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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **NFU YOUNG FARMERS CRITICIZE SAFETY NET PROPOSALS**

**BRUSSELS, Ont.**— Count in the youth contingent of the National Farmers Union among the many farm groups who are unhappy with the federal government's safety net package, proposed under its Agriculture Policy Framework (APF).

The proposed safety net programs do little to enable young farmers in Canada to move into full partnership in their family farms. "NISA-type programs offer little hope for a young farmer who does not have the spare cash to deposit in order to get the government's matching funding," said Dave Lewington, Youth Advisory member for Ontario.

In addition to lacking funds to participate, young farmers often don't have the production history necessary to fully utilize programs that are based on three- and five-year average revenues and margins. The federal government has said that it would include provisions for beginning farmers in its proposed New NISA program, but has offered no details. "It is very frustrating the government has not provided specifics on how its proposed New NISA program would accommodate beginning farmers. For young farmers, it is impossible to know how New NISA would perform for them," said Lewington.

Lewington also said that "A 'whole farm' subsidy approach penalizes farmers who diversify their operations, and farmers who cut their costs and work harder during lean times. Do we really want to send the message to young and beginning farmers that diversifying will penalize us on the amount of government support we receive?"

Melissa Hunter, a 25-year-old farmer from the Mitchell-area of Ontario, stressed the need for Canadian agriculture policy and, most importantly, farm safety net programs to support sustainable, family farm agriculture. "The APF does not appear to be adapted to the interests of small family farms, but more in the interests of those large farmers and corporations who have direct interests in the expansion of cheap raw materials and cheaper labor. A true focus on environmentally-, financially-, and socially-sustainable agriculture is critical," said Hunter.

Some aspects of the government's proposed safety net package are positive. While few farmers have seen the proposed details of New NISA, several who have say that it includes improvements over existing programs. The move to demand-driven provincial allocation is also positive as it ensures that farmers in need will be treated equitably and

that money will flow to the regions with farm income problems. Lewington said that “While the government may be making some progress, its package is gravely compromised by unchanged and inadequate funding, the lack of caps to prevent the bulk of the money going to large corporate farms, and a failure to provide for the intergenerational transfer of family farms and the entry of new farmers.”

The NFU submitted a comprehensive report on safety nets to the federal government in January 2003. That report, entitled “*Safety Nets and the Future of the Family Farm*,” critiqued the government’s safety net proposals and detailed effective, low-cost alternatives that could end the farm crisis. Lewington concluded: “The NFU feels that safety net programs should be implemented that are based on cost of production, so that farm families earn a respectable income for their labor and investment. This assistance should be targeted to family farms, and not to giant agribusiness corporations. And there needs to be both a realistic allocation of support dollars in the medium term, and a commitment to ending the farm income crisis in the longer term.”

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