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union farmer monthly

NFU meets with Ontario Liberal Caucus

Membership in NFU Region 3 (Ontario) is increasing rapidly and so is the level of activity. In addition to this article, please see others in this edition.

On April 9, in Toronto, the NFU met with members of the Ontario Liberal Caucus. The meeting included provincial Agriculture Critic Steve Peters. The NFU presented a concise report that outlined a range of affordable solutions to the problems plaguing Ontario farmers and citizens in rural communities. The brief is on the Ontario NFU website (www.nfu.ca/on).

The NFU told Caucus members that before farmers and government can choose solutions, they must understand the problems and understand the underlying causes of the farm income crisis. The NFU pointed out that Ontario farmers had quadrupled production and exports and, despite this, farmers' net incomes had *fallen*. "Others in the economy are treating farmers as an extractive resource. Close to \$70 billion in increased wealth generated by farm families has disappeared off Ontario farms over the past 25 years," said NFU Region 3 (Ontario) Coordinator Peter Dowling.

The NFU delegation—which, in addition to Dowling, included Board member-elect Joe Dama and Director of the NFU-Ontario Council Barry Robinson—told caucus members that the NFU has been unique in advocating *solely* in the interests of farm families. "Other organizations talk about solutions that are good for 'agriculture' and for 'the industry.' The interests of family farmers are different from the interests of the industry. The 'industry' is draining the wealth from our farms and rural communities. Simultaneously advocating on behalf of the foxes and the chickens slows your progress in finding real solutions for the chickens," said Dowling.

Ontario lost 13% of its farm families in the decade between 1991 and 2001. "The current policies are not working. New policies now on the table seem similar enough to existing ones that we can expect similar results. To stop the loss of farm families and the bleeding of wealth and people from rural areas, fundamentally different policies are necessary. The NFU, in its brief to the Liberal Caucus, presented some of that new thinking," said Dowling.

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— ATTENTION — ONTARIO MEMBERS

The NFU in Ontario is now accredited under that province's *Farm Registration and Farm Organizations Funding Act*. Farm families are now joining the NFU by indicating that choice on their Farm Business Registration forms.

However, some farmers who have selected the NFU on their forms or on their cheques have received membership materials from another organization because of mix-ups in processing the Farm Business Registration forms.

If you, or other farmers you know, selected the NFU by marking your form or making out your cheque to the NFU-Ontario, but were sent a membership card from another organization, please contact the Ontario NFU Regional Coordinator, Peter Dowling, at (613) 546-0869.

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International Day of Farmers' Struggle

April 17th is International Day of Farmers' Struggle. The day commemorates the killing of 19 peasants in Brazil's state of Para, which occurred on April 17th, 1996. Each year, farmers and peasants around the world join together on April 17th to focus attention on the situation of rural people.

In April this year, the NFU and farm organizations around the world are working through the Via Campesina (please see sidebar) to draw attention to the global crisis in agriculture and to create a unified response to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its corporate global agenda.

2003 will be a pivotal year for farmers and for the global food trading system. Farmers in Mexico launched the year with protests drawing attention to cheap food flooding their country and to the devastating effects of such a flood on Mexican farmers. In February, the WTO released the controversial "Harbinson Draft" proposals to restructure agricultural production and trade. In March and April, farm organizations around the world spoke out against the destructive measures proposed by Harbinson. And, in September, government and corporate leaders will gather in Cancun, Mexico to attempt to negotiate new rules for global agriculture and trade at the WTO Ministerial meetings. In April 17th news releases and at meetings, the NFU worked to draw attention to the forces restructuring global agriculture and to the devastating effects on farm families in Canada and around the world.

Peter Dowling, Ontario NFU Coordinator, travelled to Montreal to take part in rallies and protests to mark April 17. Dowling joined hundreds of citizens who gathered at Montreal's Stock Exchange and marched to a flour mill owned by agribusiness giant Archer Daniels Midland. Dowling told the crowd assembled in Montreal: "Farmers around the world are speaking out, and resisting the negative effects

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In April, organizations around the world staged events. Those actions included:

Austria

Farmers' organizations belonging to the Via Campesina and to the Coordination Paysanne Européenne (CPE) organized a meal in front of the Agricultural Ministry to demand that more attention be paid to the negative effects on farmers resulting from the WTO, GM crops, and Europe's Common Agricultural Policy.

