

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 44-18(2): AGRICULTURAL LAND AVAILABILITY

February 23, 2016

MS. GREEN: As I said in my statement today, agriculture has become a significant growth sector in the NWT economy in the last few years. It also has the added benefit of reducing food cost by substituting imported food.

More growth is possible, but one of the limiting factors is the availability of the land. My question for the Minister of Lands is what plans the government has to make more land available in the NWT for agriculture and food production.

MR. SPEAKER: Mahsi. Minister of Lands.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: We see that as a valuable opportunity to produce a lot of locally grown food across Northwest Territories. One of the things we would have to do is see the land claims, all land claims settle, so land might be made available for that. Also, we do our land use planning and we need to identify that. We have the Agricultural Strategy, which would help us identify some of the issues that we have to deal with.

MS. GREEN: What I heard is that land will not be available in some areas until all land claims are settled. I'm wondering how we can sustain the growth of the agriculture sector if there is going to be no additional land available for the production of food.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: What I said was that we would like to see all the land claims settle. That way, there might be more land available that is within their claims area. If it's not in their claims area, there are still opportunities to access lands that they could potentially use for agriculture.

We have a lot of communities that have community gardens. I believe all 33 communities have community gardens. We have to continue to look at the options and try and promote and endorse the locally grown foods, and that would help the cost of living across the Northwest Territories.

MS. GREEN: I am still a little unclear. If I wanted to begin --

MR. SPEAKER: I like to remind Members to direct their questions through the speaker, please.

MS. GREEN: I beg your pardon, Mr. Speaker. My question for the Minister is: If somebody wanted to grow food that they would later sell at the successful Yellowknife Farmers Market, how would they obtain land outside of the city to do that?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Right now, we are doing some work on our land use sustainability. If there are lands that are identified outside city limits and it suits the purpose or it's for the purpose, then I would assume that they would put in an application. Again, I will have to confirm the actual process, and share it with the Members and committee as to the actual process that they would have to go through,

the conditions they might have to meet. I will commit to the Member and all Members that I will confirm all that information. I will be pleased to share it with them.

MS. GREEN: Thank you for that commitment, Mr. Minister. My final question for the Minister is how decisions will be made about who gets access to the land for growing.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD It would be application-based, and then each application will be looked at. Based on its merit, it will determine whether the application is approved or not, and the application process will go through the Department of Lands.