convenient to them. Arrangements for holding the special meeting are in progress.

In the meantime “*Growing the Island Way*” the Report of the Commission on the Future of Agriculture and Agri-Food on Prince Edward Island has been released. This is a ‘*consultation draft*’ report and the Planning Board is participating in the consultations. Some aspects of “*Growing the Island Way*” could be quite relevant to discussions between the agricultural sector and the Planning Board.

**‘Growing the Island Way’.** The Commission on the Future of Agriculture and Agri-Food on Prince Edward Island was established by the Government of Prince Edward Island in the spring of 2008. The Commission was mandated to assess the state of agriculture, articulate a vision for the future, and develop an action plan to achieve that vision. In ‘*Growing the Island Way*’ the Commission expresses the opinion that the future of agriculture depends on leadership from all partners, including from the community, and on the willingness of the farm community to be part of necessary attitudinal and cultural changes. It identified three themes to focus on: competitiveness, sustainability, and collaboration.

**Recommendations and Observations.** The ‘*consultation draft*’ Report just released is subject to review and revision following consultations, so its recommendations are not finalized as yet. All of the 14 recommendations could have strong relevance to the agricultural sector, and some of them could have relevance to our proposed Official Plan. Following are the recommendations which this author believes are most pertinent to an Official Plan.

**Recommendation 5:** “*The PEI government should align the work of the departments of Tourism and Agriculture to create economic opportunities for farms that are focused on organic farms, farm markets, agri-tourism experiences, and value added products. This effort should broaden to involve other sectors in establishing a unique PEI brand strategy.*”

**Observations on Recommendation 5:** Although aimed at the provincial government, this recommendation is one that the Municipality might want to support through an Official Plan. It recognizes the importance of agriculture to tourism and the preservation of rural landscapes, and suggests that agri-tourism should become a priority for economic development. The challenge for the Planning Board is to work with agriculture and tourism sectors of the

Municipality to identify opportunities for agri-tourism ventures that may contribute to our future economic development.

*Recommendation 9: “The PEI agri-food sector partners should establish a Sustainable Agriculture Working Group to focus directly on rebuilding the relationship between agriculture and the community.”*

Observations on Recommendation 9: The Planning Board and interested residents of the Municipality may wish to participate in, or contribute to, the work of this proposed Working Group. It will be looking at ways of mitigating areas of stress and mistrust between farmers and the community, reducing pesticide use, and taking other measures to sustain our land and water resources. The proposed Official Plan may be useful in formulating related Municipal values and objectives, and supporting initiatives through education and communications.

*Recommendation 10: “The federal and provincial governments should continue to support ALUS and other environmental programs that encourage sustainable use of PEI’s land and water resources.”*

Observations on Recommendation 10: The province wide Alternate Land Use Services (ALUS) program was launched earlier this year. It is based on the principle that society should help share costs incurred by farmers in maintaining the quality of the environment. Under ALUS the Province, and the Official Plan could support incentive programs for improved management practices for watersheds, fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, and soil erosion. Support for farmers as well as for organizations such as the Kensington North Watershed Group is central to this recommendation.

*Recommendation 11: “The PEI government, in collaboration with the agri-food industry and the broader community, should establish an Advisory Committee, reporting to the Minister responsible for the Lands Protection Act, to review the province’s land use policies and make recommendations that better reflect current economic realities and societal preference.”*

Observations on Recommendation 11: This recommendation involves “a range of concerns about limits on land holdings, incorrect and double-counting of land for varying uses, and ‘strip’ development that often conflicts with normal farming operations.” A review, and possible revision, of existing land use policies is beyond the purview of an Official Plan. However, the timing is such that the Planning Board and residents of the Municipality may be able to provide useful input during the review process by documenting municipal examples.

**In Summary.** The ‘observations’ and opinions expressed in this Discussion Paper are those of the author, not necessarily those of the Planning Board. They are put forward to facilitate future discussions between the agricultural sector and the Planning Board.