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national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

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NFU MEETS MEXICAN FARM ORGANIZATIONS TO DISCUSS NAFTA IMPACTS

SASKATOON, Sask.—Saskatchewan farmer and NFU member Jim Robbins recently returned from Mexico. While in Mexico City, Robbins held a joint press conference with members of the powerful farm coalition “El Campo no Aguanta Mas (The Countryside can’t take it anymore) to compare the impacts of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in Canada and Mexico.

Mexican farm leaders spoke of the rising levels of poverty in the countryside—the World Bank figures now estimates that 73% of rural Mexicans are poor. Robbins and Mexican leaders also talked about the flood of cheap imports into Mexico that have crushed local markets. For example, since the NAFTA, cheap corn—the favoured crop of small farmers and staple foodstuff of rural peoples—has poured in from the United States.

Robbins explained what the NAFTA had done to Canadian farmers: “Contrary to what our government officials and the media would have us believe, free trade agreements are decimating our rural communities. While Canadian agri-food exports have risen from \$10.9 billion in 1988 to \$28.2 billion in 2002, it is not farmers who are pocketing any proceeds. In fact, realized net far income is down and the number of farmers in Canada has fallen by 16%,” said Robbins. He went on to stress that “governments in both countries have dismantled support programs and infrastructure that benefited us as farmers while at the same time they have signed free-trade agreements that facilitated the growth and expansion of agri-business. There is no doubt that the real beneficiaries of NAFTA are the transnational corporations who now have enormous market power.”

Mexican farmers have been calling on President Vicente Fox to renegotiate the agriculture chapters of the NAFTA. After holding mass demonstrations, closing down roads and border points, and participating in hunger strikes, Mexican farm organizations finally succeeded in getting the attention of the Government of Mexico. During the past two weeks, farm leaders have met with individual federal Ministers to apprise them of the devastating situation of rural families who depend on agriculture for survival. The farmers’ coalition is demanding a renegotiation of the agriculture chapters and an overhaul of domestic rural policy to reorient it toward reaching food sovereignty. Mexican farm leaders are calling for a new agricultural policy that emphasizes producing for the national market, reducing food dependency, creating rural employment, and practicing sustainable agriculture.

Negotiations between the farmers’ coalition and the Government of Mexico will culminate on March 10th with a meeting with all key Ministers of Fox’s administration.

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