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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

APRIL 29, 2009

ACTIONS AIMED AT REVERSING DECISION TO CLOSE PRISON FARMS

Members of the National Farmers Union (NFU) and community organizations are stepping up the pressure on the Harper government to retain agricultural training and food production programs at six prison farms across the country.

In a letter to Peter Van Loan, federal Minister of Public Safety, NFU President Stewart Wells called on the government to reverse a decision taken in late February to close down the institutions. The NFU had written to the Minister on March 5, but received no reply. A letter sent to the Minister April 29 reinforced the NFU's message and urged the Minister to respond.

NFU members from the Kingston, Ontario area, along with community groups, are staging educational actions to publicize the issue on Thursday, April 30. The actions consist of a gathering on Parliament Hill in Ottawa at 1 PM; the planting of vegetables on the grounds of the Frontenac Institution in Kingston (one of the prison farms slated for closure); and a free roadside barbecue in front of the abattoir at Pittsburgh Institution in Kingston (also slated for closure).

The closure of the prison farms appears to be motivated by the potential sale of crown-owned land, which could potentially be worth millions of dollars. However, the NFU points out the sale of the land would be a short-sighted move. The prison farms provide a constructive alternative to the regular prison institutions, and provide inmates with training programs where they gain valuable employment and social skills. In addition, the prison farms, located on prime agricultural land, contribute a considerable quantity of locally-grown food for the prison institutions.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kingston, Ontario - April 29, 2009

SAVE THE PRISON FARMS – NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION, APRIL 30

On Thursday, April 30, a National Day of Action to save the federal prison farms, city-dwelling eaters and gardeners will join farmers in protesting the Conservative government's decision to close Canada's six prison farms.

"After weeks of appeals and no response, it is time to crank up the pressure on the federal government to reverse its decision to close the farms," said Andrea Cumpson, President, Local 316 of the National Farmers Union.

The farms help make the prison system self-reliant. Inmates in the prison farm program develop personal and employment skills that can be applied to any job; as well, they gain rehabilitation and self-confidence.

Rather than being cut, the prison farm program should be revitalized and reoriented towards producing sustainable local food. "The loss of this highly productive farmland would be terribly shortsighted for the food security of people in the communities around the prisons. In light of peak oil, climate change, water scarcity and a global population set to reach 8 billion by 2025, we will all need these farms," said Mike Payne of Urban Agriculture Kingston

The National Farmers Union, the Frontenac Cattlemen's Association and Urban Agriculture Kingston will take action this Thursday, April 30th at 1:00 pm:

1. **Demonstration on Parliament Hill in Ottawa** – Public Safety decision-makers have not seen the farms. They do not have first-hand knowledge of the rehabilitative benefits to inmates of interacting with plants, animals and the soil. Farmer will have cattle on hand to offer MPs the opportunity of such an experience right there on the Hill. They will also meet with Liberal agriculture critic, Wayne Easter and other MPs. "From his responses in Question Period, Minister of Public Safety Peter Van Loan, who could reverse this ill-advised decision to close the farms, does not have a good understanding of what is at stake – what inmates learn and how the farms change their lives," said Cumpson.
2. **Guerrilla Gardening at Frontenac Institution** -- Gardeners will turn the soil and plant seeds in Frontenac prison farm fields off Bath Road. This 800 acres of prime agricultural land is central to the future food security of our community. Grow Food, Not Houses!
3. **Roadside Barbecue at Pittsburgh Institution** – Local burgers will be served to the public driving by the prison on Highway 15. The Pittsburgh Institution abattoir is essential for local cattle farmers, the Kingston area's supply of local

beef, and the future of our sustainable local food system in Kingston and countryside. Local Burgers are Better!

For more details on the issue, go to www.nfuontario.ca .

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