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Phone: 306-652-9465 * Fax: 306-664-6226 * E-mail: nfu@nfu.ca
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"Patented" ≠ "genetically modified"

When Monsanto sues a farmer for patent infringement, the company usually goes looking for farm-destroying amounts of money. (See: The Center for Food Safety, *Monsanto vs. U.S. Farmers*, 2005.) Many farmers received that lesson as they watched Percy Schmeiser spend $400,000 to defend himself and his farm. Even if a farmer wasn't clear who was right and who was wrong in the Schmeiser case, the lesson was clear: patent law gives Monsanto a wide range of sharp-edged tools with which to go after a farmer; and, win or lose, high legal costs mean that resisting Monsanto means risking the farm.

Because of those legal risks, many farmers made the decision not to grow the genetically-modified (GM) seeds that contain patented genes. Some of those farmers thought that if they avoided GM seeds, they'd avoid patents and avoid the risks of large lawsuits. They're wrong. "Patented" is not synonymous with "GM;" corporations are claiming patent rights over non-GM seeds. One example is the newly-released line of Clearfield® lentils.

Clearfield lentils have been developed by the Crop Development Centre at the University of Saskatchewan. The U. of S. owns the Clearfield lentil trait and all Clearfield lentil

(continued on page 2…)

NFU President meets new Ag Minister:
Wells urges Strahl to solve farm crisis

During a March 8 meeting in Regina with federal Agriculture Minister Chuck Strahl, NFU President Stewart Wells urged the government to implement the NFU's 16-point plan to help end the farm crisis. Wells also urged immediate, short-term action—a bridge program that can keep farmers on the land until new cost-of-production-based support measures can be implemented.

The Conservatives have pledged to scrap the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization (CAIS) Program and bring in a new plan based on cost-of-production (see box, below). "When can we expect to see that plan?" Wells asked Strahl. Wells also noted to Strahl that, because of the massive decline in realized net farm incomes, provinces such as Manitoba and Saskatchewan are unable to afford to cost-share programs on a 60/40 basis with the federal government.

Wells highlighted the need to restore farmers' economic power in the marketplace and raise net farm incomes. He also emphasized the importance of federal government support for the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB), Canadian Grain Commission (CGC), and supply-management agencies. And Wells called on the federal government to ban Genetic Use Restriction Technologies (GURTs), commonly referred to as "Terminator" technology (seeds which have been genetically-modified to become sterile at harvest, so farmers are forced to buy new seed each season). Wells' meeting with the federal Agriculture Minister is just one of a series of March and April meetings aimed at reversing the catastrophic net farm income slide. — nfu —

Conservatives promise cost-of-production

The Conservative Party agriculture platform, released December 21, 2005, reads in part:

"A Conservative government will replace CAIS with a new income stabilization program that is simpler and more responsive. We will ensure that it properly addresses the cost of production, market revenue, and inventory evaluation."

www.conservative.ca/media/20060112-Platform.pdf (see page 10 of 25)

("Patented" ≠ genetically modified", from page 1)

varieties. They have licensed exclusive rights to BASF, who has in turn licensed commercial distribution rights to the Saskatchewan Pulse Growers. Clearfield lentils are designed to be resistant to imidazolinone (IMI) herbicides such as BASF's Odyssey®.

Clearfield Lentils are not genetically-modified; they are the products of chemically induced seed mutagenesis. (Seeds of many plants were treated with ethyl-methane-sulphonate then planted. The plants were then sprayed with an IMI herbicide. One herbicide-tolerant mutant was selected as the basis for the BASF line.)

Farmers wishing to purchase and grow Clearfield lentils will be asked to sign a contract that BASF calls its "Clearfield Commitment." The Commitment is innovative in that, in its current version, it allows farmers to save and re-use seeds (more on this below). It also allows BASF to fulfill its commitment to the CFIA regarding the communication of best management practices to farmers. But the problem with the contract is that it invokes patent rights to protect BASF's non-GM lentils. Here are some excerpts from the contract:

> **BACKGROUND**
>
> …
>
> 3. BASF is the exclusive licensee of and holds exclusive rights to Canadian Patent 1,341,465 entitled 'Herbicide Resistance in Plants' (the "Patent").
>
> …
>
> 6. BASF intends to grant a license to use the Patent on the terms set out herein to those purchasers of CLEARFIELD lentil seeds who have executed a copy of this Commitment.
>
> **Article 1 - License**
>
> 1.1 Methods of growing plants from CLEARFIELD lentil seeds are protected by the Patent and can only be used with permission from BASF. At all times BASF owns the technology resident in CLEARFIELD lentil seeds, irrespective of ownership of the seeds themselves. Therefore, as consideration for your obligations in this Commitment and payment of the purchase price for CLEARFIELD lentil seed, BASF hereby grants to you (the Purchaser) a personal, non-transferable, royalty-free license to grow lentil plants from CLEARFIELD lentil seed provided that no AHAS herbicide, other than the BASF Product, is applied to the lentil plants or to the area where the plants are grown. This license is granted only for the 2006 growing season and only for the plants grown in Canada.
>
> …
>
> 1.4 BASF and/or its affiliates retain exclusive license rights of the Patent and the Purchaser shall receive only a limited right to use the Patent as granted herein.
>
> 1.5 The Purchaser hereby agrees that it shall not, directly or indirectly, during or at any time after the 2006 growing season, take any action to challenge or contest the validity or ownership of any technology or intellectual property relating to CLEARFIELD lentils including, for greater certainty, the Patent. ….

In its explicit use of patent language, the Clearfield lentil contract (2006) is significantly different than the Clearfield canola contract (2005), which includes the following.

> 4. … Any violation [of the Commitment] may result in infringement of Plant Breeders Rights under which canola varieties are protected. …

Further, the Clearfield lentil contract requires that farmers who use an IMI herbicide with the lentils must use BASF's brand, Odyssey®:

> (v) it shall not grow lentil plants from CLEARFIELD lentil seeds in the presence of any AHAS herbicide other than the BASF Product.

There is no royalty and no technology use fee on Clearfield lentils. However, farmers who wish to re-use seed will be required to pay to have the seed tested each year as a quality assurance measure to ensure that the

(continued on page 4….)

