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national farmers union

In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AG MINISTER ATTEMPTS TO FORCE AGENCY TO BREAK THE LAW

In October, 2007 and again in January, 2008, Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz repeatedly demanded that the Canadian Wheat Board hand over confidential information, including names and addresses of individual farmers and their marketing records, a direct violation of the *Privacy Act*.

These attempts to force the CWB to break the law are unprecedented, and people need to consider whether Gerry Ritz should be allowed to continue as Minister of Agriculture, says Stewart Wells, President of the National Farmers Union (NFU). Copies of two letters from Ritz to CWB President Greg Arason, as well as the replies from Arason, were obtained by the NFU on April 16 through an Access to Information request. Questions about confidential information arose after David Anderson stood in the House of Commons on February 13, 2008 and pretended to know how Stewart Wells marketed grains through the CWB.

On October 22, 2007, Ritz sent a letter to then-CWB President and CEO Greg Arason demanding information on a 2006 CWB pilot project for marketing organic wheat. But Ritz also demanded specific information, including names and addresses, of all participants in the program, including the quantities of wheat marketed and delivery points. He also demanded specific information on these producers' marketings in subsequent years beyond 2006. In response, Arason said the CWB was able to provide a "full briefing on the organic programs, including financial results" but the release of confidential information on individuals was prohibited under the *Privacy Act*. On January 25, Ritz once again demanded confidential personal information on the farmers. On February 29, the response from Arason was: "With respect to your request, we remain concerned as to the *Privacy Act* implications of providing this to you. We would be happy to speak with your officials and legal counsel to explore ways to avoid running afoul of the *Privacy Act*."

"Ritz is engaged in nothing more than a witch hunt when he is looking for individuals' names and the number of tonnes that they market through the CWB," Wells stated. "Ritz is also demanding that the CWB break the *Privacy Act* by giving him the names and financial information of the farmers it deals with on various marketing options. This is a witch hunt by a government that is breaking the law every time they turn around."

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***Note:** Copies of the letters between Ritz and Arason obtained by the NFU under Access to Information are available from the NFU office upon request.*