

The Fight to Keep Nappan Research Centre

The Nappan Research Centre is a beef research facility in Cumberland County, near Amherst, Nova Scotia. The federal government has developed a plan to privatize non-regulatory research labs under the guise of cutting costs. In 2005, they decided that they would privatize Nappan Research Centre as a trial balloon. The federal government claimed closing Nappan down would save several millions of dollars. They failed to recognize that it would also mean millions of dollars coming out of the economy of a small rural community.

The beef-producing community was the first to raise concerns on talks of closing Nappan and they expressed concern. The PSAC set up a political action committee called an Area Council. Members that worked at Nappan Research Centre, the PSAC Area Council, the Agriculture Component and the Cumberland County Federation of Agriculture all worked together to raise public and political support.

It is often hard to get public support for government employees because of popular stereotypical views of federal jobs. The ad hoc coalition worked hard to educate the community regarding the impact that the loss of 18-22 salaries would have on the community, as well as the importance of doing beef research in a beef-producing area. Beef-growers, notably Frank Foster, were extremely vocal and did a considerable amount of legwork. He was, by all accounts, instrumental in keeping the action going and led the community fight to keep Nappan open.

The biggest event of the fight-back action was the beef community barbecue. This was a community event, garnering over 300 people, with music and speeches from notable politicians such as Peter McKay and officials from the Federation of Agriculture. The media was an indispensable ally in getting the message out to the community and raising awareness of the issue. Members and politicians did media interviews and put information in newspapers, particularly agricultural and farm-related newsletters. A huge public outcry ensued from these efforts, with politicians of all Stripes speaking out. The government decided to shelve the plan to privatize the Nappan Research Centre.

This is a great union success story, but it is not just that; it was a community effort and thus a community victory when the government shelved the plan. The union worked together with the people in the community and the media to fight this issue, and together they won what may be a small achievement in the grand scheme, but a huge triumph for the community of Amherst and surrounding region.