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national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WESTERN PREMIERS BETRAY FARMERS, CONSUMERS AND ENVIRONMENT

“Comments on Canadian supply-management programs contained in a recent news release issued by the Western Premiers amount to an attack on Canadian farmers, consumers and the environment,” says Stewart Wells, President of the National Farmers Union (NFU).

The Western Premiers issued the news release at the end of their conference in Gimli, Manitoba last week. In their release, the Premiers call on the federal government to sanction “cuts to over-quota tariffs” on “sensitive products” including dairy. This would effectively open up the supply-managed dairy sector to massive imports from the US and other countries.

Wells questioned the Premiers’ assertion that opening up the Canadian market to imported dairy products will lead to increased “market access” for grains, oilseeds and livestock. In effect, he said, such a position sacrifices an existing stable, profitable Canadian market for an unstable, unprofitable international market. He noted over the past two decades, increased exports have resulted in lower, not higher, net farm incomes.

“Time and again, Canada’s supply-management programs have proven to be a net benefit to Canadian farmers and consumers,” he said. “A typical basket of dairy products in Canada costs 27% less than similar products in the United States.”

He noted that over the last twenty years, supply-managed commodities (where production is matched to Canadian demand) have consistently provided fair returns to farmers from the marketplace instead of from tax transfers. “To attack, undermine and erode the brightest light in Canadian net farm incomes is a short-sighted mistake on the part of the Western Premiers,” stated Wells.

As well, with the emphasis on climate change, governments should be looking for opportunities to support local food systems, he added. “Local food systems decrease the energy used to transport food products around the world. Forcing Canadians to import supply-managed products like dairy from New Zealand or the United States consumes far more of the world’s energy supplies and increases greenhouse gas emissions.”

Wells pointed out the Western Premiers seem more intent on destroying Canadian supply-management than working to pressure other countries to match the magnitude of

market access that Canada already offers. “If this is correct, then the Western Premiers are merely pandering to the global corporate food trading companies,” stated Wells, “even though these policies have been proven to destroy the incomes of Canadian farmers.”

“The NFU is appalled at the comments made by the Premiers,” concluded Wells. “Undermining both farm incomes and the environment while at the same time driving up the cost of food to the consumer is a ‘lose-lose-lose’ game. We strongly urge the Western Premiers to re-think their positions. Failing that, we urge the Federal Government to dismiss their anti-farmer rhetoric around the WTO negotiations.”

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