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national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NFU MEETS WITH PREMIER AND AG. MINISTER

GUELPH, Ont.—National Farmers Union Ontario Co-ordinator Peter Dowling and other farm leaders met with Ontario Premier Ernie Eves and Agriculture Minister Helen Johns yesterday. Farm leaders called for a change in direction for provincial ag. policy. After the meeting, Dowling said that "Farm leaders seemed optimistic that progress will be made in solving Ontario's farm policy problems. The new premier and minister say they want to improve the situation over the long term. Although we've heard this from other politicians, we are hopeful that Eves and Johns are sincere."

The Premier and Ag. Minister were told that farmers lack market power relative to agribusiness corporations. "There is plenty of money in the food chain. Farmers need the market power to hold onto their fair share," said Dowling.

The Premier and Ag. Minister also heard the message that Ontario's youth need support to start farming. "Government can facilitate the entry of young people and the renewal of the province's family farms," Dowling said.

The NFU raised concerns about genetically-modified (GM) foods. "The introduction of GM crops undermines farmers' market power by making them more dependent on corporations. Farmers risk becoming contract producers as companies use growers to produce proprietary GM foods." Dowling also questioned promises of profits from GM crops: "Farmers have been adopting new technologies for 50 years—chemical fertilizer, weed sprays, computers, big tractors—and we are less profitable each year. Those who believe that GM crops will make farmers richer should look carefully at the past 50 years."

Dowling also commented on the proposal that farmers need to work more closely with processors, wholesalers, and retailers. "Such co-operation will only succeed when those corporations are willing to make sure that the huge profits in the food chain are shared fairly with farmers."

Dowling observed: "Ontario farmers operate amid one of the richest and most stable markets for food in the world. Corporate profits among agribusiness transnationals are in the billions. Clearly, there is enough money in this province to allow farmers a profit. Far from being insoluble, solutions to agricultural problems abound. Farmers hope that the Ontario government will have the courage to grasp those solutions."

— 30 —

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