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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FARMING A FAMILY JOB, STUDY SHOWS

SASKATOON, Sask. – “Farm women, youth and men all play a necessary role in the survival of Canada’s family farms,” says Karen Pedersen, Women’s President of the National Farmers Union.

Pedersen was speaking at a press conference called to release “The Canadian Farm Family At Work: Exploring Gender and Generation”. The document reports the outcomes of the Employment Practices of Farm Families project, a national study of farm family work conducted by the National Farmers Union in partnership with the Centre for Rural Studies and Enrichment. The study examined the type and amount of work done by farm family members over a one-year period, and included farm work, family work, non-farm paid employment and community work.

“Farm family members have a strong commitment to their farms’ success. As a result, every family member contributes what they can, through some combination of farm work, household work and non-farm paid employment which is increasingly needed to subsidize farm production,” Pedersen continues. “Gender boundaries between kinds of work are starting to break down as everyone on the farm contributes what they can. The study provides especially strong evidence that farm youth play a role in the farm’s survival. Until now, the role of youth has been badly underrated.”

Diane Martz, director of the Centre for Rural Studies and Enrichment, reviewed earlier research on farm family work prior to the beginning of the NFU-CRSE study. “The work of farm youth has never been assessed in any serious way in Canada,” she says. “Because Statistics Canada cannot ask questions about unpaid work or the work of youth under the age of 15, we are in the best position to find out about young people’s work on the farm. We expected to find that youth were helping a lot, but we were startled by the essential role that many young people play in maintaining the farm and the household while their parents generate cash income elsewhere.”

The data was collected from farm families scattered across Canada’s farming regions. Interesting contrasts came to light concerning gendered divisions of labour. Farm families’ decision-making processes were examined in depth, and since both men and women were examined, the study will contribute to a substantial improvement in gender analysis of farm issues and practices. The study used a combination of self-assessment and more objective time diaries to

gather work-related information. Therefore, it provides an unusually clear window on the range of work most farm families do over the course of the year and on the way work is divided between genders and age groups within families. More research is needed, however, on the sheer quantity of work done during the busy harvest and seeding periods on farms, since most of the studies' roughly 500 farmer participants had no time to complete time diaries during those peak work periods.

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For additional information on the project and for a list of the federal and provincial agencies that funded it, please view the attached backgrounder or contact:

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