

National Office
2717 Wentz Ave.
Saskatoon, Sask.
S7K 4B6
Tel (306) 652-9465
Fax (306) 664-6226
E-Mail: nfu@nfu.ca



national farmers union

In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUGUST 27, 2008

FOOD SAFETY: LOCAL FOOD ALTERNATIVE TO CENTRALIZED SYSTEM

The tragic deaths of a number of Canadians due to a bacterial infection caused by eating tainted meat from a Toronto-area processing plant is a sobering reminder of how centralized and consolidated our current food system is, says Nigel Smith, Youth President of the National Farmers Union (NFU).

Smith said while accidental food-borne contamination is extremely rare thanks to a reliable publicly-accountable food inspection system, the recent outbreak of listeria has nonetheless resulted in several tragic deaths. A widespread recall of over 200 meat products is currently in place, affecting Canadians across the country.

“It’s important to ensure food safety standards are enforced to protect public health, at both large and small processing plants,” he stated. “Contamination can conceivably occur at any plant, regardless of its size. The big difference, however, is that when contamination takes place at a very large plant, the consequences are staggering – both in the number of people potentially affected – and in the overall costs.”

Don Mills, NFU Ontario Board member, said the food system in Canada has steadily become more centralized over the years as food processors, distributors and retailers have become larger and more integrated. Food products distributed throughout a national system tend to be sourced from large, federally-inspected processing plants.

That centralization has resulted in reduced opportunities for Canadians to purchase locally-grown and locally-processed food products, Mills pointed out. “Normally we wouldn’t give that a second thought, but when unfortunate instances like this occur, it underlines how vulnerable the system really is.”

In the meat processing sector, for example, ownership is very concentrated, with Cargill, XL Meats, and Maple Leaf controlling most of the capacity. “The food chain is very narrow at the processing level,” stated Mills. “It’s only when people understand how the food system actually operates, that real changes can be made.”

Smith concluded that it is important for Canadians to support local food initiatives as a way of promoting a healthy food system.

- 30 -

Contact: Nigel Smith, NFU Youth President (613) 359-5470 or (613) 620-5746
Don Mills, NFU Region 3 National Board member (519) 225-2163