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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SASK. PRISON FARM SELL-OFF A BAD IDEA

SASKATOON, SK – The National Farmers Union is calling for a stop to the sell-off of the dairy herd at Riverbend Institution. The NFU argues that a valuable benefit to Canadian society is being lost in the federal government’s misguided attempt to save money. The Riverbend farm, located near Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, is one of six prison farms in Canada slated for closure. An auction is scheduled for June 23 at Saskatoon Livestock Sales in Saskatoon.

“The government is defying the wishes of the vast majority of Canadians by going ahead with the sale of the Riverbend herd,” Dianne Dowling, NFU Local 316 president, stated. “When asked, Canadians have overwhelmingly spoken in support of maintaining and revitalizing the farms which provide effective training and rehabilitation. Farm organizations, the NFU, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and others have signed a position statement to that effect. This sale makes no sense to Canadians.”

Since the planned closures became public in February of 2009, people across Canada have been rallying to keep them open. The Save the Prison Farms campaign, of which the NFU is a part, argues that prison farms serve as a valuable means of training and rehabilitation. During the campaign, former inmates and experts on rehabilitation have testified that the prison farms are good for public safety because they help to develop empathy and an ethic of hard work. However, the government has refused to release information on the recidivism or employment rates of inmates who pass through the prison farm.

“The federal government has claimed that closing the farms will save money,” said Dowling. “But they’ve refused to release any information about the farm’s profitability. And replacing the food they produce from outside will be even more expensive.”

The parliamentary committee on public safety passed a motion calling on Vic Toews, the Minister of Public Safety, to immediately halt the closures, and set up a full and independent assessment of the value of the prison program. Kingston City Council passed a similar motion last week. So far, both motions have been ignored by the federal government.

There has been strong mobilization in Kingston, Ontario, which is home to two of the six prison farms. On June 6, author Margaret Atwood joined more than a thousand people in Kingston at a rally and march to the regional Corrections headquarters, where a call for a moratorium was posted on the front door. Campaigners in Kingston have set up a 24-hour watch station across from the Frontenac Institution, in case Corrections attempts to sneak the herd out to auction. Hundreds of people have volunteered to be called up day or night to blockade any cattle trucks.

On June 15th, a delegation of First Nations, English and French Canadians went to Parliament Hill by canoe and delivered a message including the statement: “Prison farms belong to all

Canadians. Stop ignoring democracy. Save the farms now!” The federal government has not responded.

“The Conservatives promised accountability, transparency and fiscal management,” said Dowling. “But we sure haven’t seen that. It’s time for a moratorium on the closures, and a full independent review.”

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For background information, go to:

<http://www.saveourprisonfarms.ca/>