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national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DUAL MANDATE OF CFIA LED TO COMPROMISES IN FOOD SAFETY

A major review in 2005 by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) showed serious problems with Canada's food recall system, but public safety was compromised for the sake of commercial interests.

A Toronto Star/CBC investigative report released September 24 has revealed that spotty inspections, delays in warning the public about tainted food, and a lack of follow-up to prevent repeat outbreaks were serious concerns for CFIA inspectors. Inspectors also worried that "too much reliance" is being placed on information provided by food companies and exporting countries.

This confirms what the National Farmers Union (NFU) stated in April, 2005, before the House of Commons Agriculture Committee: namely that the CFIA's role should be one of protecting public safety – not promoting food exports for commercial interests.

Since 1997, the CFIA has been operating under a dual mandate. It is responsible for promoting the public interest by ensuring all food produced and sold in Canada, exported out of Canada or imported into Canada is safe; while at the same time it is also responsible for facilitating exports of food and expediting free trade agreements with Canada's trading partners. In testimony to the Commons Agriculture Committee, the NFU stated; "These dual responsibilities place the CFIA in a compromised position. If Canada is to ensure its food supply is safe, there must be a set of strong, national food safety standards to ensure the public interest remains our highest priority. Increased trade leads inevitably to increased risk. To maximize trade, Canada is required to continually lower its standards and relax its regulations to achieve a competitive advantage."

NFU President Stewart Wells said the recent outbreak of listeriosis arising from tainted meat processed at a Maple Leaf Foods plant in Toronto could have been prevented if the 2005 CFIA internal review had been acted on. "But instead of re-focusing CFIA's mandate to put public safety first, the federal government continues to cut back on needed resources at the CFIA and to turn responsibility for food inspections over to profit-driven private companies."

Self-policing by companies will inevitably increase food safety risks for Canadians, Wells concluded. "Canadians deserve a safer and more secure food system. All imported

foods must meet the safety, quality, tracing and tracking standards demanded of Canadian farm-raised food.”

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