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DANGEROUS WTO PROCESS RESULTS IN “LEAST WORST” OUTCOME

HONG KONG—“Canadian farmers should be happy, at least for now, that Minister of Agriculture Andy Mitchell and Parliamentary Secretary Wayne Easter were able to fend off attacks against orderly marketing agencies at WTO talks in Hong Kong. The two, along with trade negotiators and farm leaders, prevented calamity for farmers, at least in the short term,” said NFU President Stewart Wells. Wells, along with NFU Women’s President Colleen Ross, is in Hong Kong.

Wells said that “There was tremendous pressure on Canadian officials to surrender the CWB and supply management. The WTO talks continue to pose a tremendous threat to our marketing agencies. We’ve come out of these meetings without significant casualties. But that may not be the case if talks continue,” said Wells.

Ross called the Hong Kong talks a failure, but noted that the outcomes for Canadian farmers could have been even worse. “In terms of helping developing nation farmers, there’s not much here. The promise of the Doha development agenda, if it ever was real, is largely dead. Canadian farmers gained little or nothing in Hong Kong. But at least we seem to have come out of this round of talks with farmers’ marketing agencies in tact,” said Ross.

Wells noted the good work of many of the farm leaders, including those from the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and Canada’s supply management agencies. He was extremely critical, however, of some politicians and lobby groups. “MPs David Anderson and Ted Menzies and the Canadian Agri-Food Trade Alliance (CAFTA) all worked tirelessly against the interests of farmers. CAFTA, whose members include Cargill and the Canola Growers, promoted an anti-farmer, corporate agenda,” said Wells.

Wells concluded: “This deal is focused on trade, not on increasing farmers’ incomes or their wellbeing. Meanwhile the trade agenda is shaping everything from Canadian seed policy to our farm support programs. And foreign nations are pushing to strip Canadian farmers of their marketing agencies. This is a bad process for farmers. While we avoided the worst this week in Hong Kong, we can’t count on similar outcomes in the future. We must work vigorously to protect farmers’ marketing agencies.”

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(Note: NFU President Stewart Wells is currently in transit back to Canada from Hong Kong)