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national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NO MANDATE FOR CHANGE TO CWB: NFU CALLS ON HARPER TO RESPECT CWB DIRECTORS

Even with the full weight of the Harper government and a hideously-flawed plebiscite, the Conservatives could not get the plebiscite result they were looking for,” says Stewart Wells, President of the National Farmers Union (NFU). “I’m not surprised at the outcome because when you ask a misleading question, you will get a misleading result. The anti-CWB options – combined together - received 62%, but Option 2 was deliberately misleading and offered farmers an unrealistic expectation.”

The NFU warned farmers that a vote for Option 2 would be counted by the federal government as a vote against the CWB, and the announcement by Strahl has confirmed that to be the case. “Even so, we know that many farmers voted for Option 2 thinking they were supporting the CWB single desk,” stated Wells.

Wells pointed out that in Manitoba, a clear majority of farmers voted in favour of the CWB single desk. A strong vote in favour of the single desk was also recorded by Saskatchewan farmers.

For the past year, the federal government has been trying to destroy the CWB single desk sales advantage. This advantage has been shown to be worth more than \$600 million annually to farmers – over and above what they would receive from the marketplace alone. Wells said the recent mickey mouse barley plebiscite was really nothing more than a vehicle for anti-CWB campaigners, including the federal government, to continue to smear the CWB.

The plebiscite process was seriously flawed:

1. It contained a misleading “marketing choice” option which even the federal government’s own task force admitted would be unworkable;
2. It employed wording which legitimate pollsters have described as “bizarre” and which was designed to yield the result sought by the government;
3. There was no public access to a voters’ list prior to the plebiscite;
4. Multiple ballots were sent out to individuals;
5. The ballots were identifiable and not secret;
6. Voters contacted after the ballots were mailed in were asked by KPMG to provide sanction for the destruction of their ballots, or ballots of others;
7. Major farm organizations were not allowed to scrutinize the ballot counting procedure;

8. There were no third-party spending limits on the vote;
9. Conservative Government MPs campaigned actively on the issue, while the CWB was bound by a government-imposed gag order and unable to defend the single desk option.

The NFU is once again calling on the Harper government to respect the choices that farmers made in the recent CWB Director elections. (These elections were fair until the Harper government tampered with the voters' list while the campaign was underway.) In the CWB elections, farmers voted for strong single desk supporters in 4 out of 5 districts.

Wells concluded the prolonged harassment of the CWB by the federal government is:

- embarrassing customers;
- costing farmers money through severance, election costs, downgrading of bonds, etc;
- politicizing the CWB issue and dividing the rural community;
- removing control of the CWB from farmers and their elected Directors;
- hurting farmers' market power;
- undermining Canada's long-standing democratic traditions and values.

The Harper government has indicated it will introduce regulatory changes to remove barley from the CWB single desk by August 1, 2007. But Wells said the plebiscite process was so flawed it does not constitute a legitimate consultation.

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