

National Office
2717 Wentz Ave.
Saskatoon, Sask., S7K 4B6
Tel (306) 652-9465
Fax (306) 664-6226



national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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YOUNG FARMERS FROM ACROSS COUNTRY TO MEET ON VANCOUVER ISLAND

Saskatoon, Sask. - The National Farmers Union (NFU) Youth will meet in Saanich, B.C. from March 10-12, 2011 for the Fourth Annual NFU Youth Leadership Workshop. The meeting will include debate on the current issues and policy of the NFU Youth, local farm tours, and dialogue with a number of local organizations and young farmers.

This will be the first meeting of the NFU Youth on the west coast. As the population of British Columbia becomes more aware of current food and farming issues, there has been a resurgence of interest among younger people to take up farming. This is a necessary shift, given that more people are demanding local food that is produced using ecologically sound agricultural methods. "One thing is certain in Canadian agriculture today; there is a pressing need for new and young farmers across the country," stated Cammie Harbottle, NFU Youth President. Harbottle, originally from B.C., now farms in Nova Scotia.

The growing movement of young people towards farming is not restricted to any particular area in Canada, although certain areas are showing more activity than others. A number of new farmers are starting out their careers close to urban centres in a low capital investment scenario that focuses on local food. "It's not possible to know how many at this point, but there is definitely a number of young, small-scale farmers emerging in areas around major cities in Ontario and B.C.," states Paul Slomp, NFU Youth Vice-President. Slomp, who grew up on an Alberta dairy farm, now operates a beef Community-supported Agriculture (CSA) in Ottawa.

The group is meeting in this area is to connect with a vibrant young and urban farmer network, and to gain insight into a Vancouver-based urban farm. SOLEfood farm was established in 2009 and operates in Vancouver's Downtown East Side. The farmers at SOLEfood grow food for local restaurants and farmers markets.

The recent change in NFU policy - to allow urban farmers to become full members - has not only increased the potential membership for the organization, it has also opened the door for connections to be made between traditional rural farmers and their urban counterparts. Seann Dory sees this as a critical time for partnership building. "I think we're starting to see people in urban centres really understand how important farming issues are, not only to their health, but the environment. For the first time in generations, we have an opportunity to build a common voice around food and the people who grow it," stated Dory, the director of SOLEfood.

The NFU Youth focus on creating a strong grassroots membership of young farmers to develop resilience in Canada's food and farming systems. The previous three workshops have taken place in Nova Scotia, Ontario and Saskatchewan.

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For more information, please contact:

Paul Slomp	NFU Youth Vice-President	(613) 898-9136
Seann Dory	SOLEfood farm Director	(604) 837-1601