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**national farmers union**

***In Union Is Strength***

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **CWB ELECTION REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS WOULD HOBBLE BOARD**

The federal government should refrain from implementing many of the recommendations contained in the report of the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) Election Review Panel, says Fred Tait, Manitoba Coordinator of the National Farmers Union (NFU).

The report, which was posted unannounced on the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) website at the end of November, contains a number of recommendations which would disenfranchise thousands of farmers and also seriously hinder the normal business operations of the CWB.

Tait said it is important the report be widely discussed at public meetings across Western Canada so farmers become fully aware of the recommendations and their potential implications.

The panel recommended that farmers who deliver less than 40 tonnes of grain to the CWB in two successive crop years be dropped from the voters list. Tait said this would eliminate a significant percentage of farmers, including those whose crop yields and quality may be reduced by adverse weather conditions. "A malting barley crop can become feed barley virtually overnight if there's a bad frost, as happened in 2004," noted Tait. In addition, retired landowners who cash rent their acreage to others would not show up as having any deliveries, but they have a significant interest in the CWB and its operations.

The NFU had recommended to the panel that the voting criteria should be based on one permit book, one vote; with no individual being allowed to vote more than once. "The principle of one person, one vote is a fundamental tenet of democracy," stated Tait. "The CWB is not a limited stock corporation where the larger shareholders' ballots carry more weight."

The Review Panel also recommended that the incumbent CWB Board of Directors seeking re-election be prohibited from speaking to the media or appearing at public functions as a representative of the CWB during the election period; and that no CWB payments or program announcements be made or CWB publications be printed during that period as well. Tait said this recommendation would hobble the CWB unnecessarily.

“This would seriously limit the CWB’s ability to carry on business as usual during a three-month period,” he noted. “This would be especially damaging if the timing of the election period is changed to begin December 1 and end in late February. This is the time when final payments are normally issued.”

He noted that the CWB directors should also be free to defend the CWB against attacks by anti-orderly marketing candidates during the election period.

Tait said the Election Review panel’s recommendation to have an “independent election commissioner” conduct the election does not offer any improvement to the current situation. He reiterated the NFU’s call for the federal government to amend the Elections Act to allow Elections Canada to oversee the balloting.

The NFU Coordinator said there are three panel recommendations the NFU agreed with: improving the ability of candidates to communicate with voters, retaining the preferential balloting system; and disallowing CWB funding of any candidates’ campaign expenses.

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