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**national farmers union**

*In Union Is Strength*

**MEDIA ADVISORY -- MONDAY, JUNE 1, 2009**

## **Campaign to Save Canada's Prison Farms Goes National**

A coalition of organizations will hold a media conference, outside the fence at the Frontenac Institution, Kingston, Ontario, at noon on Wednesday, June 3. You are invited to attend to hear our position and to ask questions. We will gather at the side of Bath Road, near the "Paying Our Way through Agriculture" sign, about a half kilometre west of the entrance to Collins Bay Penitentiary.

Please see the media release below for details of the campaign.

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**MEDIA RELEASE -- MONDAY, JUNE 1, 2009**

## **Campaign to Save Canada's Prison Farms Goes National**

KINGSTON -- A local campaign to save Canada's prison farm program is becoming a national campaign this week.

"This issue unites farmers with individuals and groups involved in social justice, food security, conservation and the environment, labour and inmate rehabilitation," said Andrea Cumpson, president of Local 316 of the National Farmers Union, one of several organizations that initiated the campaign to preserve Canada's six prison farms.

Other groups involved in raising concerns about the plan to close the prison farms include the Frontenac Cattlemen's Association, the Frontenac Federation of Agriculture, Urban Agriculture Kingston and the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul.

These groups developed a position statement, calling on Minister Van Loan and the government of Canada to stop the closure of the farms, revitalize the prison farm program and enhance partnerships with local communities and local farmers.

Groups including the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Kingston chapter of the Elizabeth Fry Society and the Union of Solicitor General Employees have joined in signing the position statement; other groups are being approached for their support.

Two of the six farms are located in Kingston, Ontario, with one each in New Brunswick, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Correctional Service of Canada says the farm program does not give inmates employability skills and that the farms lose \$4 million dollars yearly. No clear accounting of the prison farm program has been made public.

"The decision by CSC to dismantle the prison farms is short-sighted and wrong-headed," Cumpson said. "We are mobilizing support to have the federal government reverse the decision, and to, in fact, revitalize the program, re-orienting it toward sustainable farming and food security for the prisons and for local communities."

"Inmates in the prison farm program learn farm and food processing skills, as well as employment attitudes such as punctuality, taking responsibility and teamwork," said Jeff Peters, a Frontenac Cattlemen's Association director. "In the Kingston institutions, they produce and process meat, eggs and dairy products for use within the prison system."

Ending the prison farm program would have included closure of the abattoir at the Kingston area Pittsburgh Institution, an abattoir which is used by local farmers. Following several weeks of public opposition to the farm closures, Minister of Public Safety Peter Van Loan announced in mid-May that the abattoir at Pittsburgh Institution will continue to operate.

"Many area farmers depend on that abattoir as a way to sell to local people, stores and restaurants," Peters said. "It is an essential part of our farm and food system, and a critical part of financial survival for local farmers. We are pleased that CSC will keep the abattoir operating, but it is part of a bigger picture. We see the benefits of continuing and revitalizing the prison farm program across Canada."

"We have a meeting with Minister Van Loan on June 8," Peters said. "We will ask him to halt the dismantling of the prison farm program and its infrastructure, and, instead, to keep and improve the program."

Supporters see public safety benefits in continuing the farm program.

"When prisoners re-enter the community, we are all much better off if they had training and rehabilitation opportunities in jail," said Bridget Doherty, of the Justice and Peace Office of the Sisters of Providence. "Giving prisoners the ability to feed themselves ensures that they help pay their way, while at the same time gaining skills and preparing them for their eventual return to society."

More information about the prison farm campaign can be found at [www.nfuontario/316](http://www.nfuontario/316).

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