A nation of bookkeepers?

Forget "hewers of wood and drawers of water;" Canada is fast becoming a nation of data-entry clerks.

Despite the admonition by GK Chesterton that "We cannot all live by taking in each other's washing…." Canada seems intent on bankrupting farm families who produce real wealth, while enriching its paper-modification and service elites. And before the "information workers" reading these words respond in anger that their contributions are being devalued, that's not the intent. The problem isn't that we have administrators and consultants; it's that we have such people *in vast and rapidly increasing numbers* while at the same time that we're displacing family farmers—questioning whether food production really adds "value" in our modern economy. While a sound economy needs equally workers who produce tangible wealth—food, clothing, shelter, energy, durable goods—and workers who administrate, cogitate, and delegate, Canada's corporate-controlled economy is directing far too much wealth to the latter group, at the expense of the former. We're destroying the essential balance between those who make and those who manage.

Between 1996 and 2001, the two most recent censuses, Canada reduced its number of farmers by 29,623—a cut of nearly 11% in just five years.

Over the same period, the Canadian economy *added* nearly 19,000 gambling operators, nearly doubling their number. It added 22,000 in the category of "accounting and bookkeeping services." It added 25,000 in the category of "advertising services". It added 63,000 in the catchall of "other business services." And our economy added a staggering 170,000+ in the category of "computer and related services."

For every farmer the Canadian economy liquidated, it added twelve managers and information workers. (Those wanting to carp about government inefficiency should note that *all* of that management-staff growth was in the private sector—the number of workers in "government services industries" declined.) If the goal of farmer expulsion is economic efficiency, policy-makers might be wise to worry that efficiency gains on our farms may be neutralized by more-than-offsetting losses in corporate office towers.

The current farm crisis is not, as in the 1930s, the result of weather problems and a generalized economic collapse: the farm crisis is a public policy mistake that has allowed corporations to restructure our economy so that it increasingly extracts the vast food, fibre, mineral, and energy wealth produced in rural areas and fast-tracks that wealth to the office towers in the dominant (often foreign) financial centres where a rapidly expanding paper-modification, managerial, and stock-option elite flourishes.

Some will see the preceding as a restatement of the old rural/urban split—the country folk against the city folk; farmers against the workers. But it's certainly not that; it's more a restatement of the critique of colonialism. An empire—made up of the globe's dominant corporations—is restructuring rural Canada so that today we work, not for our benefit, but for theirs. — nfu —

Source: Numbers of workers taken from Statistics Canada online datasets 97F0012XCB2001013

Saskatchewan property tax relief welcome

In early March, the Saskatchewan government announced a 33% reduction in the education portion of farm property tax. In very rough numbers, such a reduction may add up to $300 to $500 per section of farm land.

In making the announcement, Premier Calvert announced a long-term commitment to a 60/40 funding split on education funding.

The NFU worked with the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM), Sask. Wheat Pool, and some livestock associations for much of the past five years to reform farm property taxes and to equalize the relative burden borne by rural and urban citizens. The March announcement is an important step in that process and a significant gain for farmers. The coalition's recommendation to the Province has long been to move to a 60/40 funding split, with the Province picking up the 60% share. "We're extremely pleased that the province has chosen to listen to farmers and rural residents, to provide meaningful relief, and to restore some of the equity in the tax system," said NFU President Stewart Wells in a news release responding to the Province's announcement.

The great French potato famine or How French farmers were fried

The following is written by NFU Vice-President Terry Boehm. Boehm has worked extensively on seed issues and intellectual property rights in Canada and he has met with European farm leaders on these issues.

Not since the Irish potato famine of the 19th Century has a European nation been confronted with a crisis such as France now faces. However, the brave Deputies of the National Assembly have confronted a terror no one knew of, and the Deputies have saved France from unimaginable peril. On Feb. 23rd, 2006, France reacted to the impending expiration (after 25 years) of Plant Breeders' Rights on the potato variety named "Charlotte;" Deputies legislated the seed companies of France an additional 5 years to collect royalties on their varieties. Apparently a catastrophe of biblical proportions would befall France if Charlotte were to pass into the public domain and farmers and gardeners could plant this potato royalty-free. Of course, after a mere 25 years of collecting royalties (now at €670,000 per year—approx. one million Canadian dollars), how could the poor seed companies find the strength to develop a new variety without at least another 5 years of life-giving, million-dollar transfusions. Now they can continue to collect from everyone's plate and prevent the citizens from gorging themselves on Charlotte potatoes which would surely be grown on every hectare of France once they were free of royalties.

"Let them eat cake," chimed the Deputies of France, and perhaps they will not notice democracy's demise. It seems that the Deputies will not rest until all threats are behind them, so, for good measure (also on Feb. 23rd, two weeks ahead of scheduled debates), the deputies threw in UPOV '91—an international convention that will give the companies almost complete control of seeds (see note, below). The French government will decree *which* crops farmers may plant with their own seeds—even further weakening the largely ineffective Farmers Privilege in UPOV '91. Apparently, after 10,000 years of doing so, farmers and citizens cannot be trusted to plant seeds without decree. No longer will they be able to seed without paying the new emperors their due. Long live the Seed Companies; Long live the King of France Finance! — nfu —

Note: UPOV '91 is the extremely restrictive form of Plant Breeders' Rights that the NFU successfully fought in Canada last year with the help of many others. Norway recently rejected UPOV '91 (see story on Norway in this issue).. However it was introduced in France, not through the Dept. of Agriculture, but through the Dept. of Foreign Affairs. It was passed in one day with almost no debate. Not only that, but when a few people became aware of what was going on and tried to mount some opposition, Deputies moved up the day for debate by two weeks. This is a sobering tale for us in Canada, and it indicates that we had better watch all departments in government for this kind of manoeuvre. The adoption of UPOV '91 has huge consequences for French farmers, as the country is a huge agricultural producer (France produces as much wheat as Canada).

("Patented" ≠ genetically modified", from page 2)

seed has adequate herbicide tolerance. This test is called the Clearfield "Confirm Test." The BASF strategy seems to be to forgo payment on the seed and to make its money on sales of its Odyssey herbicide.

