

National Office
2717 Wentz Ave.
Saskatoon, Sask.
S7K 4B6
Tel (306) 652-9465
Fax (306) 664-6226
E-Mail: nfu@nfu.ca



national farmers union

In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FARMERS PAYING A HIGH PRICE FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE DEALS

The tragic death of a 43-year old farmer from South Korea late last month confirms the unacceptable human costs of global trade deals that put profits before people, says Colleen Ross, Women's President of the National Farmers Union (NFU).

Ross, a farmer from Ontario and one of two NFU representatives traveling to the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Meeting in Hong Kong in mid-December, said government leaders and trade negotiators must take full responsibility for the massive negative consequences of free trade agreements.

Jeon Yong-Cheol was one of many farmers who were severely beaten by police during a peaceful protest in Seoul, South Korea in mid-November. He died a few days later as a direct result of his injuries. The farmers were protesting the South Korean government's decision to open the border to a flood of imported rice.

The "National Peasants Rally against the Ratification of the Rice Agreement" marked the culmination of two weeks of actions, including hunger strikes, across South Korea. Two farmers also committed suicide to protest the sacrifice of their nation's food sovereignty. On November 23, however, the Korean National Assembly ratified the free trade deal with China, the United States and seven other countries.

Ross said corporate violence against farmers is not confined to the global south. "Neoliberal free trade deals disempower farmers, create poverty and increase hunger around the world," she stated. "The WTO pushes that agenda, regardless of whether farmers get in the way or not."

She said as negotiators prepare for the upcoming WTO Ministerial meeting, farmers from all over the world are also preparing to descend upon Hong Kong with their own peaceful agenda. "Through growing international organizations such as Via Campesina, farmers and peasants are pushing back," she said. "At the WTO meeting in Cancun, Mexico in 2003, the world watched as Korean farmer Lee Kyung Hae was driven to take his own life under the banner: 'WTO Kills farmers'. But has Lee Kyung Hae and farmers just like him died in vain? We think not!"

Ross said farmers in Canada and elsewhere are "waking up" and lobbying their governments to take food and agriculture out of the WTO altogether. "Liberalized trade

and market access has not and will not enhance food security or farm livelihoods,” she said. “In Korea, that took the form of a Rice Agreement. But in Canada, it is the danger of trading away our Canadian Wheat Board and supply-management systems. These are the only remaining mechanisms left to farmers to ensure farm livelihoods.”

Ross said the WTO is clearly not about food sovereignty, farmers or citizens. “It is all about wealth for a few at the expense of entire civilizations and cultures. We need to ramp up our global campaign now as we head to Hong Kong.”

Jan Slomp, NFU Alberta Coordinator, echoing Ross’ concerns, said it is apparent the interests of farmers are sacrificed to facilitate the trade requirements of transnational corporations. “We have glaring examples of that here in Canada,” he explained. “Recently, the House of Commons unanimously passed a resolution in support of supply-management, but the Minister of Agriculture is still willing to compromise.”

The NFU is demanding Canadian negotiators not sacrifice the CWB single-desk marketing ability or supply management at the trade talks. Ross and NFU President Stewart Wells will be representing Canadian farmers as part of a large peaceful farmer delegation at the WTO talks in Hong Kong December 13-18.

- 30 -

Contact: Colleen Ross, NFU Women’s President (613) 652-1552
Jan Slomp, NFU Alberta Coordinator (403) 843-2068
Annette Desmarais, Via Campesina liaison (306) 585-5066
Terry Pugh, NFU Executive-Secretary (306) 652-9465