



STRATEGIC PLAN (2023-2026)

Prepared By:

Yvonne Thyssen-Post, P.Ag.

Thyagrissen Consulting Limited

Tel: 902-895-1414; Fax: 902-895-5188

Email: Yvonne@thyagrissenconsulting.ca

Website: www.thyagrissenconsulting.ca

**ADOPTED BY THE NSFGA BOARD OF DIRECTORS
ON DECEMBER 6TH, 2023**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE ORGANIZATION 3

THE INDUSTRY 5

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS 7

WHO WE SERVE..... 9

VISION STATEMENT..... 9

MISSION STATEMENT 9

CORE FUNCTIONS 10

THE KEY ISSUES 11

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 13

TACTICS TO ADDRESS STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 14

APPENDIX A 15

APPENDIX B..... 16

THE ORGANIZATION

The Nova Scotia Fruit Growers Association (NSFGA) was established in 1863 (incorporated in 1931), under the leadership of Dr. Charles Hamilton and Lt. Col. Robert Grant Haliburton. From the beginning, the association ensured that the apple industry was a key player in the advancement of agriculture in Nova Scotia. In the early days they promoted apples internationally and collected production information to pass along to growers. Today the association is recognized as the authoritative voice of industry.

In 2001 the NSFGA was instrumental in creating and advancing the Industry Vitalization Program (IVP), a long-term program aimed at restoring the economic viability of the NS apple industry. The program consisted of two segments: #1. Industry strategic objectives focused on Best Management Practices (BMP) in current farm production including integrated fruit production, cultivar development & evaluation, and orchard development; and #2. Future growth opportunities including bio-product development, market development and commercialization. The IVP was revised in 2005, leading the way to securing funding programs directed at renewing orchards, replacing bins, and long-term research supporting the orchard renewal program.

The associations' mandate is currently stated as follows: "To assist its members in being successful by fostering the growth and development of a viable and sustainable industry." Membership in NSFGA is voluntary, and unique in Canada in that it is open to growers, packers and processors of apples in Nova Scotia. Fees are charged according to production in terms of the number of bins produced and/or handled. This is a self-declaration process and there is no verification implemented. Membership in NSFGA in 2022 consisted of 54 growers, five packer members, and two processor members. The association operates through a voluntary board of directors comprised of 18 members as outlined in the by-laws: nine elected grower members; plus one representative from Scotian Gold (member packing cooperative); one other packer representative; one processing representative; and one Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada (FVGC) (previously the Canadian Horticultural Council) representative appointed by the Board of Directors. In addition, the Executive – President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Past-President, and Director-at-Large – are elected on top of the 13 other members.

The NSFGA Board of Directors as of the AGM 2023 is as follows:

President: Janet Chappel

Vice-President: Joan Hebb

Past-President: Peter Eisses

Treasurer: Doug Nichols

Director at Large: Vacant

FVGC Member Representative: Janet Chappel

Scotian Gold Member: David Parrish

Packer Member: Joan Hebb

Processing Rep: vacant

Directors elected at large:

Alex Sarsfield, Jeffrey Walsh; Travis Pearson; Doug Nichols; Stephen Van Meekeren; Cassian Ferlatte; Tim Stirling; Kim Thiessen; Starr Best

NSFGA employ two staff: full-time Executive Director, Emily Lutz; and contracted, part-time Financial Officer, Teresa Rooney. Staff carry out the day-to-day operations of the organization, reporting to the Board of Directors. The NSFGA currently functions on two streams of funding: membership dues paid annually by members and income earned from event sponsorships, facilitating projects, and administering programs such as the Advanced Payment Program (APP).

THE INDUSTRY

The Nova Scotia tree fruit industry is primarily concentrated in the Annapolis Valley region of the province. According to the 2022 Agriculture Census data, as reported by Statistics Canada, NS reports 4924 acres of apple orchard, 57 acres of peaches, 104 acres of pears and 33 acres of plums/prunes. The farm gate value of the fresh apple industry was reported as \$25,561,000 in 2021; fresh peaches reported \$484,000 farm gate value. The industry consists of more than 70 growers of various sizes and business model, five packing members, one local processor (pies), and a steadily growing hard cider industry.

Packer Members:

- Scotian Gold Co-Operative Ltd. is a cooperative with approximately 55 grower members. Started in 1912, they store, pack, and sell 60% of the apple production in Atlantic Canada using modern storage and packing technology.
- Van Meekeren Farms Ltd. is a family-owned farm and packing facility in Lakeville, Nova Scotia. In operation since 1964, they have expanded their production, storage, and packing technology several times since inception.
- Stirling Fruit Farms Ltd. have been a family owned and operated apple business since 1917. They supply markets across Atlantic Canada and own about 450 acres of orchard.
- Noggins Corner Farm Ltd is owned by the Bishop Family of Greenwich. They have on-site storage and packing facilities to supply their markets in Greenwich and Halifax.
- OceanCrisp Apple Company is owned by Blake Sarsfield and family. OceanCrisp is a newer operation focusing on Honeycrisp, Ambrosia and Gala from a series of large orchards around the valley.

