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national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NFU HOLDS REGIONAL MEETING IN PEACE RIVER COUNTRY

Members of the National Farmers Union (NFU) in the Peace River country of Alberta and British Columbia met in Grande Prairie, Alberta this past week to elect two Directors to the NFU National Board.

Peter Eggers of La Glace, Alberta, and Neil Peacock of Sexsmith, Alberta were chosen by the membership to lead the organization in Region 8. Sandra Mark, who farms on Vancouver Island, was elected to the NFU Women's Advisory Committee. Region 8 of the NFU includes the province of BC as well as the Alberta Peace River area.

Colleen Ross, NFU Women's President, addressed the meeting on the farm income crisis. She said while gross farm income has gone up over the last two decades, realized net farm income has actually declined. This means that even though farmers are producing more wealth by incorporating greater efficiencies in their operations, they aren't the ones who benefit. "Instead, it's the big agribusiness companies who control the marketplace who are benefiting," she said. "We've embraced every new technology that's come along. We've been so busy working that we haven't paid attention to the fact that control over the marketplace has been taken away from us."

Ross, who farms near Iroquois, Ontario, said farm input costs have skyrocketed as a result of increasing oil prices, forcing farmers to rely even more on farm debt. "Farm debt is over \$50 billion," she explained. "That debt is like a rubber band that's been stretched as far as possible, and now because of rising interest rates and higher input costs we're expected to stretch it even further. It's only a matter of time till we reach the breaking point."

Ross said farmers need to reclaim market power through ensuring the Canadian Wheat Board single-desk is retained, and by protecting supply-management systems. There is also a need to challenge the large meat packing companies, she added, noting Cargill now owns 50% of the Canadian meat packing capacity.

Art Macklin of Grande Prairie, a former NFU President and current Director for the area on the Canadian Wheat Board, said the upcoming CWB Director elections this fall will be crucial. Macklin, a strong supporter of the CWB single-desk, has announced he is a candidate in those elections. He said the future of the CWB must be decided by farmers.

Neil Peacock, who also serves as Chair of the Peace Country Tender Beef Co-op, provided an update on the progress of the producer-owned meat packing plant, which is scheduled to start construction in Dawson Creek, BC in the near future. The plant is based on a co-operative philosophy, and is designed to have a positive impact on the community, the economy and the environment, he said.

Delegates to the meeting also heard a presentation on surface rights conflicts between landowners and the oil and gas industry.

A resolution calling on the organization to formulate a marketing plan to achieve higher prices for grass seed was passed by the convention.

UPCOMING NFU REGIONAL MEETINGS:

The NFU is holding a regional meeting for **Region 7 (Alberta)** this coming Saturday, **June 17** at the Calmar Curling Rink in Calmar, Alberta. The NFU **Region 6 (Saskatchewan)** regional convention is scheduled for Wapiti Valley Regional Park near Melfort, Saskatchewan on **July 5 and 6**. The NFU **Region 5 (Manitoba)** regional meeting takes place in Onanole, Manitoba on Saturday, **July 15**.

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