Brazil

In Brazil—as a result of an initiative from former Senator Marina Silva—April 17th has been declared the "National Day of Struggle for Agrarian Reform." Consequently, from April 10th to 30th, the Movimento Sem Terra (MST) and other Brazilian Via Campesina organizations are organizing numerous activities such as marches, assemblies of landless people, land occupations, press work, and lectures and fairs to demand that the current government carry out effective agrarian reform.

Brazilian Via Campesina organizations are also demanding justice be dealt out to those responsible for the massacre of peasants in Brazil on April 17, 1996. To date, no one has been punished.

The MST is asking that people request the punishment of those responsible for this brutal crime. Please send letters, telegrams, faxes and emails to the National Secretariat of Human Rights, to ask for justice in this matter. Please contact:

NILMÁRIO MIRANDA, Secretaria Especial dos Direitos Humanos
Espanada dos Ministério – Bloco T – 4º andar – sala 418
CEP 70064-900 – Brasília – DF – Brasil
Fax 55 61 226 2971 – email: mario.mamede@mj.gov.br

Canada

In addition to the work by the NFU, the Union Paysanne in Québec participated in:

- an exposition of Sebastao Solgado's photos of the MST at the "Centre Paysan" in St-Croix, Quebec;
- a press conference on food sovereignty; and
- a presentation on the Via Campesina in a forum on international social movements at the "Institut de Technologie Agro-Alimentaire" in La Pocatière.

Chile

Peasant organizations met to plan the International Seed Campaign. A leadership training session for farm workers will be held from April 21-26. Then, on April 28th, farmers are organizing a rally using the slogan "In Chile also, the Countryside cannot take it any longer", echoing Mexican farmers' slogan: El Campo no Aguanta Mas (The Countryside can't take it anymore).

If you don't want GM wheat, don't buy Roundup:

NFU runs radio ads

The NFU is running a series of ads on selected radio stations. The ads are variations on the following script:

“Hello, I'm Stewart Wells, President of the National Farmers Union. We're asking farmers to use their market power to help us stop the introduction of genetically-modified Roundup Ready wheat. By switching brands of glyphosate and seed this spring, farmers can send a strong message to the promoters of Roundup Ready wheat. And be sure to tell your retailer why you're making the switch. For more on genetically-modified wheat, visit our website at www.nfu.ca”

The NFU website includes information on GM wheat and on sending a strong message to Monsanto through your glyphosate purchase decisions. Please follow the links on the NFU home page (www.nfu.ca).

The NFU is asking members, Locals, Districts, and Regions to contribute to this campaign. If you would like radio ads to run in your area, please consider making a financial contribution to this initiative.

There are many signs that we are closing in on a victory on GM wheat. This ad campaign is one of many initiatives on GM wheat that the NFU has spearheaded. And it is an important initiative: educating farmers, giving them a simple and direct action that they can take to stop GM wheat, and putting financial pressure on Monsanto that complements our ongoing work with the federal government. Please contribute to this campaign. Please send cheques to the National Office: 2717 Wentz Ave., Saskatoon, Sask., S7K 4B6. Please indicate in the letter or on the cheque that you want the money to go toward NFU's radio ads on GM wheat.

Thanks to all NFU members for your ongoing support.

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NFU members: Come to a barn dance

NFU Executive Secretary Darrin Qualman and his wife Donna—with help from their friends—will hold their third barn dance, on Thursday, July 3, 2003. Darrin and Donna's barn is located on their farm near Dundurn, Saskatchewan—25 minutes South of Saskatoon.

Many NFU members attended the previous two barn dances (in 1998 and '99). Darrin and Donna are hoping that NFU members can again attend.