The BASF contract gives the company wide-ranging powers, including the right to audit a farmer's records and inspect a farmer's property to verify compliance with contract terms. By claiming patent protection for its lentils, BASF has armed itself with all the tools that Monsanto deployed against Schmeiser—including the right to sue farmers for tens- or hundreds-of-thousands of dollars.

In the end, the problem isn't simply Clearfield lentils, the problem is the proliferation of patents to encompass more and more of the Canadian seed supply. And the problem of patent proliferation is just one part of a larger problem: Farmers' rights to save, re-use, and control their seed are under sustained and intensifying attack on numerous fronts: Terminator Technology; a seed-industry push for stronger Plant Breeders' Rights (PBR) legislation; increasing contracting that prohibits seed saving; and the expansion of patents to a wider and wider variety of non-GM varieties.

The NFU is the lead organization in Canada fighting for farmers' and citizens' rights to save, re-use, exchange, and control their seeds. The NFU has taken a lead role in the Ban Terminator Campaign. The NFU continues to be extremely successful in blocking efforts to amend Canada's PBR Act. And the NFU will vigorously oppose the proliferation of patents on seeds. — nfu —

CRASH! Manitoba Net Income disaster intensifies

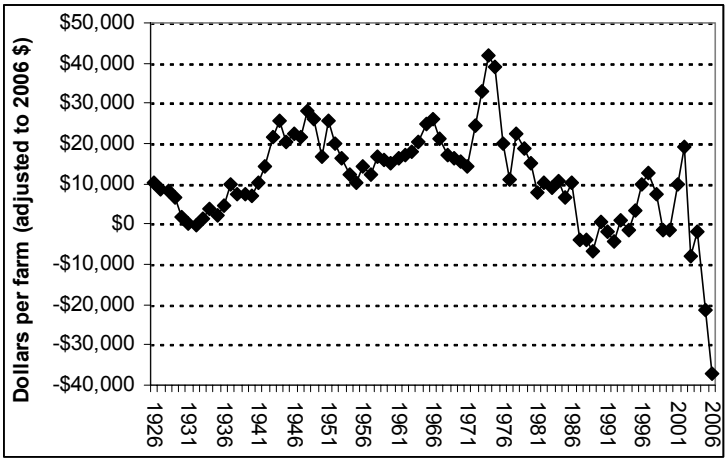
"We're having a meltdown here," says Manitoba NFU Co-ordinator and Rossendale-area farmer Fred Tait. Tait was commenting in an NFU news release on February-released data from Agriculture Canada that shows Manitoba net farm income in free fall.

Ag. Canada projects that in 2006 the average Manitoba farmer's net income from the markets will be *negative* $37,000. 2006—like '05 and '04—will be far worse than the Great Depression.

The following graph uses Ag. Canada and Stats. Canada Realized Net Income numbers, subtracts government payments to show net income from the markets, divides net income by the number of farmers in Manitoba, and adjusts those per-farm net incomes for inflation to allow comparability with past years.

2005 was the worst year in history for Manitoba farmers. And if Ag. Canada predictions hold true, 2006 will be even worse. "What's causing this collapse?" asked Tait. He responded: "The BSE crisis is over. Bad weather certainly played a part, but the collapse clearly started many years ago. And the 1930s certainly had some bad weather, but our net incomes from the markets are lower today."

Manitoba Realized Net Incomes from the market, per farm, adjusted for inflation: 1926-2006

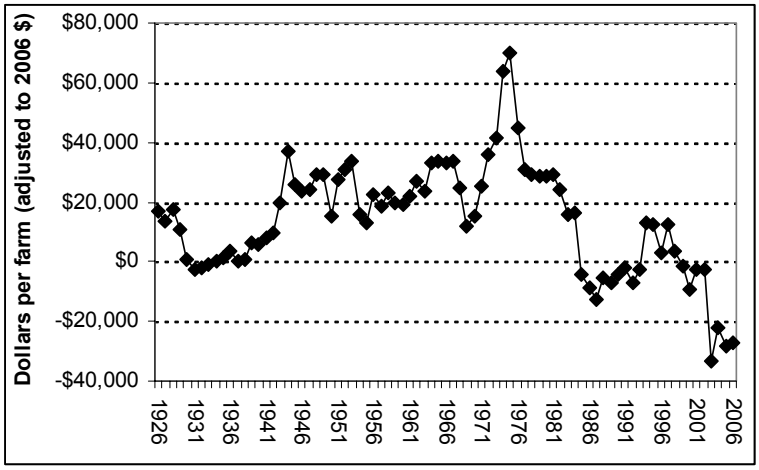


The NFU's November, 2005 report entitled *The Farm Crisis and Corporate Profits* lists the profits of nearly every agribusiness corporation that plays a significant role in the Canadian agri-food economy. That report finds that in recent years, farmers have posted their lowest profits in history and agribusiness has posted its highest. That report can be accessed at www/nfu.ca/briefs/corporate_profits.pdf. The NFU's July 5, 2005 report *The Farm Crisis: Its Causes and Solutions* lays out a comprehensive 16-point plan for ending the farm income crisis. That report is also on the NFU website. NFU officials are meeting with government officials and other farm leaders to push for solutions to the intensifying crisis.

Saskatchewan income disaster will continue: Ag. Canada

The following graph is based on the same methodology as the Manitoba graph, above. It shows that in 2006 Saskatchewan farmers can expect their third worst year in history.

Saskatchewan Realized Net Incomes from the market, per farm, adjusted for inflation: 1926-2006



In only five of the last 22 years have the markets paid a positive net return to Saskatchewan farmers—that, after 45 straight years of positive net returns following the end of the depression. Year after year, farmers have to rely on off-farm and spousal income, debt, taxpayer support, and the depletion of savings and equity.

Saskatchewan NFU Board member Lori Erhardt said in a February 9 news release that such an unprecedented and prolonged income collapse demands an explanation. "Farmers' profits have hit record lows just as agribusiness profits have hit record highs. Perhaps rather than calling this a net income crisis we should call it a net income *transfer*," said Erhardt. — nfu —

Why Carbon Credits for farmers can never amount to a hill of beans

The following is the latest offering from the NFU satire factory. As such, it is a completely fictional account of a completely plausible reality.

