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national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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IS THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT AIMING TO KILL THE FAMILY FARM?

Comments by Ontario Assistant Deputy Agriculture Minister Jim Wheeler which appeared in the April 4 edition of the Ontario Farmer appear to indicate the provincial government is deliberately sacrificing family farms on the altar of the marketplace.

National Farmers Union (NFU) Ontario Board member Grant Robertson says the comments attributed to Wheeler in the newspaper constitute “a direct assault” on the province’s family farms. He said the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Leona Dombrowsky, should immediately disassociate herself and her government from these comments.

The Ontario Farmer article quoted Wheeler as saying the marketplace should continue to weed out “uncompetitive” farmers. “Wheeler said that agriculture farm policies should be directed to the commercial-sized operations and that social policies should be implemented to deal with the other operations,” stated the Ontario Farmer article. Wheeler also indicated he “tries to discourage his staff from thinking of the agricultural community as farm families, ‘they are really hydro workers, who farm on the side’.”

Robertson said the Deputy Minister’s faith in the marketplace as an indicator of efficiency and competitiveness is sadly misplaced. “Family farmers are the most efficient sector of the economy,” he said. “But government policies have allowed agribusiness corporations to capture excessive power in the marketplace at the expense of farmers. As a result, the wealth created by family farms is pocketed by these corporations.”

Robertson added the disparaging remarks about farmers who are forced to earn off-farm income to take care of their families and pay the bills during this crisis displays a callous disregard for rural communities.

“Unless I missed something in the last election, this government was not given a mandate to make the family farm extinct,” said Robertson. “A significant part of our farm business is dealing with the public, and from my experience, most people want to buy food grown by family farmers connected to their community. The government appears to be seriously out of step with the public on this.”

Robertson said comments like this from an Assistant Deputy Minister indicate a serious lack of respect on the part of government to the rural communities whose interests they

are supposed to represent. “It’s called the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs,” concluded Robertson. “Not the Ministry of Corporate Agribusiness.”

- 30 -

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