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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CLIMATE CHANGE THREATENS ONTARIO AGRICULTURE

ST. MARYS, Ont.—Ontario farmers can expect significant increases in temperature; more floods, droughts, and extreme weather events; and hotter, drier conditions during the main growing season. These are the conclusions of a report recently released by the David Suzuki Foundation and the Union of Concerned Scientists on the effects of climate change on the Great Lakes basin.

These changes in climate will have a significant impact on agriculture in Ontario. Although the warmer temperatures may suggest a benefit for agriculture due to a potentially longer and warmer growing season, the change in climate is more likely to have detrimental effects on the farm community.

Some of the changes outlined in the “Confronting Climate Change in the Great Lakes Basin” report include:

- a reduction in soil moisture by as much as 30% in the summer;
- higher ozone concentrations which will damage bean and horticultural crops;
- severe rainstorms during the planting and harvest seasons;
- hot and dry growing seasons;
- the expansion northward of pests and pathogens; and
- increased competition for increasingly scarce water resources for irrigation, drinking, and other uses.

The National Farmers Union has already recognized the serious implications of climate change for farmers in Ontario, and across the country, and has urged all levels of government to take immediate action to slow and reverse climate change, by significantly reducing the amount of greenhouse gas being released into the atmosphere. Some changes that need to be put in place include using more fuel-efficient transportation, using more solar and wind power, reducing the use of chemical fertilizers and reducing the distances that food travels.

Ann Slater, NFU Women’s Advisor in Ontario says, “We have developed an extremely energy-inefficient food production and distribution system. A globalized food system leads to needless food trade over 1000’s of kilometres resulting in needless emissions of carbon dioxide—a major contributor to global warming.” Instead of supporting international trade agreements that maximize food travel, the

NFU believes that governments must support localized food systems that reduce the distance food travels from farmer to table, thereby, reducing the use of fossil fuels in food distribution and processing.

The NFU supports moves toward organic and low-input agriculture that reduce the use of fossil fuels in food distribution and in the production of inputs like chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The NFU has also noted that a move towards small-scale, pasture-based livestock production can help reduce the use of fossil fuels as these livestock harvest their own forage during the growing season and rely on local forage in the winter.

A study released last week by the NAFTA Commission for Environmental Cooperation notes that Ontario is the third worst polluting jurisdiction in Canada or the United States, with the single worst offender being the coal-fired power generating plant at Nanticoke. Much of this pollution comes in the form of greenhouse gases. The NFU has called on the Ontario and federal governments to look at the Kyoto Accord as a small first step to the reduction of greenhouse gases and to take more immediate and significant steps to slow the rate of climate change by reducing the use of fossil fuels.

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