

National Office  
2717 Wentz Ave.  
Saskatoon, Sask.  
S7K 4B6  
Tel (306) 652-9465  
Fax (306) 664-6226  
E-Mail: nfu@nfu.ca



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

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**MARCH 9, 2005**

**FARMERS OPTIMISTIC IN WAKE OF HOPPER CAR FLEET ANNOUNCEMENT**

**SASKATOON, Sask** - Western Canadian farmers are optimistic that negotiations to transfer ownership of the 12,400-car federal grain hopper car fleet to the Farmer Rail Car Coalition (FRCC) will be successful, according to Nettie Wiebe of the National Farmers Union (NFU).

Wiebe, who served as Vice-Chair of the FRCC from its inception until last year, said the announcement March 9 by Transport Minister Hon. Jean Lapierre that the federal government will open negotiations with the FRCC is "welcome news."

"I'm optimistic there is room to strike a deal that would be favourable to farmers," she said. "We take Mr. Lapierre seriously when he says the government decided to pursue negotiations on the FRCC option because they have a bias in favour of western farmers. We have been working hard for almost 9 years to get to this point. We've done due diligence on car maintenance costs and have put forward a very credible business plan. These negotiations will be more vigorous and complex, but we're confident that once farmers gain ownership of the hopper cars, then that will lead to more fairness in the grain handling and transportation system."

The current Vice-Chair of the FRCC is NFU representative Jim Robbins. It is expected that Robbins will be a key player in the upcoming negotiations with the federal government. The negotiations to transfer ownership of the hopper car fleet will take place over the next six weeks, and could wrap up by the end of April.

NFU President Stewart Wells said the announcement by Lapierre shows the federal government recognizes the contribution of farmers, and was not swayed by commodity organizations that have attempted to derail the FRCC proposal. "I'm hopeful these negotiations are a signal the Liberals are beginning a process that returns market power to farmers," he said. "The NFU has played a pivotal leadership role and worked tirelessly on the FRCC since it was founded in the winter of 1996-97. We're confident the people involved in the FRCC will negotiate a solid business arrangement on behalf of farmers."

- 30 -

Contact: Nettie Wiebe, (306) 966-8979 or (306) 493-2569  
Jim Robbins, FRCC Vice-Chair (306) 493-2569 or (306) 493-7048  
Stewart Wells, NFU President (306) 741-7694 or (306) 784-2216  
Terry Pugh, NFU Executive-Secretary (306) 652-9465