From: [redacted], Strategic Policy Div., Monsanto Corporation
To: [redacted] Corp. Affairs, Monsanto Corp
Date: November 11, 2005
Issue: Suppressing value of farmers' carbon credits

Dear [redacted]

Further to our talk, D.C. airport, and to the same point, I want to raise 1 more issue. I agree that paying farmers to sequester carbon through min-til (and even just continued discussions about the possibility) will be a plus in terms of our sales...plant genetics and crop-protect products. And, I agree that our real payoff will be if carbon credit payments can be made on a permanent, contractual basis--locking in farmers for up to a generation (The financial guys say that the tillage option "price disciplines" our stuff).

But I think that you should temper your enthusiasm for carbon sequestration payments. There could be a downside for us unless such payments are kept in a very narrow band--perhaps between $5 and $12/ton.

Here's the thing: If farmer payments are too low, farmers won't submit to long-term contracts (and certainly not to caveats on their land titles). But if carbon credits are too high--say over $12/ton--then we risk "the buffalo effect." Farmers can sequester about two tons of carbon per year by putting land back to grass. Two tons at $12 net per ton is $24 per acre per year. In some parts of the world (think west Canada), $24 is close to the cash rent rate. Unless we can work with government and the corps to cap carbon payments, we risk farmers choosing to grass their land and collect carbon money rather than bothering with tenants and production (and our products). I don't have to tell you what $20/ton carbon would do to that equation (and to our profits). What we risk here is that farmers will really move to ZERO till.

When talking to the decision guys from the other companies, make sure they are aware of our COLLECTIVE interest in keeping carbon payments capped. We'll have real allies among the energy cos. on this one. It's critical to OUR interests that farmers receive only a token amount for their carbon.

Sincerely, [redacted]
-023452345- [redacted]/

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NFU continues to press government to limit improper dairy imports

The federal government should move immediately to close a legal loophole allowing increased imports of dairy protein ingredients, according to Jan Slomp, NFU Alberta Coordinator and Rimbey, Alberta-area dairy farmer. The NFU and supply-management allies have been battling such milk-product imports since the late-1990s.

In a letter to Chuck Strahl, newly-appointed Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Slomp says a recent ruling by the Federal Court of Canada has potentially serious implications for the stability of the dairy sector and the supply-management system as a whole. The court ruling stated that Canada does not have the right to limit imports of subsidized dairy ingredients. In its decision, the court backed the contention of the Canadian International Trade Tribunal (CITT) that it was more precise to classify the milk protein product in question as "protein substances" instead of "natural milk constituents."

According to the Dairy Farmers of Canada (DFC), the inability to limit such imports could mean hundreds of millions of dollars in losses to Canadian dairy farmers as a result of the loss of that portion of their domestic market.

Slomp said it is particularly galling that an unelected trade negotiating body like CITT is working to eliminate Canada's legitimate right to limit imports. He pointed out that the supply-managed sector is one of the few bright spots in agriculture, where farmers are able to earn sufficient returns from the marketplace. "During the last Parliamentary session, a resolution in support of supply management was passed unanimously by members of the House of Commons," Slomp said. "The new government must follow through on that commitment by blocking the loophole which threatens to compromise the foundation of the supply-management system. To do otherwise is to condemn dairy farmers to the possibility of a lingering 'death by a thousand cuts'."

— nfu —

Small Farms Challenge—your big opportunity to dream small

The following article explains a new initiative designed to help increase the numbers of farmers and revitalize rural areas. The article is written by Manitoba NFU member David Neufeld. You can contact David Neufeld at (204) 534-2303 or by email at roomtogrow@mts.net

It seems to me, people choose to live near to centres of power, and accept the busy lifestyle this proximity demands, or they choose to live further away from cities, billboards, and power-brokering influences in order to have more flexibility in determining their quality of life. Perhaps this is how we (hill people) console ourselves when driving our older-model cars and trucks or when we try to explain our lifestyles to our children. Whatever it is, I see a relaxed beauty surrounding many smaller scale farmers; a contentedness I don't see nearly as often in people who have chosen to live on a larger, more bank-managed scale. It's not that one is inherently better than another, but some of us feel it's important to raise the profile of smaller scale farmers, so that the option is more visible and seen as viable for new or down-sizing farmers.

Or is it that simple—a personal choice issue? Our remote rural areas on the prairies are steadily losing residents. Since I was a lad (about 30 years ago), our municipality has lost ½ of its population. For some of us hermits, this isn't a totally bad thing, but for a community that wants to keep its businesses and services, this outflow of consumers, volunteers, rural-living experts, and potential young farmers can be devastating. The larger the farms and the larger the equipment, the fewer people it takes to keep the land producing food and the greater distances farmers will drive to get what they need, and the less likely it is that they will remain interdependent with their neighbours. As the realities of high costs and low income squeeze out capital and profit, each farm family becomes increasingly vulnerable to the promises of the industry. And so perhaps it is as much a community choice issue as it is a personal issue. Our community, at least, is beginning to embrace the small-farm movement as a potential force in helping to repopulate our rural areas.

We're careful not to criticize individual large farmers for their choices. After all, we've all been complicit in letting the culture slip out of agriculture. And we've all begun to wonder if the road we've been on is going in the right direction—considering we all want a thriving community that offers job and career options for our youth. We all recognize the vulnerability of farmers caught up in an industry that pushes getting-bigger-will-solve-the-cash-flow-problems thinking. We each understand the logic that our town-based businesses, schools, hospitals, youth social circles, service agencies, churches will become more stable with more people living in the countryside. Ultimately, we feel it is about us, individually *and* as a community, making choices through which we gain power to decide who we benefit and how our quality of life is mirrored in the quality of life of our neighbours.

In early 2004, our local Agriculture Committee (under the Turtle Mountain Community Development Corporation umbrella) published a book that highlighted 20 smaller-scale farmers in the area entitled 'Successful Small Farms in Southwest Manitoba'. With this publication, we were making the point that it is still possible to fashion a comfortable lifestyle while thinking and acting modestly on the farm. In some areas of Manitoba this thinking is almost extinct. The average age of the farmers on those 20 farms is quite high and the activities are for the most part traditional beef and/or grain operations.

