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**national farmers union**  
*In Union Is Strength*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**MPPs' SALARY INCREASE DOESN'T REFLECT REALITY, SAYS NFU**

Members of the Ontario Legislature who are struggling financially should take a page from the province's farmers who are forced to take off-farm jobs to make ends meet, says Grant Robertson, National Farmers Union Board member for Ontario.

"If politicians can't make enough from their full-time work as elected representatives, perhaps it's time for them to take an off-Queen's Park job to supplement their income," said Robertson. "Farmers have continually demanded that governments implement long-term solutions to the farm income crisis so family farmers are not forced to take two or sometimes three off-farm jobs to keep their operations afloat. But the only 'income deficiency' that politicians seem to care about is their own paycheque."

Robertson, who farms near Paisley, Ontario, says the proposed raise to MPP salaries is a "slap in the face" to the province's financially hard-pressed farmers. Farm incomes in Ontario are at near-record lows, and farmers are increasingly relying on debt financing and off-farm income to compensate. Farm debt in Ontario grew from \$4.8 billion in 1981 to \$12.1 billion in 2004 and continues to grow. Calls for a Risk Management Plan (RMP) from a wide range of farm groups have fallen on deaf ears in Queen's Park.

"Politicians have failed to stem the decline of rural Ontario," added Robertson, "Yet they seem to think their efforts should be rewarded with a pay hike. Food is a basic necessity, and farmers are essential to the economy, yet little action has been taken. The NFU challenges all MPPs, particularly the Minister of Agriculture and those representing rural ridings, to forgo any raise until Ontario implements realistic solutions to stop the bleeding in farm incomes."

Robertson concluded that despite all the evidence of the farm income crisis, farmers are often lectured about how support programs may be misused on "non-essential" items. "I think the people of Ontario should be concerned that any MPP pay raise may be misused for luxury items like vacations and new cars," he said. "MPPs should be required to submit receipts for all spending related to this government income program."

- 30 -

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