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national farmers union

In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NFU ADVOCATES CHANGES TO “PRODUCT OF CANADA” FOOD LABELLING

Canadians want clear rules in labelling, so they know that food in their local grocery store which is labelled “Product of Canada” is actually produced in Canada by Canadian farmers, says Grant Robertson, Ontario Coordinator of the National Farmers Union (NFU).

In a presentation to the House of Commons Agriculture Committee in Ottawa April 8, Robertson said the current laws and regulations regarding food labelling in Canada are ambiguous at best, and deceptive at worst. Currently, under CFIA guidelines, imported food products can be repackaged and labelled as “Product of Canada” if the cost of labour and/or additional ingredients represents 51% of its cost of production.

“If you want to get serious about having clear labelling that means something for consumers, there are two routes,” he said. “If you go for an optional label, then you need to enforce our food safety, environmental, labour and other standards at the border before a product is allowed in. Without that enforcement, it’s meaningless.

“The other route is to make it mandatory that the origin of the foodstuffs be on the package label. Only food that is produced by Canadian farmers should be allowed to be called ‘Product of Canada’,” Robertson added.

The NFU has led the charge on getting labelling rules changed so that “Product of Canada” labels actually apply to Canadian-grown or raised farm products. “It is ironic that fruits and vegetables grown and processed in Canada, for sale in Canada, are among the items on store shelves which are potentially *hardest* to identify as Canadian,” stated Robertson. “This is *not in spite of*, but rather *because of*, the current CFIA labelling guidelines.”

The *CFIA Labelling Guide for Processed Fruits and Vegetables* clearly states that “indicating ‘Product of Canada’ is *optional* for the purposes of marketing in Canada and export” *for Canadian grown and processed fruits and vegetables*. Meanwhile, food products which may consist almost entirely of *imported* ingredients are *required* to carry a “Product of Canada’ label if they meet specific guidelines.

The NFU national convention in London, Ontario in November, 2008 adopted a resolution calling for improved clarity and accuracy in food labelling. A similar

resolution was adopted at the NFU Ontario convention in Woodstock in early April, 2008.

Robertson was accompanied at the Agriculture Committee hearing by Nigel Smith, NFU Youth President.

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