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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NFU MEETS WITH FEDERAL NDP LEADER

MITCHELL, Ont.— Several NFU members and officials met with Federal NDP leader Jack Layton near Mitchell, Ontario this past week. The farmers and the NDP leader found much common ground.

The NFU told Layton that genetically-modified (GM) crops are a growing concern for Canadian farmers, especially in relation to contamination of non-GM crops. Layton responded that stopping the introduction of GM wheat is a top priority for his party. The NFU noted to Layton the extreme threat that GM wheat and other crops pose to the continued existence of organic agriculture in much of Canada.

The NFU told the NDP leader of farmers' concerns with increasing corporate control of farming and focused on the corporate takeover of hog production. As Perth/Oxford Local Vice-President Bruce Hunter noted, "Many farmers are becoming serfs. In the hog industry, many farmers are under contracts which require them to both buy their feed from, and sell their pigs to, the same corporation."

Layton and the NFU discussed how the erosion of farmers' incomes and government cutbacks leads to the decline of rural communities: the closure of rural schools and libraries and the loss of valuable programs like summer reading clubs.

They also discussed the difficulties faced by young farmers who attempt to start their own operations or take over the full financial role on their family farms. NFU Youth Advisory Member Dave Lewington pointed out the inadequacies of current safety net programs for beginning farmers. He said: "Young farmers trying to participate in safety net programs have long faced problems documenting their long-term average yields or revenues. The government has brought forward no details on how its proposed new programs would alleviate these problems."

Lewington also noted that the commodification of Supply Management quota is also adding to barriers for young farmers. He said: "The high price of quota prevents young farmers and organic farmers from diversifying into dairy, hens, or broiler chickens. This small-scale production could help meet a growing demand for local produce marketed directly from the farmer to consumer."

Ann Slater noted, "I am a full-time farmer with no other income. I make my living off of three acres by selling fresh produce direct to consumers. Agribusiness and

governments have tended to focus on export markets. There needs to be more attention paid to local marketing as a way for farmers to take more of the dollar value of their products. Ontario farmers should be growing food for the City of Toronto not only for markets in other countries.” In response, Layton recalled his involvement in forming the Toronto Food Policy Council.

The meeting with Layton was arranged by Bruce Hunter, Vice-President of the Perth/Oxford Local of the NFU and was at his farm on April 11. In attendance from the NFU were Perth/Oxford executive members Bob and Carol Passmore, Bruce Hunter, and Ann Slater as well as NFU Youth Advisory Committee Member Dave Lewington. In addition to Jack Layton, Sam Dinicol (NDP Federal Candidate Perth-Middlesex riding) and Jack Verhulst (NDP Provincial Candidate) also attended.

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