

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**

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**FARM FAMILIES URGE “A BETTER CANADIAN DIRECTION – ABCD”**

Family farmers and consumers are calling for a new food and agricultural policy: one that offers A Better Canadian Direction - or ABCD, says Stewart Wells, President of the National Farmers Union (NFU).

Wells said the current federal election campaign offers a good opportunity for Canadians to stop the decline of family farms. “The last several years have been very negative for family farmers,” Wells noted, pointing out that thousands of grain growers and livestock farmers have been forced off the land because of low net returns and high input costs.

This situation has been made worse by government policies aimed at lowering Canadian food quality standards to comply with international trade agreements. “Harmonization” of food quality standards facilitates increased imports from countries where food is produced as cheaply as possible.

In addition, the food system in Canada is increasingly vulnerable due to cutbacks in public sector inspection and research services. “Public sector research is being starved of funds, stated Wells. “Food safety is at risk because of the move to turn responsibility for food inspections over to the private companies, and Canada’s reputation for high-quality export grain has been jeopardized. Also, promises to change ‘Product of Canada’ food labelling laws are still in limbo.”

Wells said the NFU wants these important issues addressed, not just for the sake of the survival of the family farm, but because Canadians deserve a safe, healthy food system.

“We need A Better Canadian Direction – or ABCD, for short,” he stated. “There are several key points that all political candidates need to address:

1. **The federal agricultural budget must be re-focused on family farms.** Sustainable food production from Canada’s family farms is important to Canadians. Funding must be restored to ensure public sector inspection and research services are maintained at a high-quality level.
2. Family-farm cattle operations must receive fair prices from the marketplace. **There must be a ban on packer control and ownership of cattle.** The level of corporate concentration in the beef processing sector is very high. Three companies dominate the

market. Currently, there is a captive supply of cattle. Two-thirds of the cattle in Canada are either owned or controlled by the packers. The packers then can manipulate prices paid to farmers – especially cow-calf operators.

**3. Pork production should be re-focused toward family farms.** Mega-barns and intensive hog operations have forced family farmers out of the business and relied on taxpayer funds for support. Having taxpayers recently foot the bill for a slaughter program compounds the problem.

**4. Canadian farmers' longstanding advantage in export grain sales returns, quality and reliability must be protected and strengthened.** Recent all-out attacks are killing research, killing the Canadian Grain Commission, and killing the Canadian Wheat Board. Just as the packers have been put in control of the beef sector, the Harper government is putting multinational grain companies in charge of the grain side and destroying the Canadian brand in the process.

**5. There must be an immediate halt to food safety cutbacks.** The cuts to public sector food inspection services and the lack of clear food labelling laws are driving down consumer confidence in our food system.

**6. There must be a renewed emphasis on energy-efficient railway transportation, and an effective regulatory mechanism to ensure that freight costs paid by farmers are fair.** An objective railway costing review for western grain movement is long overdue.

**7. Federal agricultural policy must give priority to raising net farm incomes.** Farmers were promised that the unworkable Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization (CAIS) Program would be scrapped. That promise was not kept. Farm programs must be capped so that the benefits are directed to bona-fide family farms, rather than to multinational agribusiness. Farm programs must allow regional flexibility, and facilitate the efforts of farmers working to increase their market power.

“The outcome of this federal election is pivotal to the future – or lack of future – for family farms and for all Canadians,” concluded Wells. “We need to start at the beginning and put in place A Better Canadian Direction (ABCD).”

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Contact: Stewart Wells, NFU President (306) 773-6852 or (306) 741-7694  
Colleen Ross, NFU Women's President (613) 652-1552  
Grant Robertson, NFU Ontario Coordinator (519) 353-4033  
Neil Peacock, NFU Peace River Region Board Member (780) 568-7011  
Terry Pugh, NFU Executive-Secretary (306) 652-9465