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**national farmers union**

***In Union Is Strength***

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**COMPENSATION FOR PEI POTATO DISASTER INADEQUATE, SAYS NFU**

Potato farmers in Prince Edward Island who lost their crop due to flooding last fall are “extremely disappointed” with the federal and provincial governments’ announcement of a payment of only 2 cents a pound.

Edith Ling, National Farmers Union (NFU) District Women’s Director in PEI, said the scale of the disaster was massive, and many of the province’s potato farmers are facing severe financial hardship. While farmers are encouraged that governments have recognized the problem and committed some funds, the level of financial assistance announced by Federal Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz falls far short of what is really needed to help producers recover.

“Two cents a pound is not nearly enough when it costs between 10 and 11 cents a pound to grow a crop,” stated Ling. “This assistance package really only is designed to cover the additional expenses farmers had of removing potatoes that spoiled in storage from warehouses and disinfecting the buildings. It offers nothing toward the loss of the crop.”

The NFU has been pressing the federal and provincial governments for a meaningful disaster relief payment since last fall. As recently as April 21, 2009, the NFU sent a letter to Minister Ritz and PEI Agriculture Minister George Webster to urge action on the issue. The NFU noted that costs of potato production are extremely high, and farmers need financial aid in order to plant a crop.

“We had asked the government for a commitment of 4 to 5 cents a pound – or about \$1100 an acre,” explained Ling. “It costs over \$2500 an acre to produce potatoes.” She said the widespread flooding last fall took a massive toll on potato production in the central and eastern portions of the Island province. Much of the crop which was harvested was put in storage, but the wet conditions soon took a toll and the potatoes literally “melted” away. Most had to be composted or otherwise disposed of over the winter.

“It was a disaster and those areas should have been declared disaster areas,” she concluded. “Farmers are in debt to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars now and there was nothing they could have done to prevent the spoilage of their crop.” She urged

the federal and provincial governments to follow through with additional funds to assist producers as soon as possible.

Horticulture growers will also receive 2 cents per pound as part of this financial aid package. The NFU had lobbied for additional assistance to these growers as well. “It’s the same story,” Ling said. “We’re grateful for the help, but it’s really far short of what is needed.”

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