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national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NFU PRESIDENT MEETS WITH EUROPEAN AG COMMISSIONER

WINNIPEG, Manitoba - The President of the National Farmers Union (NFU) held a face-to-face meeting today with the European Agriculture Commissioner, Franz Fischler, on the eve of continuing World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations in Geneva. A final agreement on agriculture could be hammered out over the next few weeks.

During the meeting in Winnipeg, NFU President Stewart Wells told Fischler that while farmers need fair and equitable trade relations, many aspects of the current WTO agricultural trade discussions are worrisome. Among farmers' concerns is the misdirected focus on the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB).

The European Union (EU) is currently under pressure to eliminate its substantial export subsidies. In response, the EU has been pressing for the curtailment or elimination of what it has termed "State Trading Enterprises" or STEs. The EU has labeled the CWB an STE, despite the fact it is a non-governmental marketing agency that operates by and for farmers in a transparent, commercial manner.

"Farmers are not willing to put the Canadian Wheat Board and other orderly marketing systems on the table as a bargaining chip," stated Wells. "Eliminating the CWB would have no impact in terms of eliminating trade-distorting export subsidies, but it would have a devastating impact on family farmers and rural communities in western Canada." Wells noted that the United States, which is under pressure to phase out its own brand of export subsidies, may join with the EU in calling for the dismantling of STEs, in particular the CWB.

Wells represents the NFU on the Agricultural Trade Negotiations Consultations Group (ATNCG), an advisory committee of farm and food industry organizations which meets regularly with Canadian trade negotiators. The NFU has consistently urged the Canadian trade delegation to ensure domestic supply-management and orderly marketing systems are protected, and to build support for these systems among other trading partners.

The NFU President also presented Fischler with several studies done by the NFU on global trade, corporate agribusiness concentration and the farm income crisis. While trade in agricultural commodities continues to grow, the farmers' share of the income generated from that trade continues to decline. Wells said governments must address this fundamental economic imbalance if fair and equitable trade relations are to be achieved.

- 30 -

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