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national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THRONE SPEECH INDICATES NO CHANGE IN DIRECTION BY GOVERNMENT

The Speech from the Throne indicates the Harper Government is unwilling to change direction, says the President of the National Farmers Union (NFU). “Policies that have reduced the number of farmers, especially young farmers, in Canada, are simply reinforced in this throne speech,” says Stewart Wells.

Wells said the few ambiguous sentences devoted to agriculture in the throne speech reveal the government is intent on pursuing policies that undermine farmers’ market power. “This government will say and do anything to destroy the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) single desk,” he said. “They are promising to enact ‘market choice’ – the code for The destruction of the CWB’s single desk selling advantage - but they don’t specify whether that is just for barley or whether they also intend to include wheat.”

The government’s agenda includes a much-criticized new Agricultural Policy Framework (APF) entitled “Growing Forward” that simply continues the failed policies of the past. “The last five years (the APF years) have been the worst in history for realized net farm income,” stated Wells. He also questioned the government’s commitment to supply-management, given its obsession with enacting an open market for barley and wheat. “Supply-management is the one bright spot in Canadian agriculture, but I strongly suspect this government’s support for supply-management is very superficial, given its past record at the World Trade Organization (WTO) talks. They’re paying lip service to supply-management because they realize it’s a vote-getter in Quebec and Ontario,” he noted.

Biofuels were mentioned, but the NFU President says the wisdom of government-promoted biofuels is questionable, and may be creating many more problems than solutions.

Wells said the Harper Government has demonstrated it is committed to undermining farmers’ market power by:

1. turning control of the fleet of federally-owned grain hopper cars to CN and CP Rail;
2. stepping up its attack on the CWB single desk; and
3. reducing the built-in safeguards for farmers at the Canadian Grain Commission.

“On balance, this throne speech moves us in the wrong direction – toward less market power for farmers,” concluded Wells.

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