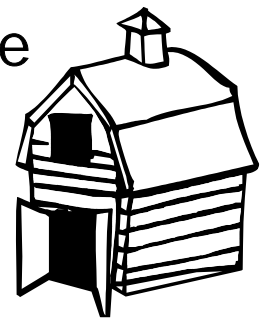
This year's attractions include:

- **Headlining act Fred Eaglesmith (www.fredeaglesmith.com).** Fred is an international star and a thoughtful songwriter.
- An opening act;
- Our barn, built in 1918 with hand tools and featuring a 40 foot ceiling;
- Hay rides (we hope);
- An 11 PM lunch featuring organic beef, local bread, and locally-grown produce (included in ticket price);
- Free camping on the farm.

All profits go to fund Saskatoon's Child Hunger and Education Project (CHEP).

Tickets are \$25 each and we expect to sell out by early June. Please talk to your friends and family and send Darrin a cheque for the tickets you want so that you won't be disappointed. Admission is by advance tickets only and ticket numbers are strictly limited. Children under 12 are free.

Please send a cheque to Darrin Qualman, Box 84, Dundurn, Saskatchewan S0K 1K0.



(International Farmers' Day, from page 2)

that trade agreements, corporate globalization, and neo-liberal policies are having on their farms, their neighbors, and on their rural communities.”

The Montreal action was organized and supported by the Union Paysanne de Montréal; Food Not Laws; Biotech Action Montréal; The Convergence des luttes anti-capitalistes; The People's Potato; Comité chrétien pour les droits en Amérique Latine; Comité Libertad (CEGEP Vieux-Montréal); Comité pour la libération des prisonnières-s politiques; Social Justice Committee; Students Taking Action in Chiapas; and Student Network to Stop the FTAA.

NFU officials are extremely active on trade and international issues. NFU President Stewart Wells has had conversations with Canadian trade officials and has recently written to the Canadian government objecting to the anti-farmer measures proposed by the WTO's Harbinson. NFU former-President (and Via Campesina North America Coordinator) Nettie Wiebe recently met with farm organizations and NGOs in Geneva in preparation for the Cancun WTO talks. The NFU will send a delegation to Cancun in September.

International Farmers' Day activities continued...

Colombia

From April 6th to 8th, peasants held a major demonstration and held a National Agrarian Congress where they discussed human rights issues in the countryside and opposition to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

Ecuador

In the city of Cuenca, the National Confederation of Peasants launched a National Campaign on Food Sovereignty.

El Salvador

On April 2nd, peasants held a demonstration against the FTAA. On April 22nd, there will be a “Mayors' Forum” that will bring together over a hundred mayors from across the country who will discuss the issue of agriculture and environment.

Honduras

On April 29th, over 3000 peasants will participate in a March for Agrarian Reform, to express opposition to the FTAA and US actions in Iraq.

Indonesia

The Federation of Indonesian Peasant Unions (FSPI) held a press conference to demand the release of peasant leaders who have been imprisoned for engaging in a struggle for social justice. The press conference will also demand the “release” of Indonesia from neo-liberalism. The FSPI also held a leadership training session on the dangers of neo-liberalism and a demonstration to protest the introduction of five bills related to agriculture.

India

The Karnataka State Farmers' Association (KRRS) held a massive rally of farmers in Davangere, Karnataka against GMOs, the WTO, rising farm debt, dismantling of subsidy programs for electricity, and crop-insurance frauds: all of which is leading to increasing suicides among farmers.

Italy

A Public Conference on GMOs and food sovereignty was held in the Provincia di Lucca.

In Rome, a number of events took place:

- a meeting of students on the issue of seed, health, and human rights;
- Campaign Stop-WTO initiatives took place in 20 shopping centers throughout Rome;
- A farmers' initiative, called the Forum Contadino – Altragricoltura, will hold its first assembly; and
- The Foro Contadino/Altragricoltura and MST support committee met with representatives of the Brazilian government.

What is the Vía Campesina?

