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**national farmers union**

***In Union Is Strength***

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**ELIMINATION OF CGC ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER POSITIONS PART OF LARGER AGENDA OF DEREGULATION OF GRAIN INDUSTRY**

The elimination of all six Assistant Commissioner positions by the Harper government will further weaken the regulatory powers of the Canadian Grain Commission (CGC), and make farmers more vulnerable to the big grain companies, says Glenn Tait, Saskatchewan Coordinator of the National Farmers Union (NFU).

The six Assistant Commissioner positions were cut by Treasury Board President Stockwell Day on March 8 as part of a move to eliminate 245 government-in-council appointments. Day claimed the cuts were designed to save the government about \$1 million. However, any savings are illusory because the positions were vacant.

Tait pointed out the cuts to the CGC, even though they are lumped in with many other agencies, are much more serious because they are part of a larger strategy designed to deregulate the grain industry. The government has tried on two occasions since 2006 to pass legislation designed to amend the *Canada Grain Act* to remove regulatory protections for grain farmers and weaken quality standards for Canadian grain. In both those bills, the elimination of Assistant Commissioner positions was included. Assistant Commissioners are appointed by the Governor in Council under Section 9 (1) of the *Canada Grain Act*.

Assistant Commissioners were first appointed when amendments were made to the *Canada Grain Act* in 1929. Those amendments were aimed at making the Board of Grain Commissioners (as the CGC was then known) more accessible, and at strengthening enforcement of the provisions of the *Canada Grain Act* in the countryside. Assistant Commissioners checked elevator scales, ensured fair weights and measures, educated elevator agents about the legal requirements of grading and weighing grain, and intervened on behalf of farmers to ensure fairness.

The Assistant Commissioners have proven their worth through the decades, said Tait, adding that eliminating the positions is “penny-wise and pound-foolish”. While the government claims it will save “millions”, it will lose many more millions through deregulation as a result of mis-graded grain and lost sales due to declines in quality standards. The grain companies, meanwhile, will be increasingly able to manipulate the system to their own benefit.

“It’s all well and good to debate what kind of a job we want the government to do, but if this government keeps slashing programs and staff, there won’t be anything left to do any kind of a job at all. It’s another example of the government starving itself into impotency,” he said.

Tait also pointed to the example of Australia, which deregulated its grain sector in an effort to increase sales. But as the reliability of the grading of their export grain declined, so too did the price. “Australian grain is now discounted, while Canadian grain still earns a premium,” he said.

The CGC Assistant Commissioners have proven their worth over the years,” stated Tait. “They have been individuals who have taken their jobs very seriously. They have all demonstrated integrity and knowledge of the *Canada Grain Act*, and the industry in general. Farmers have been well-served by their efforts. There have been many instances where the intervention of the Assistant Commissioner has resolved disputes fairly.”

Tait said the Assistant Commissioners’ role goes well beyond liaison and communications, and have acted as advocates for farmers. “This is an integral part of the job,” he concluded. “The mandate of the *Canada Grain Act* is to regulate the grain industry in the interests of producers. That’s the only way to ensure fairness in the marketplace. It’s unfortunate this government appears intent on turning back the clock to the 19<sup>th</sup> century by deregulating the grain industry and letting grain companies get away with whatever they can.”

- 30 -

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