Processors:

- Apple Valley Foods Inc. was started by the Sarsfield family in 1999. They are the largest pie manufacturer in Canada and one of the largest in North America. They have a 43,000 square foot manufacturing facility and warehouse in Kentville, Nova Scotia.
 - Great Valley Juices processed drop apples for pasteurized apple juice sales in Atlantic Canada. Owned by Lassonde Inc, they announced permanent closure of the facility in June 2023. At the time of closure they had been processing an average of seven million pounds of apples per year, down from 50 million pounds in the early 2000's. Lassonde continues the tradition of holding a Processor Membership in the NSFGA.
-

The Kentville Research and Development Centre is a federal facility operated by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC). It is the primary site for tree fruit research and development in Atlantic Canada. The NSFGA also has the ability to work with universities like Acadia University and Dalhousie University Agriculture Campus on relevant research projects. The NS Tree Fruit Research Foundation was formed and incorporated in 1988 with a mission to encourage research in the NS tree fruit industry. This foundation has since folded leaving their investments with NSFGA to manage. NSFGA works closely with Perennia, Nova Scotia's food development agency, on extension, promotion, and market development. NSFGA provides input and maintains a positive relationship to research and development efforts among their partners.

Honeycrisp is the main apple variety grown in the province today, primarily resulting from a 10-year orchard renewal program that supported orchard replanting costs. Honeycrisp is a variety developed in the USA but performs extremely well in the cooler climate of Atlantic Canada. Research and cultivar trials with Honeycrisp started in Nova Scotia in the 1990's. Over time the apple varieties in the province have moved towards fresh fruit varieties as opposed to processing for apples or pies. The number of apple growers has declined but the average orchard size has increased.

Nova Scotia is one of the most northerly growing regions in North America for apple production, resulting in a comparatively short and cool growing season. The high annual rainfall means most growers in NS have not had to rely on irrigation. The short, cool, and moist growing conditions of the Annapolis Valley can provide certain competitive market advantages to growers with respect to apple quality. The biggest advantage appears to be in producing a highly colored apple, like the popular Honeycrisp.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Strategic planning is the development of a vision that is created to drive organizational change and transformation from the current state to a desired future state.

NSFGA contracted Yvonne Thyssen-Post, P.Ag. of Thyagrissen Consulting Limited in the fall of 2022 to assist with this strategic planning exercise. Relevant reports, studies and documents were accessed and reviewed. This review was essential in gaining an understanding of the current state of both the industry and the association.

An overview of the strategic planning process implemented by Thyagrissen Consulting is depicted below.



Strategic Planning Process



As a member-based organization it is imperative to obtain input from the membership as the first step in strategic planning. It was decided that an online survey would be the most efficient approach to secure input from members. The survey is a tool for conducting the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis. It provides an environmental scan of the association (strengths & weaknesses), and the industry (opportunities & threats).

Appendix A contains the questions asked and the responses received; both the details as well as a summary. Twenty-one responses were received from members over a 14-day period. The Executive Director compiled the survey responses. The goal behind the survey was to gain an appreciation for the challenges members identify as affecting the future success of the association and their business. These findings provide the foundation for the strategic planning process.

Effort was directed at summarizing the survey findings into main themes, as noted in Appendix A. The survey results and summary were presented to members participating in the Annual General meeting (AGM) held on January 26, 2023. This provided another opportunity for members to provide input regarding future direction of the NSFGA. They had the opportunity to add to the list where they felt there were short-comings. Each participant then voted for what they felt were the top four priorities for the association for the next three to five years. The votes were tallied and those items with the highest totals were recorded as the priorities for the strategic planning process.

A steering committee was created to work through the remainder of the strategic planning process with the consultant. The committee included Janet Chappel, Jeffrey Walsh, Joan Hebb, Alex Sarsfield and Emily Lutz. Two workshops were held to create a draft plan on February 9 and March 31 2023. The facilitator compiled a draft strategic plan from the outcomes of the two workshops. This was reviewed and reworked in consultation with the Executive Director. A work planning tool was used to identify the specifics to address each priority area – including the what, how, who, why and when. Staff will develop detailed work plans for each strategic priority.

The strategic plan is a living document that should be reviewed regularly, at least once a year to ensure goals are being met and that the items identified as priorities are still the most significant. The plan also should be reviewed whenever a major change occurs, as it may influence the priorities of the association.

