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national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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NFU CALLS FOR EMERGENCY ACTION TO DEAL WITH BEEF CRISIS

GRANTON, Ontario – Parliament should be reconvened as soon as possible following the election so that legislation can be introduced to deal with the crisis in the beef sector, says Don Mills, Chair of the National Farmers Union (NFU) Livestock Committee.

In a letter issued June 11 to political party leaders and agriculture critics, Mills called for two commitments:

1. That an emergency session of the House of Commons would be called as soon as possible following the June 28 election; and
2. That legislation be introduced setting a floor price for cattle.

The text of the letter reads as follows:

As you are aware, the financial crisis facing family farmers who raise beef cattle in Canada has taken a serious turn for the worse in the last few weeks. Prices for fed cattle have plummeted, and are likely to continue in a free fall as cattle held over the winter come onto the market at the same time as the leading edge of the seasonal calf run comes on stream.

Quite simply, farmers are losing money on every animal they sell, but they are forced to put their animals on the market now because all indications point to even lower prices in the near future.

The situation facing family farmers is desperate. The US border is unlikely to open over the summer. Even when the border does re-open, there are long-term systemic problems in the beef sector that must be addressed, such as corporate concentration and price manipulation by packers.

The NFU is calling on you, should your party form the government, to pledge that you will immediately reconvene Parliament in an emergency session following the election. The NFU is further urging you to pledge that you will introduce legislation during that emergency session that sets a floor price for beef cattle that the packers will have to pay to farmers.

This floor price should be set at a level that returns to farmers the same percentage of the retail value of beef that they were receiving before BSE was found in North America. This ensures a level of fairness to all sectors of the industry.

Family farmers have been pressing for justice in the marketplace since the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) crisis began over a year ago. Last March, the NFU

wrote a letter to Federal Agriculture Minister Bob Speller urging the establishment of a floor price mechanism. More recently, the Ontario Cattlemen's Association and the Canadian Cattlemen's Association have also joined the call for a floor price.

Meanwhile, the large packing companies have refused to comply with a request from the House of Commons Agriculture Committee to provide forensic auditors with financial information on alleged profiteering, and have even been found in contempt of Parliament. Instead of retreating in the face of public criticism, however, the packers have been aggressively driving down prices at the farm gate even further.

Clearly, the time has come for immediate action on this issue.

1. Will you pledge to reconvene Parliament for an emergency session immediately following the election should your party win enough seats to form a government?
2. Will you pledge to introduce legislation which enables a floor price mechanism for beef cattle to be implemented?

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