Naturally enough, our next step in let's-try-on-some-new-thinking is launching a contest to draw out farm plans that we know are simmering under all the straw hats and ball caps out there. There are markets, philosophies, technologies, energy options, and cooperative methods that farmers fifty years ago couldn't imagine. So the pool of possible farms and rural businesses is much larger than what my and my parent's generation had to choose from. This is not to say we have to think non-traditionally when we dream; it just means that we're open to hearing any plan that may be drifting or rumbling around inside your head or between you and a partner. Bottom line, (here's the pitch) we want to hear from you. If you've ever dreamt of owning and/or managing a viable small farm or rural business on the prairies, we want you to commit your dream to paper and submit it to us. To be honest, we are particularly interested in ideas that would serve remote locations, but we are also keen to hear about ideas based on urban proximities. We know there's a

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Historical and structural origins of environmental problems in agriculture

The following article is written by Darryl McLaughlin who teaches sociology at Saint Thomas Moore , University of Saskatchewan. Darryl is a long-time NFU member originally from New Brunswick.

In early June of 2005, a heavy isolated shower drenched some of the farms in Northwestern New Brunswick. Because the major crop grown in the area is a row crop (potatoes), the land is especially vulnerable to water erosion in the spring before the plants are able to get a firm grip on the gravelly loam soils typical of the region. The damage of the spring storm was still visible in July. The rolling topography of farmland adjacent to the St. John River Valley has meant that farmers must always be vigilant in their stewardship. However, economic pressure and/or ignorance on the part of farmers, consumers, governments, and corporate managers about a sustainable food system have often eroded that stewardship and subsequently natural resources. The situation in New Brunswick is not unique but rather part of a pattern which has accompanied industrial farming practices as they spread around the world. The International Food Policy Research Institute identifies six main forms of land degradation: loss of soil nutrients, salinisation, agrochemical pollution, soil erosion, overgrazing, and deforestation. "Nearly two-fifths of all farmland has been subject to some degree of degradation since the middle of the twentieth century, accounting for a 17% loss in productivity over that period – even though this has been balanced in some measure by improvements in land quality and conversion of some forest, range, and pasture to agriculture" (McLaughlin, 2002: 13).

In this brief article, I offer a brief overview of the context of humanity's encroachment on most aspects of the structure and functioning of Earth's ecosystems, particularly in relation to activities surrounding food production.

For 99.5% of human history (a period estimated to have lasted from 8 million years up to 13 thousand years ago) human food was acquired by means of hunting and gathering (Ponting, 1991; Stager, 2003). Human communities expanded and contracted in proportion to what nature offered. During this unimaginably long period, human beings ever so gradually developed the capacity to live in a variety of ecosystems. From its birth place in South Africa, human life slowly expanded into Eurasia and then to almost the entire globe over the next 500,000 years (Stager, 2003). The flexibility of humans [to adapt] to a wide range of habitat is the product of the "brain's interaction with nature, through culture" (Wright, 2004: 29). In other words, our ability to work together through the use of language, ideas and values allows us to further create technologies, skills and organizations,

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(Small Farms Challenge, from page 8)

wealth of ideas out there and so we're offering advisory help in the process, generous prizes, and opportunities to mix with other small and wannabe smaller scale farmers. We ask that you add as many numbers as you can manage, so that you (or someone somewhere) can explore the potential of your idea further—hopefully making it a reality.

If you need to draw on our advice, you'll need to send us a draft before 1 Sept. 2006. But if you want to go it alone, the final submission date is 1 Nov. 2006. We've put some resources at www.boissevain.ca; follow the Small Farm Challenge link to the pages that carry a full description of the Challenge, Small Farm links, and a business plan worksheet —the use of which is recommended but optional. If you prefer not to use the internet, we encourage you to call and leave a message at 1-800-497-2393 with your name, phone number, and address. We'll send you more information.

— nfu —

Note to Community Activists. *We're keen on other rural communities using this as a model. Let us know how your experiment evolves or if you've initiated something similar or complimentary.*

(*Historical and structural origins, from page 9*)

which are the different components of culture, help humans live in every part of the world. One can only imagine the laborious process of trial, error and myth connected with this cultural adaption. As Wright points out, "though we became experimental creatures of our own devising, it is important to bear in mind that we had no inkling of this process, let alone its consequences, until only the last six or seven of our 100,000 generations" (2004: 13). Once a group found practices that worked (efficiently or otherwise), practices would change slowly. To experiment too much would be done at one's peril and that of other members of the group (Cohen, 1977). Our dependence on culture for survival has increased in direct proportion to a decline in our awareness of nature (Eder, 1996).

Evidence suggest that between 4,000 and 13,000 years ago farming originated primarily in four areas (the Middle East – 13,000 years ago; the Far East – 7,000 years ago; Central Mexico and Central America – 10,000 years ago; and South America – 4,000 years ago) (Wright, 2004) . The earliest evidence of farming has been found in Southern Iraq, which 13,000 years ago was home to the Sumerian civilization. Although the Sumerian ecological footprint was comparatively small by today's standards, the accumulated consequences of over harvesting the woods, and over tilling and over-grazing the land produced semi-desert conditions still visible today, 8,000 years later. One advantage to being an early civilization, was the abundance of undeveloped real estate available. Even then water front property appeared to be attractive. Permanent agricultural settlements became established where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers slowed to created flood plains. This land was not as new as it seemed. "...the people...had in effect followed their old fields, which had been washed from the worn hills...." (Wright, 2004: 68).

There are important lessons in this Neolithic tragedy that is worth acknowledging. Within their society, hierarchies of power and simple divisions of labour appeared. While the masses were engaged directly in food production and other life-sustaining activities, their observations about environmental impacts would not have been as culturally influential as those of the leaders (Redman, 2004). In other words, social distance affected knowledge production. We can begin to see the origins of a rift between nature and culture. This represents a fundamental change in human culture. In earliest times, the interaction was direct, unmediated by social organizations. If a group's conclusions resulted in success (more or less), they lived to pass on their cultural knowledge. If not, then the group would be replaced by a successful group. This may appear as a Darwinian argument but I believe that the evidence demonstrates the importance of culture in human survival without discounting the natural processes also occurring.