WHO WE SERVE

We serve the members of the Nova Scotia Fruit Growers' Association, which includes growers of tree fruit (apples, pears, peaches, etc), packers, and processors.

VISION STATEMENT

Our Vision: A progressive and united tree fruit industry.

MISSION STATEMENT

Our Mission: To support the continued growth and development of a sustainable Nova Scotia tree fruit industry.

CORE FUNCTIONS

In fulfilling its purpose, the organization has three core functions:

- Membership & Operations
 - Organizational excellence
 - Serve the membership

- Voice for Industry
 - Advocacy
 - To all levels of governments – provincial, municipal, national and international – for support of industry
 - To the greater community for industry support/awareness
 - To other associations- Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada
 - Media and communications

- Industry Development
 - Long-term strategy (research, technology development, technology transfer, education, innovation, diversification, expansion, etc.)
 - Research
 - Promotion

THE KEY ISSUES

The consultative piece of the strategic planning process was initiated with an on-line survey that received 21 submissions. The responses were categorized into main themes. At the AGM in January 2023, members were asked to select their top four priorities of things that they see as the greatest challenges to their future success. The issues presented as themes (broader topic areas) are listed below in order of priority as voted collectively by the AGM participants.

1. Voice to government (address industry issues for growth & development; seek financial support; extension services; research; increase government's knowledge of the industry's value)
2. Education (transfer of knowledge; information; share latest research; etc)
3. Voice for the industry (leadership; united; collective voice; value of industry)
4. Research for industry development (enhance relationship with AAFC; promote quality research – varieties, climate change, technology, innovation, automation)
5. Programming (secure financial assistance for infrastructure items such as bins; orchard replant; APP).
6. Long-term strategy (compile industry baseline data; plan for development & growth)
7. Cooperation/collaboration (engage all members to work together for more progressive industry; learn from one another; partnerships)
8. Membership to be all-inclusive, everyone in every sector – growers, packers, processors); all sizes
9. Expansion/growth for all sectors – growers, packers, storing, processors; transition/new growers
10. Promotion to maintain current markets; premium 'Honeycrisp' growing region
11. Quality & diversification (emphasis on producing quality product; diversify beyond Honeycrisp- new varieties; varieties for niche markets)

12. Communication (increase communication with membership; share information/knowledge)

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Strategic Priorities are principles specifically related to serving the membership. They are best uncovered by understanding what areas the association needs to focus on and pay attention to in order to achieve its mission and vision.

The steering committee examined the information collected (summary in Appendices) from the survey and AGM.

The strategic priorities identified to move the industry forward and help NSFGA reach its vision and fulfill its mission are:

- **Support for industry development**
- **Research**
- **Organizational Excellence**

TACTICS TO ADDRESS STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

A list of the tactics developed by the steering committee to best address each strategic priority area is presented in Table 1. Part of the planning process is to streamline the efforts of staff as well as financial resources towards the most critical issues. The detailed work planning tool in the Appendices identifies those tasks that are best assigned to an outside expert, and paid for by using funding programs.

Table 1: Strategic Priorities for NSFGA and Specific Tactics

Strategic Priority	Specific Tactics
Support for industry development	Establish industry baseline data
	Develop long-term industry strategy for growth & development
Research	Enhance working relationships with research community
	Play larger role in encouraging regional research projects
	Connect regularly with the research committee
Organizational Excellence	Develop written policies and procedures for operations
	Prioritize member communication and engagement
	Modernize IT equipment, security, and procedures

