

Food Establishment Safety Regulation

Mr. Speaker, the demand for safe, affordable and locally-grown food choices continues to rise in the Northwest Territories and is a topic that our government is actively addressing as part of the Government of the Northwest Territories Agriculture Strategy. With emerging agricultural activities and this government's priority to support an increase in local food production, the Department of Health and Social Services recognized the need to update the Food Establishment Safety Regulations, under the Public Health Act, to support NWT residents in the agriculture and food establishment sectors.

Improving food security by encouraging local food production is one of the main goals of the Agriculture Strategy. An integral part of this work is ensuring that the proper regulatory frameworks are in place to guide and protect the NWT's agriculture industry, promote safe agriculture and food production, and integrate best practices.

Our first step is updating the Food Establishment Safety Regulations to ensure that the public is buying food that is safe to eat, while also making it easier for operators to produce and sell locally-grown foods. This enhances food security overall and promotes economic development in our territory.

Mr. Speaker, the amended Regulations came into effect yesterday and reflect current best practices for the primary agricultural activities currently found

in the NWT. These amendments will apply not just to regular food establishments, like restaurants; but also to home food processors and farmers, as well as other operators wishing to grow and sell local, low-risk foods at venues such as farmer's and community markets, out of their home, or through farm gate.

Additional updates to the Regulations have also been made to support food security. These include: the ability for the Chief Public Health Officer to waive the payment of permit fees, extend durations for temporary permits, and exempt some permitting requirements for home food processors to make it easier to establish home-based food businesses.

Under these enhanced Public Health Act Regulations, current and prospective NWT food establishment operators will see a more streamlined permitting process. This will result in a clearer and more responsive application process for NWT vendors which will better determine what type of permit is required. Resources and tools to help food operators navigate this new process are already available on the Department of Health and Social Services' website, and we hope this will make it easier for residents to sell locally-grown, low-risk food at venues throughout the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Health and Social Services will continue to work with partnering organizations and fellow departments to grow the NWT agriculture sector and lower the cost of living for NWT residents. Through the implementation of updated Regulations and our Environmental Health Unit's routine food establishment inspections, we will continue to work towards increasing the availability of safe, locally-grown food choices for our territory's residents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.