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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON FOOD A GOOD FIRST STEP

SASKATOON, SK—The United Nations (UN) Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) High-Level Conference on World Food Security taking place in Rome is a good first step, according to the National Farmers Union (NFU) of Canada. “This type of international meeting was something our organization called for two years ago,” said Stewart Wells, President of Canada’s NFU. “Our letter to the United Nations in May 2006 rang the alarm bells on the impending world food shortage and pointed to very low international food supplies.” That May 2006 letter can be viewed at www.nfu.ca .

More than just a supply and price crisis, the world is experiencing a crisis at the core of its food and agricultural systems. “An international agriculture policy dominated by the trade agenda has failed; it is now time to move in a new direction,” said Wells.

“The new direction for the world’s food system must be based on ‘food sovereignty’,” according to Colleen Ross, Women’s President of the NFU. “Every nation should focus on feeding its citizens. The current food crisis is the result of many years of deregulation of agricultural markets, the privatization of state regulatory bodies, and the dumping of agricultural products on the markets of developing countries. Over the last number of years, the World Trade Organization, bilateral trade agreements (including NAFTA), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, with the approval and assistance of governments, have imposed a trade-dominated agricultural policy onto countries. This trade-first food policy destroyed local food systems and forced farmers to grow products for export (like cut flowers) instead of food for themselves and their communities. This industrial monoculture model of agriculture further added to poverty and hunger in regions around the globe that were, until recently, resilient, biodiverse, self-reliant, and respectful of the key contributions of women in the world’s food production systems. This has all been destroyed. It must be restored.”

“The Rome UN meeting will succeed only if it recognizes there are serious, systemic problems in agriculture,” said Nigel Smith, NFU Youth President. “Local, national, and regional food sovereignty, combined with just trade policies, have much to offer in this time of crisis. Millions of people need action now. We need to see ideas coming forward that look not only to alleviating the current food shortage, but also preventing the next one. This Rome Summit will accomplish nothing without actions that ensure that we will not have to convene a similar meeting in a few years’ time. It is time that governments stopped viewing farmers as the problem, and started working with the world’s farmers as the starting point of a permanent solution. We need Food Sovereignty now, and we encourage the Canadian government to act progressively by investing in the reconstruction of sustainable food systems that meet the needs of people, not transnational corporations who continue to rake in record profits while nations starve.” concluded Smith.

Wells, Ross, and Smith are Canadian farmers. The NFU is a founding member of the Via Campesina and has been at the forefront of international efforts to gain justice and sustainable income for family farmers.

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