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national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SASKATCHEWAN NFU HOLDS SUCCESSFUL REGIONAL CONVENTION

CHOICELAND, Sask – Farmers from across Saskatchewan dealt with a variety of pressing issues at the Region 6 (Saskatchewan) convention of the National Farmers Union (NFU) recently. The meeting was held at the Prairie Ursuline Centre in Bruno, Saskatchewan, July 7 and 8.

While delegates invested considerable time proposing solutions to the crisis in the livestock sector, grain issues emerged as a high priority at the meeting. NFU Saskatchewan Coordinator Don Kelsey said one of the major concerns of producers is the recently-released Seed Sector Review report. Farmers are worried they could lose their traditional right to save, re-use, sell and exchange common seed if the recommendations contained in the Seed Sector Review are implemented by the federal government.

NFU Vice-President Terry Boehm addressed the convention on the topic, explaining the Seed Sector Review is an industry-led initiative aimed at restructuring Canada's seed and grain quality assurance systems for the benefit of seed and chemical companies at the expense of farmers. He said while seed-related legislation traditionally was aimed at protecting farmers, the new legislative initiatives are designed to protect seed companies by designating seeds as "intellectual property" which can be patented and subject to extensive royalties.

The NFU delegates passed a resolution supporting a "Seed Saver Campaign" aimed at enshrining farmers' traditional right to save seed in federal legislation. The campaign is set to be launched this fall with a nation-wide petition drive.

Delegates also heard from Donna Welke, Assistant Commissioner with the Canadian Grain Commission (CGC), and Ian McCreary, a farmer from Bladworth and director of the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB). There was considerable discussion on the need to ensure sufficient rail car capacity exists to handle the expected heavier grain volumes this fall. Other issues included the fact that currently, the onus is on farmers to determine if the brokers or grain dealers they are selling to are licensed and bonded. Farmers agreed the burden of responsibility should be more equitably shared, given the complexity of the current marketplace.

There was also discussion about the implications of recent World Trade Organization (WTO) rulings on treatment of American-origin grain within the Canadian grain handling and transportation system. With the rapid consolidation of grain elevators across the prairies, the use of producer cars is an important tool for farmers, and there must be ways of ensuring producer cars are given a higher priority by the two major railways.

Some elevator facilities are also being allowed too much leeway in the accuracy of their weights and measures calibration, with farmers losing sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars over a period of months due to even small discrepancies in calibration.

Don Kelsey of Choceland, Martha Robbins of Delisle, and Boyd Dyck of Lucky Lake were re-elected to represent Saskatchewan on the NFU National Board. Marilyn Gillis of Wynyard was re-elected to the NFU Women's Advisory Committee.

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