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WOMEN FARMERS REJECT AG-TRADE LIBERALIZATION

SASKATOON, Sask.—National farm women leaders met with Agriculture Minister Lyle Vanclief on December 10, 2002 in Ottawa to outline their concerns and recommendations. Organization leaders from the National Farmers Union, the Canadian Farm Women's Network, Federated Women's Institutes, Réseau des Entreprises Familiales, and the Fédération des agricultrices of Québec, presented their joint positions to Minister Vanclief. One of their key demands was for a fundamental change in the international trade environment - **"We demand that agriculture be removed from the WTO"** [**"Nous demandons de sortir l'agriculture de l'OMC."**].

Their demand to have agriculture removed from the World Trade Organization (WTO) is part of a growing world wide dissatisfaction with the effects of the WTO on agriculture. The Via Campesina, a global peasant and small-farmers movement which is monitoring the effects of trade liberalization on small farmers, communities and the environment, is leading a campaign to have the agriculture negotiations removed from the WTO. The WTO regime commits governments to removing any 'trade-barriers' such as supply-management or import tariffs that protect domestic markets. While forcing producers to give up their marketing boards and compete in a global marketplace against each other, the WTO is leading to the consolidation of trans-national agribusiness, increasing their market power. Liberalizing trade in agriculture has lowered the prices to farmers everywhere, forcing millions of people from their land.

Noting the statistics which indicate a rise in Canadian agricultural export, along with lower farm-gate prices, a decline in farm numbers, and an increase in farm debt, Karen Pedersen, Women's President of the National Farmers Union told Minister Vanclief, "The math of the current agricultural policies does not add up. Our agriculture policy is directed towards increasing agri-food exports – and that's working very well. But at the same time, net farm income has stayed the same and, in the most recent Census, we have just registered the steepest ever decline in the number of farmers."

The women leaders expressed their deep concern over the loss of farm families, the financial hardships facing many farm families, and the decline of rural communities. They demanded policy changes to renew family farming and rebuild rural communities in Canada. They emphasized that in order to protect the environment, ensure food quality and safety, improve farm incomes, and attract young people into farming, Canada must regain control over its farm policy. This is only possible if Canada refuses to continue to negotiate away the regulations necessary to protect farming and food in this country.

Pedersen summed up “Policies must be changed to support and ensure that small farmers can enter and stay in the business. The WTO makes that impossible. That’s why we’ve got to get agriculture out from under the WTO.”

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