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national farmers union

In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RITTER SUGGESTION MISGUIDED AND DESTRUCTIVE, WARNS NFU

A proposal that the federal government issue a payout to farmers to compensate for the loss of the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) single desk is misguided and destructive, warns the President of the National Farmers Union (NFU).

Stewart Wells said the suggestion from Ken Ritter, former Chair of the CWB, was not well-thought out because it amounts to a preemptive surrender at the World Trade Organization (WTO) talks at a time when Canada should be strengthening its position. Ritter was interviewed on CBC Radio Saskatchewan news October 13, where he suggested that the federal government buy out the CWB benefit so that it can be traded away at the WTO.

“Ritter’s comment is the same kind of idiotic nonsense that has destroyed farm incomes in Canada,” said Wells. “Net farm income from the markets has fallen to \$125 million per year, while the farm debt has ballooned to \$60 Billion because of the sell-outs and give-aways by Canada’s so-called farm leaders and farm organizations over the recent past.”

“The Crow Rate was destroyed by exactly the same faulty logic,” said NFU Vice-President Terry Boehm. “Farmers were promised all sorts of improvements in service, lower rail costs, and shorter rail car turnaround times, but what we have seen is the exact opposite. Grain freight rates have increased from \$6.50/tonne to \$43/tonne, the service is much worse, thousands of miles of track have been torn up, car turnaround times have not improved, and the government and railways are refusing to hold a review of actual rail costs in the year 2009.”

Boehm added: “When the Crow was killed the livestock associations and corporate-friendly ‘farm organizations’ talked endlessly about the benefits that would come to livestock producers. Well, guess what, things have never been worse for cattle and hog farmers in western Canada. And now these same organizations and spokespeople are trotting out the same false arguments to use against the Canadian Wheat Board.”

“Ritter’s comments are very, very unhelpful to a country that is engaged in the start-up of a new series of international trade talks. This type of disarming before we prepare for the negotiations makes Canada a laughing stock in international trade circles. Canadians

have been called boy scouts when it comes to international trade, but boy scouts can learn from their mistakes. I was in Ottawa last week meeting privately with Canada's chief agricultural negotiator," concluded Wells. "And the last thing they need is somebody stabbing them in the back when they are out trying to make other countries respect Canada's position."

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