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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JUNE 5, 2003

GM WHEAT: BSE FOR GRAIN FARMERS

OTTAWA, Ont.—“Canadian cattle producers are experiencing the devastating consequences of border closures and market losses that have resulted from BSE. At the same time, however, the Canadian government is considering the approval of the grain system equivalent of BSE: genetically-modified wheat. GM wheat will lead to massive market losses and will effectively close borders to Canadian exports. But unlike BSE—which can be rooted out and markets and borders reopened—the devastating effects of GM wheat will be permanent,” said NFU President Stewart Wells to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture.

Wells and NFU Vice-President Terry Boehm appeared before the Agriculture Committee today to present farmers’ views on genetically-modified (GM) wheat.

Wells and Boehm told the Committee that the introduction of GM wheat would undo decades of successful market development for Canadian wheat, drive down prices, and completely reverse the Canadian government’s stated goal of branding Canadian products as the safest and highest quality in the world.

The customers that buy 82% of Canada’s wheat crop have said that if Canada introduces GM varieties, then they will stop buying Canada wheat—GM and non-GM alike. Other exporters, such as Australia, will not be proceeding with GM wheat and are positioning themselves to take over Canadian markets.

Wells also brought to the Committee’s attention research linking formulations of glyphosate to fusarium growth. Fusarium is a disease plaguing wheat farmers in parts of western Canada. Very low levels of fusarium are enough to seriously devalue wheat. The growing of GM Roundup Ready (glyphosate-resistant) wheat would dramatically increase the amount of glyphosate applied during the growing

season and this may increase the growth and incidence of fusarium. “More work needs to be done in this area, but RR wheat should not be approved if formulations of glyphosate promote the growth of fusarium,” said Wells.

Terry Boehm told the Committee that GM wheat threatens to destroy organic farming. The experience with canola shows that pollen drift and seed-source contamination means that once GM varieties are introduced, organic production becomes nearly impossible. The introduction of more GM crops will leave organic farmers fewer and fewer crops to grow. “The decision to introduce GM wheat and the other GM crops that would follow is a decision that may terminate organic crop production,” said Boehm.

Boehm stressed to the Parliamentarians that the government must be the one to decide on the introduction of GM wheat. “This one can’t be left to the markets. First, at the consumer end of the market, the purchaser doesn’t have any information on which to base a decision because the government of Canada has not endorsed mandatory labelling for foods that contain GM ingredients. At the farmer end of the equation, unfortunately there will always be some farmers that will grow or use a product if it is not specifically banned. The problem is, that even if a tiny minority of farmers choose GM wheat, market loss and contamination will result for all farmers. The market is incapable of making these types of responsible decisions,” said Boehm.

The NFU brief to the Committee concluded: “The National Farmers Union recommends in the strongest possible terms that the government of Canada prevent the introduction of GM wheat into Canadian food and fields unless the concerns of Canadian farmers, industry, and consumers are adequately addressed.” The NFU brief is available at www.nfu.ca .

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