We can also see another important pattern emerging as we look in the rearview mirror of human experiences, the impact of "geographic distancing". The Roman Empire provides a useful example. As communication, transportation, and military technologies developed, the Empire was able to control, dominate, and exploit larger areas. Through a "social pyramid system", wealth was gathered to the centre while the ecological consequences were both distributed over a larger geographic area and made invisible by those with economic and political power (Wright, 2004: 83-84).

Based on the above account, we can see that the growing estrangement between nature and human culture goes back a long time. Distancing from an awareness of the natural environment is linked to both social and geographic distancing (Redman, 2004). By social distancing I mean the ways the formation of social hierarchies impact on whose knowledge was/is considered more legitimate (men, rulers, priests, landlords, managers, shareholders versus that of women, peasants, slaves, workers, farmers). In contrast, geographic distancing refers to the ways in which larger societies and eventually civilizations were to distribute their ecological footprint across many ecosystems (Wright, 2004). As a result, people at the centre of empires were not able to see the consequences of their exploitation directly, neither on the natural environment nor on other people. In other words, if we look back at farming practices of the past 13,000 years, we realize that they did not develop solely, or even primarily, on the observations of the trials and errors of food producers or, more recently, on the rational application of science. Rather, ideas about good farming practices, similar to other forms of ideas, represent an arena of social struggle.

When social and geographic distances become factors, knowledge about the consequences of one's actions becomes incomplete at best. Each civilization has its limits within a specific cultural/natural environment, even one that is as diverse and complex

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as our current globalizing civilization (Ponting, 1991). However, the lessons of history are clear. Similar cycles of social and environmental degradation were repeated empire after empire as members of those social systems failed to acknowledge that they were using up their natural capital. Those with vested interest continued to place maximum demands on nature, while using their power to maintain the status quo (Redman, 2004).

During the middle part of the Nineteenth Century , beginning in parts of Western Europe and North America, the relationship between nature and society experienced yet another change. With the development of chemical fertilizers and the substitution of mechanized power for human and animal power, the stage was set for a decline in the portion of population needed to produce food for expanding urban centres. Most people, be they consumers, scientists, government employees, corporate shareholders, or farmers, began to apply the logic of industrial manufacturing to farming.

The industrial agricultural system is designed to provide cheap food for the population of industrial centres and the accumulation of capital for corporate shareholders and managers. The linear movement of nutrients from rural to urban areas degrades soil fertility in the country and adds to the massive build up of household waste in cities. Finding solutions to the rift between nature and society is made difficult for two reasons. First, there is the tension between town and country. The urban population wants, and in some cases need, the cheapest food possible. This is also in business owners' interest for whom cheap food means less money goes towards maintaining workers and more can be directed towards manufactured goods and to owners' profits. The result is ecological damage in rural areas. Second, large-scale capitalist agriculture makes impossible the consistent rational application of scientific knowledge to the problems of soil management and the essential cycling of soil nutrients. People only become interested in soil fertility after its natural qualities have been depleted. Once the problem is recognized, it may be addressed provided the cost of the solution is not prohibitive. The logic of industrial agriculture, with its emphasis on profits, is in direct opposition to the logic of good farming practices. Good stewardship must consider a multitude of permanent conditions of life required by unborn generations (Foster, 2001: 77). Today even many of the small-scale farmers are having difficulty being able to farm sustainably. They find themselves surrounded by and embedded in capitalist social relations. Their products are either shipped to distant markets or forced to compete with imports from far away lands (Lyson, 2004).

In the above discussion, I have presented a model of food production based on a growing general distancing from the processes of nature that are involved in farming. Meanwhile, efforts are being made to control the processes of food production through the application of science to produce agro-ecosystems and using new forms of social organization to structure food production and distribution.

What might we conclude from this brief survey of historical evidence? (I am not suggesting that we follow the Sumerian example; that farmers in New Brunswick begin buying land at the mouth of the St. John River so that in a hundred generations their off-spring will still have land to farm. Rather, the lessons of the past have a more immediate application.) To act with greater purpose, we need to understand the intended and unintended consequences of actions of our ancestors and ourselves in relation to farming practices and the structural features of industrial capitalism. Associated with the emergence of industrial capitalism, there has been rapid change in our social-ecological system measured in terms of population size, energy consumption, technological changes centralization of political and economic power, social organization, and agricultural productivity. Historical accounts have their limits when it comes to providing options for our future. There is no historic example where the social pyramid for centralizing wealth has extended to encompass the globe. When an isolated civilization's culture proved to be unsustainable, people died or they moved. Today, the latter is not an option. Admittedly, what I have presented here would suggest that humans are predisposed to overpopulate in relation to the availability of food, as Thomas Malthus predicted in An Essay on the Principle of Population (1798). However, to suggest that the fate of human kind will be determined by the same biological processes as the populations of other organisms means ignoring an equally important part of being human, namely culture - both as a source of problems and solutions.

Agricultural producers alone cannot heal the rift between nature and humans that has been literally thousands of years in the making. We, as a society,

(continued on page 12…)

(*Historical and structural origins, from page 11*)

must develop cultures, particularly social structures, both locally and globally, that have the capacity to recognize the consequences of our individual and collective actions and take responsibility for them. In the meantime, as we work to create an ecological age, we must begin by buying locally products which have been produced using sustainable practices. We compost and recycle waste to reduce our ecological footprint. We need to continue to work with farmers around the world, through groups like Via Campesina, to make explicit the intended and unintended consequences of individual and collective practices. And finally, we must also offer informed opinions on possible impacts of various options as we exert efforts toward the long-term goal of healing the metabolic rift between humans and nature that has been an inherent feature of most human cultures, in one form or another, since the beginning of agriculture.

"...[T]he health of land and water – and of woods, which are the keepers of water – can be the only lasting bases for any civilization's survival and success" (Wright, 2004: 104). If we do not find ways to balance culture and nature, both society and nature will be poorer because of our failures. In the past, our ecological footprint was small enough that our inattentiveness to the long-term consequences of our cultural practices resulted in more damage to ourselves, as an isolated culture, and to our immediate environment than to the future of the planet and all of humanity. Now the stakes are much higher. — nfu —

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"[T]he powerful Canadian Wheat Board and its draconian wheat monopoly...for years has relied on force and fear to exist."

