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national farmers union

In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY – WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO FARMING

International Women's Day on March 8 provides an opportunity to celebrate the contributions and accomplishments of Canadian farm women and rural women around the world.

National Farmers Union Women's President Colleen Ross, who farms near Iroquois, Ontario, said rural women produce half the world's food, and account for between 60 to 80 percent of the food in most developing countries. She said the global food crisis could be overcome more quickly if food production and trading systems recognized the value of family farms, and especially the labour of women. "In Canada, women have been forced to rely on off-farm jobs to keep their family farms viable," she said. "The chronic loss of farmers in this country and around the world is one symptom of a global food crisis."

She noted, however, that signs of change are happening across Canada in the form of a "local food" movement, with women leading the way. She said people are questioning the high-input, industrial model of agriculture with its dependence on exports and fossil fuels; and are instead choosing a "place-based" food system that values environmental sustainability, food quality and safety, and economic fairness in the marketplace.

Kalissa Regier, NFU Youth Vice-President who farms near Laird, Saskatchewan, noted that despite the important role women play in raising food worldwide, they are often the most vulnerable to famine and poverty. Even in Canada, violence against women is still a major concern in our own communities. "This is not just a women's issue. It's very much a men's issue, too. Solutions are not just women's responsibility."

She noted that women in the farm movement have played a key role in shaping progressive social policies in Canada. "Irene Parlyby of Alberta, for example, helped found the United Farmers of Alberta in 1913, and was a founding President of the United Farm Women of Alberta in 1916. The UFWA played a major role in fostering legislation related to the welfare of women and children. She was elected to the Alberta Legislature in 1921, and became the first female Cabinet Minister in Alberta history. On October 18, 1929, she and fellow suffragettes Nellie McClung, Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, and Louise McKinney were successful in winning a legal case that awarded Canadian women the right to vote."

“Let’s celebrate the historical progress of women, and the contributions of leaders like Irene Parlby and Nellie McClung, while doing everything we can to ensure that a more equitable world is created for our future generations,” Regier concluded. “Our struggle is far from over.”

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