APPENDIX A

Survey questions/results

General themes from NSFGA 2023 Strategic Planning Questionnaire

What do you consider to be the role of the Nova Scotia Fruit Growers' Association?	What do you view as the strengths of the Nova Scotia Fruit Growers' Association as an organization?	What would you label as weaknesses of the Nova Scotia Fruit Growers' Association as an organization?	Now looking at things more generally, what future opportunities do you see for the tree fruit industry in Nova Scotia?	What concerns you most about the future of the tree fruit industry in Nova Scotia?	Based on your response to questions 1-5 above, what do you think the strategic priorities of the NSFGA should be?
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advocate to government at every level 2. Be a collective voice for all growers of every size 3. Facilitate education/growth opportunities for membership 4. Communicate key issues to the membership to keep them informed 5. Provide a forum for growers to be a collective group 6. To provide leadership for tree fruit growers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strong and diverse membership base of most growers in the province 2. Takes a big-picture innovative approach 3. Good financial base 4. Quality staff and board 5. Historical and well-respected organisation 6. United grower community 7. Offers good programming (APP admin) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Poor relationship with AAFC 2. Not enough member engagement/participation from members 3. Lack of communication 4. Rising costs to maintain office/expensive for small growers 5. Inconsistency in leadership 6. Lack of recognition outside of NS 7. Membership voluntary as opposed to mandatory, fees are self assessed 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. More growth at a reasonable pace 2. More varieties for niche markets 3. Expansion as premier Honeycrisp growing region 4. Potential for gov't support for growth-associated infrastructure (bin, storage, processing, etc.) 5. Potential for more collaboration, learning and being more progressive, creating strong growers 6. Leaders in quality fruit/quality acreage 7. Maintain current and develop new markets 8. Automation 9. Well positioned to weather an over-supply of apples 10. More opportunities to gather growers together 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Climate and weather 2. Labour shortage 3. Housing 4. Storage capabilities 5. Market saturation/Overplanting 6. Unresponsive government 7. PMRA restrictions 8. Rising costs in production 9. Demise of smaller farms/conglomeration of farms/shaky succession to next gen 10. Overreliance on Honeycrisp 11. Lack of processing capabilities/opportunities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research promotion 2. Education 3. Advocacy for key priorities (program/extension support, labour, housing, PMRA, processing) 4. More/better Communication 5. Fixing the data problem (real volume, acreage, varieties, cost of production, etc.) 6. Nurture a community of cooperative growers, big and small, new and old 7. Partnerships 8. Industry Development

NSFGA Strategic Plan Priorities - Survey Main Themes

Advocacy	Industry Development	Membership
Voice to government (address industry issues for growth and development; seek financial support; extension services; research; increase government's knowledge of industry's value) 23	Programming (secure financial assistance for infrastructure items such as bins; orchard replant, APP) 15	All inclusive (everyone in every sector – growers, packers, processors, storage); all sizes; 6
Voice for Industry (leadership; united collective voice; value of industry) 17	Marketing (less)/promotion (more) (to maintain current markets; develop niche markets; premier 'honeycrisp' growing region) 2	Communication (increase communication with membership; share information/knowledge) 1
Voice for industry to other industry (national)	Quality & diversification (emphasis on producing quality product; diversify beyond honeycrisp – new varieties; new varieties for niche markets) 2	Cooperation/collaboration (engage all members to work together = more progressive industry; learn from one another; partnerships) 9
	Expansion/growth for all sectors - growers, packing, storing, processing; transition/new growers 6	Education (transfer of knowledge; information; share latest research; etc.) 22
	Research (enhance relationship with AAFC; promote quality research – varieties, climate change; technology, innovation, automation) 16	
	Long-term strategy (compile industry baseline data; plan for development & growth) 14	

Voting at AGM – Top 4 priorities

- Voice to Government (Advocacy)
- Education for the membership (Membership)
- Voice for industry (Advocacy)
- Research (Industry Development)

APPENDIX B

Work Plan Details

WORK PLANNING SHEET

Priority Area: **Support for Industry Development**

Goal: **A government that supports industry development and growth**

Strategy (Core Function): **Advocacy/Industry Development**

Action Required	Measurable Target	Who – Responsibility	When/Timeline	How/Funding/Resources
Establish industry baseline data	Complete accurate database	Executive Director and Board of Directors	By July 2024	ACOA-SCAP funding
Develop long-term industry strategy for growth & development	Complete	Executive Director/Board of Directors/Consulting firm project	August 2023- August 2024	ACOA funding/SCAP

WORK PLANNING SHEET

Priority Area: **Research**

Goal: **Relevant research that helps grow and develop the industry**

Strategy (Core Function): **Industry Development**

Action Required	Measurable Target	Who – Responsibility	When/Timeline	How/Funding/Resources
Enhance & expand working relationships with research community	Increase the number of projects	Research committee/BoD/ED	On-going	
Play larger role in driving membership specific research	Increase number of membership specific research projects	Research committee	On-going	
Connect regularly with research committee	Reports provided at Board meetings?	Executive Director/BoD	Semi-annually	

WORK PLANNING SHEET

Priority Area: **Organizational Excellence**

Goal: **Modernize the organization with best practices**

Strategy (Core Function): **Membership & Organization**

Action Required	Measurable Target	Who – Responsibility	When/Timeline	How/Funding/Resources
Develop and record all policies	Complete policy binder	Executive Director	Draft by December 2023 Complete by December 2025	In-house
Prepare SOPs for organization	Complete SOPs for org	Executive Director Committees	Draft by December 2024	In-house
Modernize technology for security and efficient operations	Up-grade tech system with back-ups and security systems in place	Executive Director/BoD	By December 2023	\$\$\$
Prioritize member engagement and communication	Sustained/ increased membership base	Executive Director/BoD	Ongoing	In-house