The Vía Campesina is a global farm movement that unites organizations of peasants, small and medium-sized farmers, rural women, farm workers, and indigenous agrarian communities in Asia, the Americas, and Europe (Africa is working to establish a pan-African network that will then join the Vía Campesina). Formed in 1993, the Vía Campesina has experienced rapid growth. Currently, 82 organizations representing millions of farming families from 47 countries belong to the Vía Campesina.

Because agricultural policy is increasingly defined at the international level, farm leaders are forging alliances with like-minded organizations around the world. The Vía Campesina emerged in direct opposition to the globalization of an industrialized and liberalized model of agriculture promoted by the WTO and regional free trade agreements. By forming the Vía Campesina, progressive farm leaders gathered together to build an alternative model of agriculture. In that alternative model, agriculture is farmer-driven, based on peasant and small-holder production, and plays an important social function, while at the same time being economically viable, socially just, and ecologically sustainable.

The core issues that the Vía Campesina is now working on are:

- Food Sovereignty and Agricultural Trade,
- Genetic Resources, Biodiversity and Farmers' Rights,
- Agrarian Reform,
- Human Rights and Solidarity,
- Gender and rural development,
- Farmworkers' rights,
- Migration, and
- Alternative agriculture.

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International Farmers' Day activities continued...

Lebanon

On April 17th, there was a farmworkers' and farmers' conference and mobilization.

Netherlands

The Dutch "Friends of the Earth"—in collaboration with farmers' and consumers' groups and Platform Earth—organized a public debate in Amsterdam on the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy in the European Union. This marked the beginning of new relationships of cooperation and collaboration among the various participating organizations.

Spain

In Oviedo, Vía Campesina organizations and allies organized a public meeting with representatives from the Bolivian Coca Growers.

In Alicante, the Greens, in collaboration with Global Resistance Movement, sent a press release, demonstrated in front of the Ministry of Agriculture, and organized a solidarity banquet.

Switzerland

March 14:

A public debate was held that included representatives from CPE-Via Campesina, Uniterre, and ROPPA (a network of African farmers organizations).

March 17:

University students engaged in a food sovereignty action.

March 28:

European farm organizations of the CPE organized an action against Nestlé.

March 29:

A major demonstration involving over 10,000 people to protest the WTO took place in Geneva.

United States of America

Representatives from the Mexican "Movimiento El Campo No Aguanta Más" (The Countryside Can't Take it Anymore Movement) travelled to the West and East Coasts of the USA to give presentations on the negative effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on Mexican farmers.

Grain Commission proposes changing quality system: NFU submits major report

The comprehensive variety eligibility declaration (VED) system proposed by the Canadian Grain Commission (CGC) would force all farmers—over 99% of whom never misrepresent grain—to take millions of samples and sign millions of forms each year.

“This is the grain system equivalent of gun control: simple in concept, complex and expensive in practice, burdensome on the honest, and unlikely to catch the ‘criminals.’ Curbing grain system contamination and the misrepresentation of varieties does not require such a cumbersome system. Simpler, cheaper, and more effective solutions exist. The NFU has detailed such alternatives,” said NFU President Stewart Wells in a brief and letter sent March 31st to CGC Assistant Chief Commissioner Terry Harasym.

The CGC has identified a problem: some grain companies and a tiny minority of farmers are misrepresenting their grain varieties: for instance, trying to pass off unlicensed varieties of wheat as licensed milling varieties. This puts Canada’s global reputation for top-quality, consistent grain at risk. “The NFU commends the CGC for taking the initiative to identify a problem and propose remedies. But we cannot agree that a comprehensive VED system would be an effective way to deal with this threat,” said Wells.

Currently, grain classes are visually distinguishable and new varieties must meet the criteria of kernel visual distinguishability (KVD). In a January 14, 2003 report, “A Discussion Paper on the Use of Variety Eligibility Declarations”, the CGC proposes replacing the KVD system with a variety eligibility declaration (VED) system wherein parties would sign declarations attesting to the varietal makeup of grain. The CGC explains that “Every time grain changes hands, samples would be taken, and declarations signed.”

