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national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

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RITZ LAUNCHES NEW TORPEDO AT CWB DEMOCRACY

Swift Current, Sask.—Ritz's anti-CWB Bill is just another attack on the overall operations of the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB), according to Stewart Wells, President of the National Farmers Union (NFU). Yesterday Ritz tabled Bill C-57 which would disenfranchise thousands of legitimate voters in this year's CWB Director elections.

"One thing is crystal clear," says Wells. "Chuck Strahl and the Conservative government broke the law when they disenfranchised thousands of voters in the middle of an ongoing election in the last CWB Director elections. But now that farmers have organized and have proven in court that the government can be stopped from breaking Canadian laws, Ritz knows that what the government did in 2006 would not be tolerated by farmers now. So, the government's solution is to disenfranchise farmers with Bill C-57 rather than the stroke of the Minister's pen during the election."

"Many of the voters that Ritz would disenfranchise with his new attack are farmers/landlords that have a legitimate financial interest in how their grain is marketed. It has been common in the past decade for some farmers to rent out their land, and then continue to work the land for the new renter. Especially if these agreements have been made on a crop share basis, the new "landlords" have a legitimate financial interest in maximizing their returns through efficient operations of the CWB."

"Ritz's Bill C-57 also introduces the concept of "size-creep", wherein farmers must produce a certain amount of grain in order to be eligible to vote. So all farmers are equal—but some are more equal than others. In circumstances of consecutive hail/drought/flood disasters even more farmers will be disenfranchised, as was the case in the 2006 elections. This concept will be intended to appease those anti-CWB people who would like to see "weighted balloting"—where voters would have multiple votes depending on the number of bushels they produce."

"Ritz's rhetoric is absolutely disingenuous," continued Wells. "If Ritz really wanted to enhance farmer control of the CWB, his government would not have fired Adrian Measner (the previous CEO that enjoyed the support of the CWB Board of Directors), his government would not keep appointing ex-grain company executives and anti-CWB farmers to the CWB Board of Directors, his government would not have tried to end the CWB's barley marketing advantage through a secret Cabinet Order, his government would not have appealed the Federal Court's decision on the legalities of the secret Cabinet Order, his government would not have placed a "gag order" on the CWB, his government would not have introduced Bill C-46 which would again allow the government to remove barley marketing by secret Cabinet Order and paralyze Board marketing of wheat and durum, and his government would not have repeatedly attempted to breach the Privacy Act of Canada by trying to get personal and confidential financial information about farmers trying to sell grain through the CWB."

Wells concluded, "If Ritz was truly serious about farmers controlling their own marketing institution, he would:

1. continue having "actual producers" and "producers" vote in CWB elections;
2. require that sitting CWB directors maintain their status as "actual producers";
3. give the elected farmer Board members the power to appoint the remaining five Board members according to their area of expertise;
4. stop appointing ex-grain company executives to the CWB Board of Directors and draw clear distinctions about how closely farmers can be tied to grain/seed companies and still sit on the CWB Board of Directors; and
5. stop trying to control the day-to-day operations of the CWB from government offices in Ottawa."

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For more information, call:

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