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**national farmers union**  
*In Union Is Strength*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**NFU SUPPORTS MEXICAN FARMERS' DEMANDS  
FOR A MORATORIUM ON NAFTA**

**SASKATOON, Sask.**—Mexican farmers are threatening to shut down key U.S.-Mexico border crossings in the first week of January if the government does not take some immediate action to resolve the agricultural crisis. During the past two weeks Mexican farm organizations have organized major demonstrations, closed down main highways, and met with government officials. Farm organizations have consolidated a united front called the “Countryside Can’t Take it Any More” and are demanding a moratorium on the further implementation of the agriculture chapter of NAFTA accompanied by an overhaul of agricultural and rural policy in Mexico.

Mexico is bracing itself for yet another phase of liberalization in the countryside. According to the NAFTA, on January 1, 2003, tariffs on all major food products entering Mexico will be eliminated. Corn, beans and powdered milk are exempt until 2008. Since eighty-five per cent of Mexican trade is with the U.S.A., the new year will bring a flood of highly subsidized food products into Mexico. Elimination of the current 59% tariff on chickens means the displacement of Mexican chicken production. An estimated 70% of people working in the Mexican pork industry will lose their jobs.

“Mexico was once self-sufficient in basic grains but now, largely as result of NAFTA, it imports 95% of soy for consumption, 58% of rice, 49% of wheat, and 40% of its meat” explains Nettie Wiebe, member of the National Farmers Union, who recently traveled to Mexico to meet with Mexican farm leaders. Wiebe stresses that “the NAFTA has devastated the Mexican countryside: rural impoverishment has reached a crisis point with over seventy-five per cent of rural Mexicans living in poverty. Everyday, an estimated 600 peasant farmers are forced off their land. Clearly, this next phase of trade liberalization simply cannot be tolerated.”

Stewart Wells, President of the NFU, agrees wholeheartedly with the demands being made by the Mexican farm organizations. Wells says that “the NAFTA has not brought wealth and prosperity to either Mexican or Canadian farm families. Both of our governments have systematically dismantled many of the programs and infrastructure that benefited us as farmers. Now, we are all producing for an international market in which prices have fallen dramatically while input costs continue to rise. The major winners in NAFTA are the transnational agribusiness corporations who increased their market power through globalization.”

Nettie Wiebe concludes: “The Mexican farm protests are part of a worldwide opposition to free trade in agriculture. The Vía Campesina, a global peasant and farm movement, rejects trade liberalization in agriculture, whether in the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Free Trade of the Americas (FTAA) or the NAFTA. Instead of free trade of food, which is really “forced” trade, we demand food sovereignty. That is, that all people have the right to produce their own food in culturally appropriate ways.”

— 30 —

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