

## National Farmers Union

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### CONTINENTAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION UNDERMINES FOOD SECURITY

“Deep integration between Canada and the United States is not a theory or a fear,” says Maude Barlow, Chair of the Council of Canadians and author of *Too Close for Comfort: Canada’s future within Fortress North America*. “It is a reality.”

Speaking to the 36<sup>th</sup> annual national convention of the National Farmers Union (NFU) in Ottawa November 17, Barlow said Canada’s food safety is increasingly being jeopardized through “harmonization” with US standards and regulations.

“For several years, a plethora of task forces, working groups, commissions, coordinating committees, and cross-border consultations have been operating to harmonize Canada-US programs and procedures,” she told NFU delegates from across Canada. “But much of it goes far beyond common-sense coordination of security and trade. What is taking place now, totally off the radar screen of most Canadians, is the incremental and systematic harmonization of Canadian and American regulations and standards governing health, food safety and all aspects of the environment.”

Barlow said the end result is “massive deregulation” of regulatory, environmental and inspection systems. This has benefited big business by boosting exports to the US, but it has also put the environment, and the health of Canadians, in danger.

She cited the federal government’s recent “Smart Regulation” initiative as a framework for downward harmonization. “Smart regulation is a process to bring regulatory regimes in line with international trade and investment policies,” she explained. “All regulation in Canada must now conform to a dual, and almost always conflicting, mandate: to protect the health and safety of Canadians while promoting Canadian competitiveness in a global economy that is increasingly deregulated.”

In the end, promoting competitiveness is given a higher priority, and regulations are shaped to meet trade requirements at the expense of Canadian sovereignty. “Fewer and fewer decisions will be made in Canada,” she said.

Several pieces of legislation aimed facilitating this change are currently before Parliament, including Bill C-27, the *Canadian Food Inspection Agency Enforcement Act*. The CFIA has a conflicting mandate to both protect the food supply of Canadians and also to facilitate trade in food, animals, plants and related products. Under the new law, Canada’s food security is threatened because it will mean the end to any independent policy on food production, inspection and enforcement in Canada.

“Bill C-27 will give the CFIA the power to make bilateral agreements that force Canada to adopt the regulatory practices of the US,” stated Barlow. “It will authorize it to privatize Canadian food inspection services, force it to share information about Canadians with the US government; and enshrine the risk-cost-benefit approach to the enforcement of all food and agriculture legislation.”

She said under a harmonized system, any drug or food product that is “tested once” in the US and approved for the market, would have to be accepted in Canada as well.

“The ‘tested once’ policy is a key recommendation of Smart Regulations,” she said.

“This would mean that any hormone, chemical additive, antibiotic, or genetically engineered food approved in the United States would have to be accepted in Canada. In the 1990s, Canadians were successful in denying Monsanto a patent for bovine growth hormone – a controversial hormone that increases milk production in cows but has negative side effects for both cows and humans.”

“But American health and consumer groups were not able to get their government to ban it , and it is now used in most milk production in the United States,” she continued.

“Under a ‘tested once’ policy, Canada would have little choice but to allow bovine growth hormone into the Canadian dairy industry.”

Barlow concluded that international trade agreements are used as vehicles to push for deregulation and harmonization. But she added that the vast majority of people in all countries support food sovereignty and family-farm based food production.

The NFU 36<sup>th</sup> annual national convention continues until November 19 at the Ottawa West Travelodge Hotel.

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