—Stephen Harper, from a letter to the Brandon Sun, January 13, 1999.
Harper was then President of the National Citizens' Coalition (NCC).

"The wheat board should be voluntary. Farmers should have a choice in how they market their grain."

—Stephen Harper, Western Producer, October 12, 2000. (Then NCC Pres.)

Norway helps protect farmers' rights to their seed

Late in 2005, Norway's Parliament rejected a proposed law that would replace its UPOV '78-based seed royalty system with one based on the UPOV '91 Convention. This means that farmers in that country will not have their rights to save and re-use seed curtailed by restrictive UPOV '91 provisions. UPOV is the French acronym for the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants—the template for plant breeders' rights legislation. (See sidebar for the explanation of UPOV '91.)

Speaking shortly after the decision, NFU Vice-President Terry Boehm welcomed the Norwegian developments saying, "The NFU is extremely pleased at the news of Norway's rejection of UPOV '91. The Norwegian government should be congratulated for rejecting this anti-farmer legislation. This confirms the NFU's position, and reinforces the campaign we launched over the last 18 months against the federal government's efforts to have UPOV '91 adopted in Canada."

Boehm is currently in Europe. He has been attending a number of international meetings in France and speaking on a number of seed-related issues, including the consequences to farmers and the public of Plant Breeders' Rights, patents, and the use of "Terminator" or Genetic Use Restriction Technologies (GURTs). Terminator technology results in sterile seeds that will not reproduce.

"Canadians and Europeans are both facing the same threats from multinational companies which seek complete control of seeds. Seeds are farmers' most important input, and we know that when control of inputs is concentrated in the hands of a few large players, farmers' costs rise rapidly," concluded Boehm.

— nfu —

What is UPOV '91?

The UPOV Convention was adopted in 1961 to give plant breeders exclusive property rights for a limited period of time over varieties they develop. The original UPOV '61 Convention was replaced by UPOV '78, and later by UPOV '91—each with more restrictive provisions for farmers. There are important differences between the 1978 and 1991 versions of UPOV with regard to coverage, period, scope, and exemptions:

1. The protection period `under UPOV '78 is 15 years. Under UPOV '91 the protection period is extended to 20 years.
2. UPOV '91 creates "cascade rights" that can make a farmer liable for royalties, not just on any initial seed that he or she might procure, but on all subsequent generations—increasing potential liability many-fold.
3. UPOV '91 includes the provisions that seed companies would need if they want to collect royalties each year from farmers who save and re-use their seeds.

For a detailed explanation of the many negative effects of the UPOV '91 framework, see the March 8, 2005 *Report and recommendations of the National Farmers Union to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency on its Consultations on proposed amendments to the Plant Breeders' Rights Act to bring existing legislation into conformity with the 1991 UPOV Convention.* The report is available at www.nfu.ca

For more information on the Norwegian decision, see: www.grain.org/bio-ipr/?id=458

"America is over. America is like Wile E. Coyote after he's run out a few paces past the edge of the cliff—he'll take a few more steps in midair before he looks down. Then, when he sees that there's nothing under him, he'll fall. Many Americans suspect that they're running on thin air, but they haven't looked down yet. When they do ..."

— From an article on peak oil, America's trade deficit, and the challenges of empire.
Michael Ventura, "$4 a gallon", *The Austin Chronicle*, April 29, 2005.

The NFU Convention this year will focus on energy use in agriculture and will feature Richard Heinberg, world-famous author on peak oil and other energy-related issues. The NFU's 37th Annual Convention will take place in Saskatoon, November 30 to December 2, 2006. See http://www.nfu.ca/convention.html for more information.

Now, the U.S. dollar is the problem

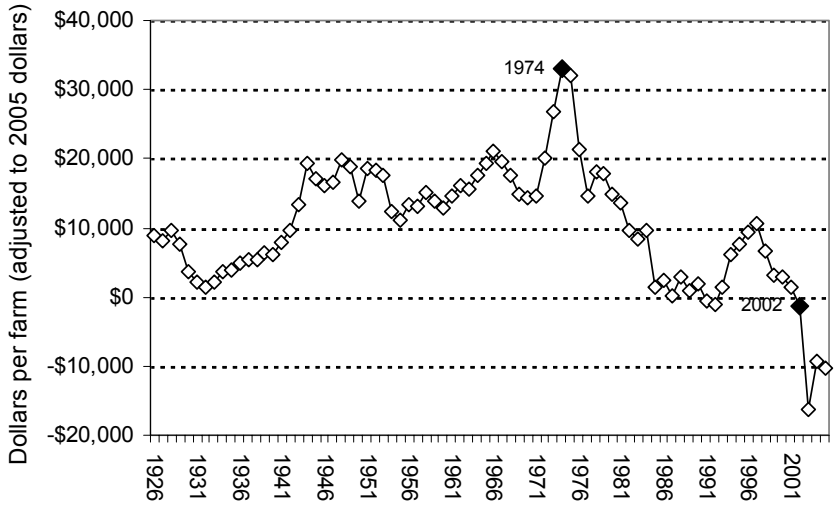
Lately, farm papers are filled with market analysts bemoaning the high value of the Canadian dollar and its damaging effects on farm incomes. The January 26th *Farmers Independent Weekly* carried an article headlined "Stronger Dollar, Weaker Canola." A keyword search of *Western Producer* back issues reveals over 40 similar articles in the past six months, focusing on every commodity from wheat to cattle. These are just a fraction of the hundreds of stories in papers across Canada delivering the message that our rising currency is a significant cause of falling prices and incomes.

Nearly everyone agrees that our high dollar is a big problem. But, perhaps that analysis is far less certain than some would have us believe. Perhaps the high-dollar-bad-for-farmers assertion is another case of what a notable anthropologist called "an important and widely-held half-truth." Perhaps the high-dollar argument is just the latest in a series of plausible-sounding but largely false explanations of the farm crisis—false explanations designed to distract farmers' attentions away from the real causes, to direct farmers' growing anger toward less-destabilizing targets.

