

Huge interest for Eat Think Vote

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An overflowing community room at the People's Place Library played host to Eat Think Vote in Antigonish Oct. 8.

"We had a wonderful turnout; an overwhelming response," Karen MacKinnon, from event host the Antigonish Food Security Association, said.

"I could have filled another room with the people who wanted to come but I had to turn them away, so food really matters to people and they're concerned about it," she added, in talking to the *Casket* at the conclusion of the event.

In addressing the audience near the start, MacKinnon explained what Eat Think Vote (campaign.foodsecurecanada.org) entailed.

"It is a national non-partisan campaign led by Food Secure Canada calling for healthy, sustainable, affordable food for all," she said, noting the national plan to "address four

key areas of action."

"Zero hunger in Canada, healthy school food, support for farmers and affordable food in the north ... this event is part of 60 events happening across Canada."

The event, which went from noon to 2 p.m., included lunch, an introduction to the campaign and the Antigonish Food Security Association by MacKinnon, Nova Scotia food security highlights as presented by Nova Scotia Health Authority health equity lead Christine Johnson, five minute speeches on the issue from each of the five Central Nova candidates in next week's federal election, community feedback from those in attendance and time at end for further mingling and one-on-one chats with the candidates.

So that everyone was on the same page when it came to food security, MacKinnon read a definition provided by Dietitians of Canada.

"Just so we're all clear about what we're talking about today, food security is dependent on being able to find and purchase

healthy foods," she said. "The term food security is used in many different ways but, generally in North America, food security has been defined as a situation in which all community residents can obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes self-reliance and social justice. And, more-and-more, food has become the means to promote health, build strong and diverse communities, protect the environment and strengthen the economy."

"I would say here in Nova Scotia, food is integral to our culture ... possibly across Canada," she added.

Candidates noted the challenges that can be had in finding and affording healthy food and some talked about while there are obstacles, there are also opportunities.

"Each candidate has talked about the need to marry the economy with the environment in an 'and' language rather than an 'either/or,'" Liberal candidate Sean Fraser said,

noting his time in the Netherlands taught him how land can be maximized for producing potential. "Local food is the perfect example of how these two concepts can be married."

Green Party candidate David Hachey also noted time abroad, in China, showed him how open parcels of land can be utilized, talking specifically about crops growing in ditches.

"Food is a challenge and a unique opportunity," he said, his speech, moving into talking about the connection with poverty and the Green Party's plan to tackle that issue.

NDP candidate Ross Landry also made the connection of food security to poverty and noted his party's "national food strategy."

"Having food is not a privilege, it's a right," Landry said, also noting a relationship in a focus on food security helping rural communities. "Good quality, accessible food ... we have to make food affordable."

Conservative candidate

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Community members have their say near the conclusion of the busy Eat Think Vote event which was held last Thursday (Oct 8) at the People's Place Library. PHOTO: Richard MacKenzie

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Fred DeLorey talked about the importance of farmers' markets to him and his family and a program they used to take advantage of provided by a neighbouring farm selling baskets of vegetables.

He also talked about taking advantage of vacant land in the region for food production.

"We could be creating initiatives for that which could go a long way," DeLorey said.

Independent candidate Alexander MacKenzie talked about his time working in both the agriculture and fishing industries and how those experiences have given him a perspective on the issue.

He also noted high prices on groceries suggesting something should be done in this area.

Community comments ranged from furthering the talk on the relationship between food security and poverty, initiatives already underway in the town such as Get The Town Growing and Our Food Store and restrictive regulations

which seem to favour large corporations over small producers who can emphasize local and healthy food.

"The community comments really spoke to the needs that exist in the community," MacKinnon said.

"I hope whoever wins the Central Nova riding is well informed now about food issues and why it's so important," she added, while expressing gratitude towards the candidates.

"Overall my experience with the candidates is that they have been very responsive, interested and well prepared for today," she said.

"They all could have said 'no' and we wouldn't have had an Eat Think Vote event so we're very pleased."

As for a final message she hoped those in attendance would leave with, MacKinnon talked about the overall importance of Eat Think Vote.

"Food is so important and yet under-valued and certainly there hasn't been much discussion about it in this federal election," she said.

"And yet, it's a huge issue for people so we need to be talking more about it."

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