



April 1st, 2010

Agricultural Land Review Committee
PO Box 816
Kentville NS B4N 4H8

Dear Committee:

Re: Agricultural land issues in the Grand Pré area

We are writing to you on behalf of the Nomination Grand Pré Advisory Board, the group that is working to submit Grand Pré as a candidate for UNESCO's World Heritage designation. The purpose of this letter is to highlight the reasons behind our submission and the importance of protecting and sustaining agriculture as a viable economic activity.

Grand Pré is being proposed according to three of UNESCO's criteria and as an enduring agricultural and memorial landscape. Our submission to UNESCO states that:

1. *It is an exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition. The intact dykelands at Grand Pré are an exceptional example of the Acadian tradition of turning wetlands into highly fertile farmland.*
2. *It is an outstanding example of a traditional land-use that is representative of human interaction with a distinctive environment. The enduring agricultural use of the dykeland and persistent settlement pattern on the upland at Grand Pré is an outstanding example of an adaptation to a distinctive coastal environment in North America.*
3. *It is tangibly associated with living traditions and ideas of outstanding universal significance. Through its evocative memorials to a people who overcame a tragedy of a forced migration, the Acadian Deportation, Grand Pré is a symbol of hope, perseverance and pride for all humanity.*

Grand Pré's marsh, the basis for its past and present livelihood, was built by the Acadians in the 1680s. It is one of the most fertile lands in Kings County, in Nova Scotia, and certainly in Canada. It has been for the most part continuously used since it was created and maintained by generations of farmers who have been responsible stewards of that land.

That land may have been created over 300 years ago, but it is not frozen in time. While the principles guiding the maintenance of the dykes, the aboiteaux, and the ditches are the same, the farmers have continuously improved the farming of that land while maintaining its distinctive character.

It is that character that has inspired countless artists in writing literary works based in Grand Pré and in depicting its extraordinary landscape. It is also that character that has attracted millions of tourists since the middle of the 19th century to come visit, invest in, and enjoy the bountiful products of the land.



These reasons and many more are at the heart of the proposal to present Grand Pré and area as a candidate for World Heritage status. There are many agricultural landscapes already on the World Heritage List. The large majority of them are living agricultural landscapes just like Grand Pré. There are vineyard landscapes, staple and economic crop landscapes, landscapes where agricultural activity has produced particularly beautiful scenery, and landscapes related to nomadic or pastoral activities. The landscapes on UNESCO's list are located in Europe, Asia and Africa, but there are none in North America. Grand Pré if successful would be the first to celebrate the importance of agriculture in people's livelihoods in North America.

This is the result of the land still being farmed and still being protected as agricultural land. It is also the result of the connection between local farmers and that land still being there.

There are important challenges with the future of Grand Pré that, you may agree, echo those experienced in other agricultural communities in Nova Scotia. Some of the challenges are social and economic. Local farmers relate that maintaining an agricultural industry is becoming increasingly difficult. There are concerns that younger generations are not interested in pursuing farming activities which is a threat to sustaining an agricultural economy. Moreover, the area attracts new residents who for the most part are individuals who retire in Grand Pré to enjoy the rural setting while being somewhat close to amenities provided by the neighbouring town of Wolfville or even Halifax. As a result, increased land use conflicts between agricultural and residential uses have put pressure on farmers.

Some of the challenges are environmental. This mainly relates to rising sea level which will be a pressure on the protection of actively farmed dykeland. Sea level rise combined with storm surges and other natural phenomena may damage the dyke system and, subsequently, paralyze agricultural activity.

These concerns need to be addressed to protect Grand Pré's agriculture and maintain its legitimacy as a candidate for World Heritage designation. Farmers must continue to adjust to changes in methods and technology to ensure success. Farming needs to be encouraged as an industry including by further ensuring the protection of the dykeland and surrounding agricultural land. Proactive measures should be taken in the present to respond to this threat.

We have identified several objectives for Grand Pré and area in our World Heritage proposal that your Committee may wish to consider:

- We aim to support the agricultural industry in remaining a vibrant economic activity and an attractive option for youth employment. This may be achieved by encouraging businesses related to agriculture, such as agritourism.
- We need to continue to preserve the dykeland and agricultural land for agricultural use and reduce the potential for land use conflicts with controls on non-farm uses on agricultural land.
- We wish to support the Grand Pré Marsh Body in its role as the long-term steward of the dykeland and work collaboratively with the Body when considering initiatives that may have an impact on the dykes and dykeland. This includes working to develop initiatives to educate visitors about the importance of working on and protecting the dykelands and doing so without impeding the everyday work of the farmers.



- We need to dedicate resources to monitor and maintain the dykelands, including the dykes, the ditches, and the roads, to assess the pressures to them and develop mitigation measures.

These objectives are found in the draft Management Plan for the proposed UNESCO World Heritage Site and in the goals of the draft Grand Pré and Area Community Plan. These are goals that make sense for both the protection of this extraordinary part of our collective heritage and for the agricultural community.

This farmland is important to the local farmers, to the Acadians, to residents, and to visitors. Agricultural land in our province is economically valuable for agriculture as an industry as well as for tourism.

As we are working diligently to ensure an international recognition for the agricultural landscape of Grand Pré, we urge the Province of Nova Scotia to work towards solutions that assist in maintaining this important landscape and that support the enduring agricultural activities of this area.

We recognize the challenges involved with the management of agricultural land in Nova Scotia. We believe that Grand Pré has a strong tradition of making a living from agriculture and we are working to contribute to a bright future by maintaining that essential part of everyone's well-being.

We appreciate the effort that you are making to consult with all interested members of the public including federal, provincial, and municipal governments.

Sincerely,

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