

National Farmers Union

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MINISTER OF AG. ADDRESSES NFU CONVENTION

Ottawa Ont.—“We need to find a way to ensure more of the wealth generated in the agriculture industry flows down to the primary producer. In my view, the problem isn’t the ability of agriculture to generate wealth—it does, it does it well, and it does it extensively. The challenge is to make sure that that wealth is distributed appropriately along the value chain,” said Canadian Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Andy Mitchell. Mitchell was addressing the NFU’s Annual National Convention today in Ottawa.

NFU members reacted positively to the Minister’s acknowledgement that the farm crisis isn’t caused by farmer inefficiency or lack of production, but that the problem is other players capturing revenues and profits that should rightly go to farm families.

Mitchell noted that he’d met with Provincial Ministers of Agriculture to discuss how to implement the recommendations of the report he commissioned: *Empowering Canadian Farmers in the Marketplace*. Farm organizations across Canada have responded extremely positively to that report.

While they reacted positively to the Minister’s comments, NFU members were worried by the answers that Mitchell gave to specific and important questions. Taking turns at the microphones, NFU farmer members asked the minister if he would assure them that the Canadian government would safeguard the Canadian Wheat Board at upcoming World Trade Organization talks; whether the government would safeguard supply management at those talks; and whether the government would say “no” to Terminator Technology (a technique wherein seeds are genetically modified to be sterile after a single generation).

Minister Mitchell refrained from giving assurances on any of these key issues. While telling farmers at the Convention his government would work hard to safeguard the CWB and supply management, he would not guarantee that these critical marketing agencies would escape fatal injury in Hong Kong or in coming months.

“Listening to Minister Mitchell confirms our uneasiness. Farmers’ critical marketing agencies are under grave threat at these trade talks and the Canadian government is far from confident that it can protect those agencies. And the government is similarly unsure that it can prevent biotech companies from introducing Terminator sterile seed technologies. Farmers should be very, very concerned,” said NFU President Stewart Wells.

The NFU Convention continues at the Travelodge West through Friday and Saturday.

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