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national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MARCH 7, 2005

NFU CALLS FOR HEARINGS ON SEEDS SYSTEM, FOOD SECURITY

OTTAWA, Ontario – The National Farmers Union (NFU) today presented the federal government with hundreds of letters from people across Canada opposing any changes to the Plant Breeders Rights (PBR) Act. The presentations were made to Hon. Wayne Easter, Parliamentary Secretary to Andy Mitchell, federal minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

At a news conference on Parliament Hill preceding the presentation of the letters, NFU spokesperson Peter Dowling, a Kingston, Ontario farmer, said both rural and urban Canadians are deeply concerned about the future direction of public plant breeding, the seed system, and food security. He cited a number of budgetary, legislative and regulatory initiatives currently underway which will have a serious negative impact on the food system in Canada.

“These initiatives include, but are not limited to, the proposed changes to the PBR Act, the Seeds Act, Bill C-27 (the CFIA Enforcement Act), and reductions to publicly-funded plant breeding research,” said Dowling. “These inter-related initiatives will lead to a food system with increased corporate controls over the varieties and quality of seed available to farmers. Seeds are the foundation of the food system. Any initiatives by the government that give more rights to corporations and take options away from farmers will inevitably affect our food choices.”

The presentations were made on the eve of the close of public consultations by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) on proposed changes to the PBR Act. (The proposed changes were posted on the CFIA website November 8, 2004 and the public consultation period is scheduled to end March 8, 2005.)

At the news conference, Dowling said the public consultations on this issue have been inadequate, both in the amount of time available and in the form of the consultations themselves. He called on the federal government to institute an extensive series of public hearings across Canada with all parties involved in the food supply system in Canada, including farmers and consumers.

“Judging from the legislative and regulatory changes that are coming down the pipe, it is clear that the major seed and chemical companies have already

provided significant input and direction to the federal government,” said Dowling. “However, there has been little opportunity for other sectors, such as family farmers and consumers, to have a meaningful say in the future of the food system.”

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