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**national farmers union**  
*In Union Is Strength*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **POWER WITHOUT RESPONSIBILITY A RECIPE FOR DISASTER**

Under the direction of Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz, changes made on April 1, 2008 meant that meat plants were no longer required to report listeria contamination directly to Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) inspectors. Perhaps the worst food safety problem in Canada developed only five months later.

Prior to April 1, 2008, food processing plants were obliged to report any presence of listeria bacteria directly to inspectors with the CFIA. CFIA inspectors would then have been directly involved in supervising the cleanup of the affected plant and would have carried out testing to validate the cleanup. But an investigative report by the CBC/Toronto Star revealed that on April 1, 2008, meat plants were no longer required to report listeria contamination directly to CFIA inspectors. Instead, they were obliged to submit a written report to the CFIA inspectors twice a month, and there was no requirement that serious listeria contamination be flagged in the reports.

The change in food inspection policy was pushed through by the Harper government as part of a switch to self-policing on the part of private industry. The change in policy meant food inspectors spent most of their time auditing paper rather than on direct inspections of meat plants.

“Prime Minister Harper and Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz want to be elected again, but they are refusing to take any responsibility for weakening the Canadian food safety system,” stated Stewart Wells, President of the National Farmers Union (NFU). “Power without responsibility is a recipe for disaster, and we have already experienced the disaster in food safety. Innocent Canadians have lost their lives, and CFIA inspectors are now saying that problems probably wouldn’t have happened without the direct political interference from Harper and Ritz.”

Wells said Ritz, as the senior Cabinet Minister in charge of food safety, must immediately resign. “Ritz’s past actions suggested he was more worried about partisan political fallout from the listeriosis deaths than he was about protecting food safety for Canadians,” concluded Wells. “This latest information proves that to be the case.”

Grant Robertson, NFU Ontario Coordinator, said government moves to undermine the food safety system were only exposed as a result of a terrible tragedy. He added it is not unreasonable to wonder what other destructive strategies are in the works.

“The first responsibility of government is to protect the citizens of Canada,” stated Robertson. “The listeriosis outbreak revealed what has been happening in food safety. But what else don’t we know given this only saw the light of day due to the deaths of Canadians? Minister Ritz no longer has the confidence of farmers and no longer has the confidence of Canadians. The only person he seems to still have the confidence of is Mr. Harper. This shows that Harper just doesn’t get it when it comes to the responsibility of his government to Canadians and standing up for their needs.”

Robertson said Harper should put aside partisan politics for once and fire Ritz immediately.

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