

THE Union farmer

QUARTERLY

SPRING 2009



Volume 15 Issue 1



Robert Jeppesen, Gayla Allan, and Sheila Allan display the Grassroots Service Citations they were awarded by the National Farmers Union on Tuesday, February 3, 2009 at the Potatoes NB annual conference in Woodstock, New Brunswick.

A Note from the Editor

Food Safety inquiry unlikely to ask the hard questions of government

- BY TERRY PUGH

When the listeriosis outbreak that killed at least 20 Canadians dominated headlines last year, the federal government promised to launch a full public inquiry into the problem. Canadians were

assured that the situation which led to tainted meat being shipped out to supermarkets across the country was an aberration, and that Canada's food inspection system was second to none in the world.

But while the Harper Government was making soothing remarks for public consumption, behind the scenes the government was more concerned with the potential political cost. Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz even went so far as to joke about the tragic situation.

In reality, the government was embarrassed because the food safety crisis came at a very inconvenient time. The government was moving to

implement a regulatory regime in which the big food companies would be self-policing, with a minimum of interference from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). The union which represented CFIA food inspectors had spoken out against this move, arguing the public was being put in danger as standards were relaxed for the sake of company profits, but little attention was paid to the union's concerns.

Until the listeriosis outbreak occurred and focused the nation's attention on what was happening in the big food plants. Suddenly, the Prime Minister realized that he would have to take steps to minimize the political damage, so he promised a public inquiry. Equally suddenly, he called an election a few weeks later, and the inquiry was conveniently shelved.

In mid-January, the Prime Minister finally moved on his promise, but the final results of the inquiry may not be too useful. Harper appointed a long-time Conservative friend, Sheila Weatherill, who also currently sits on Harper's advisory committee to revamp the public service. This conflict of interest is blatantly obvious to all but the Prime Minister. But just in case Ms. Weatherill accidentally comes up with any damaging facts, the Prime Minister has ruled that his office will vet her report before its findings are released to the public.

It's clear the Prime Minister is more concerned about his political well-being than the health of Canadians.

—nfu—

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We believe a strong rural community in Canada is an essential part of our national culture. In the National Farmers Union, we work collectively to strengthen the farm community by: building ties between farmers in all parts of Canada, with farmers in other countries and with non-farm people; ensuring all people have access to an adequate, nutritious and safely-produced food supply; promoting equity for women and young people in the farming community; promoting social support systems that permit people in farming communities a good quality of life; promoting the development and maintenance of a Canadian infrastructure to serve Canadian goals in food production and trade; and helping governments to form fair and constructive policies related to food production and food trade.



A message from the...

President

- BY STEWART WELLS

I hope this message finds you warm and dry, despite the weather in the “Great White North” since December.

As you know, our 40th Anniversary National Convention is coming up in Ottawa this November 26. And it is not too early to start to prepare, so I am using this space to put out a special request to all of our members.

Over the past 40 years, the NFU has been involved with a myriad of issues—some large, some small and some in between. Our campaigns, protests, blockades, policy development, and networking have touched tens of thousands of farmers and non-farmers, and we want to hear from you about the issues and NFU work that have left an impression with you or perhaps changed the way you think about the world.

Anything that you can send us will add to the “organizational memory” of the NFU, and will help us all to understand this great organization a little better.

Please write to our office with any memories that can add to the wealth of history that we already have at our National Office. No issue is too large or too small—it can be a very personal remembrance, or it could be one of the many NFU milestone events. Also, feel free to send in any material or stories relating to the accomplishments of the NFU predecessor organizations from across the country. For instance, Terry Pugh informs me that at 40 years of age the National Farmers Union (incorporated by an Act of the Canadian Parliament in 1969) has outlasted all of our predecessor organizations in Saskatchewan. In order they were: The Territorial Grain Growers—lasted 4 years (1901 to 1905). The Saskatchewan Grain Growers—lasted 21 years (1905 to 1926), the Farmers Union of Canada Saskatchewan Section—lasted 5 years (1921 to 1926), the United Farmers

of Canada Saskatchewan Section—lasted 23 years (1926 to 1949), the Saskatchewan Farmers Union—lasted 19 years (1950 to 1969).

And it is not too early to start booking rooms in Ottawa—the phone number is 1-800-267-4166 with code “NFU” to make reservations at the Travelodge Hotel. We hope to make this the largest NFU convention in some time, and we don’t want members to have to start booking into other hotels later on in the year.

All for now,

Stewart Wells

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A message from the...

Women's President

- BY COLLEEN ROSS

Our corporate-controlled food system is inequitable and dysfunctional. But is there an alternative?

The answer is yes. And the good news is it currently exists. It's called Food Sovereignty – and it is a system where every country has the right to define – and create – its own agricultural policy. All that is needed is the political will to implement it. That's going to be the kicker.

The National Farmers Union has made some serious commitments to the world's farmers. We agreed that we would ensure that our members, consumers and policy-makers would be educated about Food Sovereignty. We also agreed to continue working to ensure food sovereignty becomes a reality.

A country that lacks food security is also insecure in many other areas. Food sovereignty ensures not only food security, but also ensures social justice, promotes the well-being of farmers and consumers, equitable access to land, protection of the environment, and fair (as opposed to “free”) trade. The key to Food Sovereignty is the phrase: “farmers and consumers are at the centre of policy making”. This is the central challenge if we are to realize lasting change in our food and farming systems in this country.

For that reason, members of Food Secure Canada (FSC) dusted off the “Land of Milk and Money” report produced by the People's Food Commission of the 1970s, and have launched a new national campaign. It is called the People's Food Policy Project (PFPP) and it will engage people from across the country in developing our own

(continued on page 25...)