Here's the problem with the high-dollar-bad-for-farmers argument: It doesn't match the data. The argument implies that in years when the value of the Canadian dollar is high, farmers are worse off than in years when the dollar is low. If that were true, 1974 would have been farmers' worst year in the past generation—that's the year our dollar peaked against the US currency. And 2002 would have been farmers' best year—when our dollar hit its record-low relative to the US.

The following chart helps tell the tale. Not only is there no correlation to show that a high dollar is bad for farmers, the data shows the opposite: Our dollar's peak in '74 correlates with farmers' peak incomes. And our dollar's lowest value, in 2002, correlates with farmers' fifth-lowest net income.

Canadian Per-Farm Realized Net Farm Income from the Markets: 1926-2005



NFU members and others need not dismiss the currency-value argument completely— currency fluctuations admittedly must have some effect on prices and incomes. But that price effect is small relative to other factors. The take-home message is that increases in the value of the Canadian dollar over the past three years cannot be the cause of a global farm income crisis that has been ravaging farmers for over 20 years.

In recent years, farmers' net incomes have hit record lows as agribusiness profits have hit record highs (see the NFU's *The Farm Crisis and Corporate Profits*, Nov. 2005, available at www.nfu.ca). Canola basis levels have reached such unseemly high levels that free-marketers are asking the Canadian Wheat Board to intervene to help discipline corporate traders. Cargill flexed its market muscles during the BSE crisis and pocketed billions in net farm income and taxpayer support. Seed and gene companies are restructuring intellectual-property laws and research networks to gain control of the global seed system. And energy companies are pocketing unfathomable profits, backed by a price-setting cartel (Exxon Mobil profits topped $40 billion [Cdn.] in 2005). In the face of such events, only the least-courageous and the most idiological among us would claim that currency-fluctuations are the biggest problem farmers face.

(continued on page 15…)

The CWB: Farmers have a lot to lose

The following letter to the editor ran in some western Canadian newspapers. It is written by Waldeck, Saskatchewan NFU member Joyce Neufeld.

To the Editor:

On Feb 4, 2006, The Edmonton Journal carried an article titled 'Sowing Seeds of Change' in which opponents of the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) once again make many false statements. "The change" (open market) "will lead to better prices and returns, access more markets, and a wider window to take advantage of any surge in prices".

This is completely false. The CWB markets farmers' grain to over 70 customers and it blends grades when advantageous to producers. Independent studies have shown that CWB has returned premiums of $72 million annually to barley producers (Schmitz, Gray, Schmitz and Storey, *The CWB and Barley Marketing: Price Pooling and Single-Desk Selling*, 1997) and wheat premiums of $265 million annually to wheat producers (Kraft, Furtan, and Tyrchniewicz, *Performance Evaluation of the Canadian Wheat Board*, 1996).

"The Tories campaigned on marketing choice and we expect them to follow through on that commitment," said Blair Rutter, Executive Director of Western Canadian Wheat Growers (WCWG). He further states "It's a change that's long overdue. Nobody's getting rich under the current system, and there's nothing to lose trying something different".

Guess again Mr. Rutter, farmers have much more to lose. If the CWB loses its single-desk selling monopoly, farmers will lose their market power to get the best possible prices for their product. They will lose the market development of the CWB (CWB continually shows purchasers of our grains how to best utilize them). We will lose the transparencies of our marketer, we will lose a strong opponent of GM wheat, we will lose blending premiums, we will lose the Canadian Grain Commission that offers undisputed grading to producers, and we will lose the fair allocation of Producer Cars. If farmers give up the CWB's mandate over wheat or barley marketing, we can't get it back. Chapter 11 of the North American Free Trade Agreement says that if we turn over control of (and profits from) wheat or barley marketing to grain companies, **we can't reverse that decision without paying those companies billions in compensation for lost profits—present and future.**

Despite what Stephen Harper's Conservatives (David Anderson included) and their lapdogs the WCWG say, farmers have one hell of a lot to lose. There is no such thing as a dual market—you either have the CWB marketing our wheat and barley, or we have Cargill, ADM, Louis Dreyfus, and Con Agra, selling the grain and pocketing the profits.

— Joyce Neufeld

(Now, the U.S. dollar is the problem, from page 14)

The currency-value argument is just the latest in a long string of pseudo-explanations trotted out to distract attention from the corporate plunder of the planet's family farms. Before our dollar's value was the problem, "explanations" included farmer inefficiency, EU subsidies, farmers not getting on board with high-value crops and exotic livestock, oversupply, etc. Along with these false-explanations came a string of false-solutions: salvation through investment in hog mega-barns; a new WTO deal; opportunities to prosper through investments in bison, ostriches, and pot-belly pigs; salvation by ethanol; the opportunity to grow pharmaceutical crops; and the promise to terminate the CWB.

The NFU will continue to focus its efforts on advancing a solution to the real causes of the farm income crisis.

— nfu —

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NFU President Stewart Wells welcomes NFU Delegates to the 36th Annual NFU National Convention and frames the theme of the Convention: "Food, Power, and Politics." Council of Canadians Chair Maude Barlow gives the keynote address entitled "Trade at All Costs: Economic Integration and Food Insecurity". **Approximately 1½ hours.**

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Inter Pares' Anna Paskal, the Ban Terminator Campaign's Lucy Sharratt, and former Health Canada scientist Dr. Shiv Chopra team up on a panel to look at Terminator Technology and political interference in Canada's food safety system. **Approximately 1½ hours.**

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Gib Drury from the Quebec farm organization UPA, Neil Peacock of Peace Country Tender Beef Co-op, and former Health Canada scientist Dr. Margaret Haydon look at the economics, politics, and science of the BSE crisis and examine farmer-controlled alternatives to corporate control of the beef processing sector. **Approximately 1½ hours.**

DVD 5: Public plant breeding: Reclaiming seed savers' rights
Terry Boehm, NFU Vice-President, and Dr. Humberto Rios Labrada, a Cuban pioneer of farmer-researcher collaboration in plant breeding, team up to look at corporate control of the plant breeding system and farmer-directed alternatives to that corporate system. **Approx. 1½ hours.**

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