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**national farmers union**

***In Union Is Strength***

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **DROUGHT TAKING TOLL ON PEACE RIVER AREA FARMERS**

With the Peace River country of northern Alberta and British Columbia facing the worst drought on record, the National Farmers Union (NFU) is calling on the provincial and federal governments to step in with targeted disaster assistance.

On August 15, the County of Grand Prairie declared itself a disaster area, and its County Council sent letters to provincial and federal agricultural departments requesting disaster assistance for grain and hay producers in the area.

NFU Board member Neil Peacock, who farms near Sexsmith, Alberta, says the extreme lack of rainfall, coupled with skyrocketing input costs for both grain and livestock, have accelerated the financial crunch for farmers.

“Last year at this time, I paid 79 cents a litre for diesel,” Peacock noted. “Now it is almost double at \$1.24. A hundred gallon tank of diesel is costing me, on average, \$542, including GST. Last year it was about \$320 per tank. The year before, it was \$270 a tank.”

Because of the drought, prices for hay for livestock have climbed dramatically – averaging between \$30 and \$50 per bale. Peacock estimates that he normally uses about 600 bales for his herd over the winter, but because he has already had to start buying hay to supplement his pasture, his estimated cost for hay this year will be over \$23,000. That doesn’t include the estimated \$3,500 cost of fuel needed to feed cattle over winter. “It really makes you wonder if it’s worth it,” he noted. “Last year my income from 40 calves was only \$12,500.”

Peacock said the lack of rainfall this year has aggravated several continuous years of low soil moisture levels. Dugouts are dry. He said many farmers are considering selling their entire herds rather than go further into debt buying feed.

“Farm debt is already at unprecedented levels in this area,” he noted. “The only response from the Alberta government so far has been a loan program. But it doesn’t make sense to borrow money to cover borrowed money. You can’t borrow your way out of debt.”

The NFU is calling on the Alberta, BC and federal governments to step in with a disaster relief program aimed at helping farmers weather the current drought. “Our elected MLAs

in Alberta didn't have any trouble giving themselves a \$50,000 pay hike recently," he stated. "There should be some money to deal with natural disasters on the scale we're experiencing in this area."

Peacock noted that it typically costs about \$450 to feed a cow over winter, but the drought has forced farmers to start feeding cattle much earlier than normal. He suggested the provincial government could assist farmers through a relief payment for hay purchased for early feeding in the summer and fall. He estimated a payment of \$300 per adult mother cow would offset the extra costs borne by farmers due to drought. These payments would be targeted toward cow-calf family farm operations.

A disaster relief program for grain producers would also be necessary because crop insurance would be inadequate.

The NFU is a direct-membership, democratic organization representing family farmers across Canada. For more information, log on to [www.nfu.ca](http://www.nfu.ca)

- 30 -

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