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national farmers union

In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FARMERS OBJECT TO TRADE MINISTER'S COMMENTS AT WTO

National Farmers Union (NFU) representatives are deeply concerned about remarks made by Canada's Minister of International Trade, Jim Peterson, at the opening of the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Hong Kong.

NFU President Stewart Wells and NFU Women's President Colleen Ross are in Hong Kong this week as part of a delegation of Canadian farmers. They expressed dismay at Peterson's comments to a group of reporters that he is "prepared to reduce our support for agriculture in a way that is very real, and would actually cut into our domestic programs."

During that press conference, Peterson also said that "we (Canadians) are prepared to reduce tariffs on agricultural goods." Peterson made no exemption for supply management, a sector that recently received a unanimous vote of confidence from the Parliament of Canada.

Peterson also stressed that Canada "would remove all government financial support for the (Canadian) Wheat Board."

Peterson confirmed that trade deals over the past ten years have aggravated the problem of low net farm incomes. "Has this caused certain problems for some of our producers, of course it has," stated Peterson. "Is it worth it as part of our contribution to global liberalization and development? Absolutely."

Wells said Peterson's dismissal of the farm income crisis is reprehensible. "Canadian farmers have just come through two of the worst net income years ever, with average per farm losses of between \$10,000 and \$20,000," he stated. "Yet our Trade Minister is willing to increase the pain for Canadian farmers."

Ross added that corporate concentration in the global marketplace has forced prices at the farm gate lower and lower. "Canadian farmers have to rely increasingly on crop insurance, cash advance programs, and ad-hoc disaster assistance (BSE-type) programs," she said. "But Mr. Peterson's remarks indicate these programs appear to be on the chopping block."

The Canadian Minister of Agriculture, Andy Mitchell, was not present at the press conference where Peterson made his remarks. The NFU will be asking Mitchell to intervene quickly on behalf of Canadian farmers.

“It’s essential that the Canadian trade negotiators be instructed to not sacrifice supply-management agencies, the CWB, or other important programs,” concluded Ross.

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*Please note that there is a 12 to 16 hour time difference between Canada and Hong Kong
For example: 10:30 AM CST Dec 13 in Canada is 12:37 AM Dec 14 in Hong Kong*

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