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In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FEDERAL GOVERNMENT COMPROMISES CWB ELECTION REVIEW PANEL

The Federal Government has compromised a panel intended to review the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) election process, and the resulting panel is “an embarrassment to the Government and an insult to farmers,” says Stewart Wells, President of the National Farmers Union (NFU).

Wells said the appointment of Greg Porozni to the panel has created new problems.

“The Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) backgrounder on the panel members fails to mention that Greg Porozni ran in the 2002 CWB director elections and was soundly defeated,” said Wells. “More importantly, the AAFC backgrounder also fails to point out that Porozni was supported in his campaign by an organization called “CARE” which was previously found to have funneled money from grain companies to anti-CWB candidates while not registering as an intervenor.”

As well, the AAFC backgrounder fails to mention that during the 2002 CWB election, Porozni was found to be working with a secret committee of Monsanto to “assist in ensuring the positive market introduction of Roundup Ready wheat in Canada”. And finally, the Government backgrounder fails to mention that Porozni failed to disclose that he was working under the terms of a confidential Monsanto agreement.

“How can a person that was at the centre of so many election problems possibly be called on to correct the problems?” asked Wells. “If the NFU is consulted by the panel, what will we do? Ask Mr. Porozni to leave the room while we have an objective discussion of the problems in which he was a participant?”

“Surely if the Government needed to appoint an anti-CWB campaigner to the panel, they could have found someone who was not a failed candidate and also working under a Monsanto agreement at the time,” said Wells. “Appointing Mr. Porozni to the panel now compounds the original conflict-of-interest questions. Any recommendations aimed at improving the fairness and transparency of CWB elections will now have to go through the filter of a panel with Mr. Porozni on it.”

Wells concluded that the NFU has consistently raised many legitimate questions and concerns over the governance and policing of the CWB elections since 1998. “Our concerns ranged from the need for involvement of an independent, non-partisan agency like Elections Canada; to concerns over candidate financing; grain companies funneling money to anti-CWB candidates, conflict-of-interest and non-disclosure issues; and candidate over-spending,” he said. “It is probable that we have raised more issues and have had more correspondence with the government and election coordinators than all of the other farm organizations combined. Even if the panel chooses to consult with us, these legitimate views and concerns of farmers are likely to have a very short shelf life on Mr. Porozni’s panel.”

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