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national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

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WITH ELECTION OVER, TIME TO TACKLE FARM INCOME CRISIS, SAYS NFU

SWIFT CURRENT, Sask. - The National Farmers Union congratulates all the candidates in the federal election. Now that the electorate has spoken, Parliament must immediately tackle the farm income crisis, says the President of the National Farmers Union (NFU).

Stewart Wells says the government has a fresh opportunity to address the major issue facing farm families across Canada. "Canadian farm families in all regions of the country are facing the worst farm income crisis since the 1930s," noted Wells. "It is urgent that Parliament be convened quickly so MPs can work on ways to increase the incomes of Canadian farmers."

Wells pointed out that last year, net farm income statistics revealed the average farm lost \$20,000. "While the BSE crisis aggravates the situation, the real problem is that a handful of corporations dominate every sector of Canada's food system. For example, two American-owned companies, Cargill and Tyson, control 74% of the Canadian beef packing industry. They've siphoned off millions of dollars in BSE aid money that should have gone to producers."

Canadians need to take back control of the beef sector, explained the NFU President. "Our elected representatives can't simply sit back and wait for the American border to re-open. That won't solve the underlying problem. We need a national policy for beef that includes a floor price and which reduces our over-dependence on the American market."

Wells said the new government must protect orderly marketing and supply management systems. With agricultural trade talks reaching a crucial stage in July at the World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations, there is pressure from other countries to dismantle Canada's orderly marketing agencies. This would lead to an even more rapid decline in net farm incomes.

Wells said the current focus of the WTO negotiations is on boosting export trade volumes, with prices at the farm gate considered inconsequential. Corporate traders benefit from larger volumes, especially if they can buy at low prices, he pointed out. "The people running the WTO aren't considering farm incomes at all in these negotiations."

He said it's crucial that Parliament send a strong message that these agencies are not on the bargaining table. He noted the Liberals, NDP and Bloc Québécois parties all pledged strong support for the farmer-controlled Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) during the election campaign.

"Parliament should be immediately recalled," concluded Wells. "The focus should be on ways to increase net farm income. If that means walking away from the WTO negotiations, then that's what Canadian negotiators will have to do."

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