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**national farmers union**  
*In Union Is Strength*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**JANUARY 18, 2010**

**GRAIN COMPANIES EXPLOIT FLAX SITUATION TO  
TIGHTEN VISE ON FARMER SEED SAVING**

**SASKATOON, SK**—Grain company Viterra wants to force all farmers wishing to grow flax in 2010 to purchase certified seed. A Viterra spokesman delivered that message in a presentation on January 11 at the Crop Production Show in Saskatoon.

Viterra and others are pushing the requirement for certified seed as a purported solution to the problem of the Triffid contamination in flax shipments to Europe. Triffid is a genetically modified variety not approved in Europe. But the NFU believes that the proposed certified seed cure is the wrong one, and that there will be long-lasting and negative side effects.

“The best solution is to test the seed supply, both farm-saved seed and certified seed,” said NFU President and flax producer Terry Boehm. He continued: “It is false to simply assume that certified seed is safer than farm-saved. For one thing, it is almost certain that the certified seed system is the source of the Triffid contamination farmers are now facing. Furthermore, it has now been determined that two varieties of flax are contaminated with Triffid at the breeder seed level (varieties Normandy and Mons).”

Boehm said a real concern is that companies will exploit the critical problem with flax to force a long-term requirement for mandatory purchases of certified seed, a requirement that could quickly spread to other crops. “Our seed industry is in year 7 of a concerted push to curtail seed saving and force more seed purchases. We cannot let companies act opportunistically to leverage this flax sector problem into an opportunity to boost the price of flax seed and force farmers to buy all their seed.” Traditionally farmers buy certified seed of new varieties from time to time in small lots and multiply it for their own use for future years.

Boehm also said that Viterra and other powerful grain companies must not be allowed to dictate seed policies. “Under the *Canada Grains Act*, Viterra cannot refuse grain deliveries if they have space. Thus, Viterra cannot unilaterally declare that all production must be from certified seed,” said Boehm.

He concluded: “Farm-saved seed can be just as safe as certified. All seed needs to be tested, and test results need to be provided at delivery. The Canadian Grain Commission must be the final arbiter in this issue. Grain companies are over-reaching, trying to dictatorially impose their will. The same grain companies that market seeds are trying to make those seeds mandatory. Only the CGC has the power and authority to block this power grab. We need to take all steps necessary to restore markets for flax, but we have to ensure we take only *necessary* steps. And we have to ensure that key tools for farmers, such as seed saving, are not trampled as we move forward. Testing at all stages will be the key to resolving this problem. It is high time that the Minister of Agriculture stepped up to the plate and offered to pay for the costs of testing, at a minimum.”

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