The NFU told the CGC: “The proposed VED system will be extraordinarily complex in practice when implemented in the real world of commercial trucks, unit trains, and high-throughput elevators. And this complexity will introduce a multitude of opportunities for system contamination and a multitude of costs for farmers.”

The NFU also provided details of measures that would be much less expensive and failure-prone and far more effective at curbing grain system contamination and variety misrepresentation. The NFU brief is on our website: go to www.nfu.ca and click on “Briefs”. — nfu —

The NFU would like to thank members Derek Dewar, Ian Robson, Fred Tait, and Lyle Wright for their help in drafting the NFU response to the CGC.

NFU draws attention to climate change impacts in Ontario

“Ontario farmers can expect significant increases in temperature; more floods, droughts, and extreme weather events; and hotter, drier conditions during the main growing season,” noted an April 22 NFU news release.

The NFU release pointed to a recent report by the Union of Concerned Scientists, the Ecological Society of America, and the David Suzuki Foundation entitled: “Confronting Climate Change in the Great Lakes Region.” Some of the climate change effects outlined in that report include:

- a reduction in soil moisture by as much as 30% in the summer;
- higher ozone concentrations which will damage bean and horticultural crops;
- severe rainstorms during the planting and harvest seasons;
- hot and dry growing seasons;
- the expansion northward of pests and pathogens; and
- increased competition for increasingly scarce water supplies for irrigation, drinking, and other uses.

The NFU has already recognized the serious implications of climate change for farmers in Ontario, and across the country, and has urged all levels of government to take immediate action to slow and reverse climate change by significantly reducing the amount of greenhouse gas being released into the atmosphere. Necessary changes include using more fuel-efficient transportation, using more solar and wind power, reducing chemical fertilizers use, and reducing the distances that food travels.

Ann Slater, NFU Women’s Advisory Member in Ontario says, “We have developed an extremely energy-inefficient food production and distribution system. A globalized food system leads to needless food travel, resulting in needless emissions of carbon dioxide—a major contributor to climate change.”

Instead of supporting international trade agreements that maximize food travel, the NFU believes that governments must support localized food systems that reduce the distance food travels from farmer to table, thereby, reducing the use of fossil fuels in food distribution and processing.

Federal safety net proposals fail young farmers

The NFU Youth weighed into the debate over the federal government's safety net package, proposed under its Agriculture Policy Framework (APF).

Dave Lewington, Youth Advisory member for Ontario, stated in an April 14 news release that: "The proposed safety net programs do little to enable young farmers in Canada to move into full partnership in their family farms or to begin their own operations. NISA-type programs offer little hope for a young farmer who does not have the spare cash to deposit in order to get the government's matching funding.

In addition to lacking funds to participate, young farmers often don't have the production history necessary to fully utilize programs that are based on three- and five-year averages. The federal government has said that it would include provisions for beginning farmers in its proposed New NISA program, but so far, the government has not provided specifics on how that program would accommodate beginning farmers.

Lewington also said that a "whole farm" subsidy approach penalizes farmers who diversify their operations, and farmers who cut their costs and work harder during lean times. He asked: Do we really want to send the message to young and beginning farmers that diversifying will penalize us on the amount of government support we receive?

Melissa Hunter, a 25-year-old NFU member and farmer from the Mitchell-area of Ontario, stressed the need for Canadian agriculture policy and, most importantly, farm safety net programs to support sustainable, family farm agriculture. She said, "The APF does not appear to be adapted to the interests of small family farms, but more focused on serving large farmers and corporations who have direct interests in the expanded production of cheap raw materials and the creation of cheaper labor. A true focus on environmentally-, financially-, and socially-sustainable agriculture is critical."

The NFU release did point out some positive aspects of the government's new safety net proposal, including the move to demand-driven provincial allocation. Such allocation will ensure that farmers in need will be treated equitably and that money will flow to the regions where farmers face the largest losses.

