

**NFU CALLS FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE ON FARM INCOME CRISIS**

**SASKATOON** - The National Farmers Union (NFU) is calling for an immediate emergency debate in the House of Commons to deal with the unprecedented income crisis facing Canadian farm families.

In a letter to Prime Minister Paul Martin this week, NFU President Stewart Wells said the dramatic drop in realized net farm income to negative \$13 million is without precedent in Canadian history, and urged the country's elected representatives to put the issue front and centre on the national agenda. Similar letters were also sent to the acting leader of the Conservative Party, Grant Hill, NDP Leader Jack Layton, and Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe.

Wells said realized net income from the markets alone, net of government subsidies, was negative \$5 billion. This translates into a loss of about \$20,000 per farm in 2003. "This is far worse than even the darkest years of the Great Depression," he noted.

The NFU President said it is not enough for the government and opposition politicians to simply write the income crisis off as a result of external market forces and adverse weather conditions. "It is clear from our research that while the BSE crisis, drought and a rising Canadian dollar contributed to the problem in the short term, the long-term causes of the farm income crisis are systemic," he said. "Government policies which promote corporate profits at the expense of family farms have been steadily squeezing the razor-thin operating margins of thousands of primary producers."

Wells said international trade agreements, combined with domestic deregulation policies, have allowed a few very large corporations to dominate virtually every sector of Canada's agricultural marketplace. "Corporate dominance of the market is the biggest long-term influence depressing farm gate prices," he stated.

Wells concluded an Emergency Debate on the farm income crisis should examine the full extent of corporate concentration in all aspects of the food sector – from farm inputs to transportation, wholesaling and retailing. "It is only through full disclosure of these facts that farm policy in this country can be redirected back toward family farms and healthy rural communities," he concluded.

- 30-

Contact: Stewart Wells, NFU President (306) 773-6852 or (306) 741-7694  
Terry Pugh, NFU Executive-Secretary (306) 652-9465