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national farmers union

In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Canadian Livestock Farmers in Crisis: NFU Convention Urges Immediate Action

The federal government must:

1. Distribute immediate, targeted, capped financial aid to family farm livestock producers;
2. Force Canada's dominant packers and retailers to open their books so farmers and taxpayers can learn who is pocketing livestock-sector profits; and
3. Launch cross-Canada hearings into the crisis hammering family farm livestock producers.

National Farmers Union (NFU) delegates meeting at their Annual National Convention this weekend in London, Ontario passed resolutions calling for all three measures.

Family farm hog farmers and cow-calf producers are facing a price collapse and rising feed costs. Extremely low prices mean that farmers are losing money on every animal they send to market. "Unless action is taken immediately, we could lose a significant portion of this country's cow-calf producers and virtually all our remaining independent hog producers. This is one of the worst crises livestock farmers have faced in a generation," said Ontario NFU Coordinator Grant Robertson.

Robertson pinned part of the blame on packers and retailers. "Every year, the spread widens between what farmers get and what consumers pay," he stated. "Every year, packers and retailers take more for themselves. There is intense concentration in the processing sector. Two companies control three-quarters of our beef-packing capacity. During the BSE crisis, those packers took control of several major feedlots. Family farm livestock producers are being bled dry by powerful packers and retailers. The long-term solution is to rebalance power and profits. But the short-term solution must be to keep farmers alive financially until we can implement long-term solutions."

NFU Delegates meeting in London November 22, 23, and 24 passed three resolutions calling for immediate, short-term action on the livestock crisis: The first called for "graduated payments to farmers up to a cap of \$100,000 based on current market losses." These payments would be outside of CAIS and targeted directly to producers in order to ensure that this taxpayer money is not captured by the dominant packers, or by packer-controlled feedlots, as was the case with the BSE assistance.

The second resolution called on the House of Commons Agriculture Committee to force the dominant beef and pork packers and food retailers to open their books so that farmers, policy-makers, and taxpayers can find out who is taking the profits out of our meat and livestock sectors.

The third resolution called on the Ag. Committee to launch “an immediate inquiry into the cause and impact of the financial crisis facing Canada’s livestock farmers” and to “provide primary producers ample opportunity to participate in this inquiry by holding one or more meetings in rural communities in each province.”

In addition to these immediate measures, the NFU is also preparing advice to federal and provincial policymakers on medium and long-term measures that will restructure the livestock sectors to restore the viability of family farms and to prevent the need for future taxpayer support.

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