The NFU submitted a comprehensive report on safety nets to the federal government in January 2003. That report, entitled "*Safety Nets and the Future of the Family Farm*," critiqued the government's safety net proposals and detailed effective, low-cost alternatives that could end the farm crisis.

The NFU feels that safety net programs must be based on farmers' costs of production, so that farm families earn a respectable return for their labor and investment. This assistance should be targeted to family farms, and not to giant agribusiness corporations. And there needs to be both a realistic allocation of support dollars in the medium term, and a commitment to *ending* the farm income crisis in the longer term.

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WANTED:

Books on the history of the farm movement

The NFU is creating an important collection of books on the history of the farm movement. In particular, we are interested in books on:

- **Provincial or national farm organizations;**
- **Women's agricultural organizations;**
- **Biographies of key individuals (McNaughton, Partridge, Motherwell, etc.);**
- **Histories of grain companies or other agricultural companies (CN, CP, McCains, etc.);**
- **Histories of the creation of supply management and marketing boards;**
- **Pre-WWII magazines, especially the Grain Growers Guide (1909-28).**

The NFU may be able to pay for key material. The NFU will also gratefully accept donations. Tax receipts can be issued for any donations.

The NFU intends to build up a collection of approximately 100 volumes covering the key issues of the history of Canadian agriculture and the farm movement. These books will be available, on a controlled basis, to members and other researchers.

Please contact the NFU before sending any books or magazines.

NFU meets federal NDP leader

On April 11, several NFU members and officials met with federal NDP leader Jack Layton near Mitchell, Ontario.

The NFU and Layton agreed on many issues. The NFU told the NDP leader that genetically-modified (GM) crops are a growing concern for Canadian farmers. Especially threatening to farmers is the ongoing contamination of non-GM crops by GM varieties. Layton responded that stopping the introduction of GM wheat is a top priority for his party. The NFU highlighted the extreme threat that GM wheat and other crops pose to the continued existence of organic agriculture in much of Canada.

The NFU called attention to increasing corporate control of farming and focused on the corporate takeover of hog production. Perth/Oxford Local Vice-President Bruce Hunter said, “Many farmers are becoming serfs. In the hog industry, many farmers are under contracts which require them to both buy their feed from, and sell their pigs to, the same corporation.”

Layton and the NFU discussed how the erosion of farmers’ incomes and government cutbacks leads to the decline of rural communities: the closure of rural schools and libraries and the loss of valuable programs like summer reading clubs.

They also discussed the difficulties faced by young farmers who attempt to start their own operations or take over the full financial role on their families’ farms. NFU Youth Advisory Member Dave Lewington pointed out the inadequacies of current safety net programs for beginning farmers. He also noted that the commodification of Supply Management quota—required before Canadian farmers can produce milk, eggs, or poultry—is also adding to barriers for young farmers. He said: “The high price of quota prevents young farmers and organic farmers from diversifying into dairy, hens, or broiler chickens. This small-scale production could help meet a growing demand for local produce marketed directly from the farmer to consumer.” The NFU is working to develop alternatives to sale of quota; alternatives that will ensure that small and beginning farmers can affordably obtain the quota they need.

NFU Perth/Oxford Local executive member Ann Slater said at the meeting: “I am a full-time farmer with no other income. I make my living off of three acres by selling fresh produce direct to consumers. Agribusiness and governments have tended to focus on export markets. There needs to be more attention paid to local marketing as a way for farmers to take more of the dollar value of their products. Ontario farmers should be growing food for the City of Toronto not only for markets in other countries.” In response, Layton recalled his involvement in forming the Toronto Food Policy Council.

The meeting with Layton was arranged by Bruce Hunter, Vice-President of the Perth/Oxford Local of the NFU. In attendance from the NFU were Perth/Oxford executive members Bob and Carol Passmore, Bruce Hunter, and Ann Slater as well as NFU Youth Advisory Committee Member Dave Lewington. In addition to Jack Layton, Sam Dinicol (NDP federal candidate) and Jack Verhulst (NDP provincial candidate) also attended. — nfu —



We're on the web!!
www.nfu.ca