Introducing Joan Brady, NFU Women's Vice President

Editor's Note: Joan Brady was elected NFU Women's V-P at the recent NFU national Convention. She has written the following article to introduce herself to the NFU membership:

When people ask me about myself, I respond that I am all about food. I eat it, produce it, prepare it, promote it and sell it. Through my involvement in the NFU and various community groups, I defend the right to its access in sufficient and nutritious quantities for everyone, I educate in its production, handling and nutrition, and I challenge the powers that take away my ability to decide what my food system should look like.

Two incidents had a key impact on my journey. In 1998, during the “Hog Crisis”, we received \$35 for the animals that cost \$135 to produce, and we were losing upwards of \$10,000 a month. An announcement on a radio program caught my attention. Hog farmers were invited to the local food bank so that they could feed their families. The incongruity of this picture lives with me today. Farmers that cannot feed themselves! There is something wrong with the system. The second incident was more personal. One of my children, after a life-threatening incident, was diagnosed with a severe food allergy. Suddenly food had the ability to kill, and I needed to know what it contained in minute detail, where it came from, and its potential to cause sickness and death.

These incidents led me to work with the NFU to ensure farmers receive a just return for their labor and expertise and are recognized as the solid foundation on which the food industry must be built. The NFU's policy on GMO's resonates with me because of my desire to make food safe for my family. I am proud of all the effort that NFU members have accomplished on all levels.

I am glad to work with and for the NFU on these and other issues. Our lives are filled with farm work and off-farm work. We understand the richness of our farm heritage and the importance of our impact on Canada's economy, communities and future. Operating our farms and providing for our families takes the bulk of our time and energy, but it is equally important to influence the wider reaches of Canada's Food Industry. After all, we are the experts on production, sustainability and policy for a healthy farming sector.

I look forward to meeting and working with NFU members across the country. I am glad to have the opportunity to learn more about issues that affect farmers throughout the country. I am also excited to work with our Women's president, Colleen Ross, and the Women's advisors in each province. I look forward to the 40th Anniversary celebrations in Ottawa and the opportunities to connect with NFU members in the coming year. Here's to the good life...

Joan Brady, jbrady@hay.net, 1-888-537-3163



A message from the...

Youth President

- BY NIGEL SMITH, YOUTH PRESIDENT

The Dirt on Potato Feudalism

Instead of my usual report, I'd like to tell you about a film I recently saw. It's called *Over Land* and it's about the last harvest by a farm family in Manitoba. It's a worthwhile watch for anyone involved or interested in Canadian agriculture. For more information on the documentary or to order your own copy, check out www.orangevilleroad.com.

While it examines agricultural, political, and social issues, this is first and foremost a humane film that delves into the intricacies of a farm family. There is a really great story here about farming and about things that make life really worth living. It's also interesting because even though it focuses on potato farming in Manitoba, the same thing is happening in many communities in Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick – two provinces hard hit by the vagaries of the potato market.

The first full-length film by director Steve Suderman, *Over Land* is a remarkably personal portrait. In the spring and summer of 2006 the Suderman family embarked on this solemn task, filmed by brother Steve, who doesn't farm but is certainly still connected. The audience is welcomed into the farmyard, the tractor cabs, and the households, as the director is granted privileged access to the lives of his family members. Together, they battle weather, poor prices, belligerent buyers and family tensions to harvest thousands of acres of potatoes and grains. They know when the harvest is in that it's either the end or a new beginning for the farm operation. It's difficult to watch the Suderman's farm slowly sinking into financial crisis because it confronts the insecurity of every-day farming in open markets and uncertain skies. It should also serve as an education in farm economics for anyone who hasn't spent time in the field.

As eldest son, Mike, attempts to withdraw from the farm after 10 years of working alongside his father, another son, Chris, has decided that the farm is a way of life that he would like for his family. He isn't long discovering what Mike has already come to realize. The film takes us through the blows that the farm had sustained in the previous year, including a nasty dispute with processing giant, Simplot, in which the company failed to honour a contract with the family. The

result of which was an entire harvest of spuds turning into a stinking, rotting mess. The mounting hardships have driven Mike to determine that it is not at this time possible to make a profit in farming. "Farmers are competing against themselves", concludes Mike.

For anyone who hasn't grown thousands of acres of potatoes, there is a lot to learn about the complexities of managing and marketing such a crop. From concerns about the volumes of chemicals necessary to harvest a saleable product, extending to the limited opportunities to market, the potato farming business appears a fickle, feudal arrangement if there ever was one. The potato farmer is completely dependent upon input suppliers and only a couple of buyers. Surely one who had such an experience with tubers would never want to eat or see one again. It is really quite scary that a thousand acres of potatoes and the number of people they can feed is not enough to support even one family in Canada.

Manitoba lost about 2000 farms in 2006 alone, and the Suderman family risks becoming another statistic as more power in the food system is consolidated in the hands of large agribusiness. Rick says rather succinctly, "...as we lose control the local people just become labourers...it has happened before in history...it's not a new phenomenon. Does it have purpose to think that we should stop this from happening? Where do you begin? Does it matter, does anybody care?"

In many parts as in life, it's the little things in this film that make it most memorable. The music and video are intertwined at times in such a deft fashion to highlight a meal, a mood, a smile or an emotion and the sentimental is elemental.

*In Union,
Nigel Smith, Youth President*



A message from the...

Youth Vice President

- BY KALISSA REGIER, YOUTH VICE PRESIDENT

"You don't look like a farmer to me..."

I got it again yesterday. "You don't *look* like a farmer to me!"

Hmmm, I think, what do I say to that? If, like Murray McLaughlin says in *The Farmer Song*, I need a "face like a shoe", then thanks...I guess.

Walking into a warehouse in the city to check prices on some machinery, I was greeted with, "Oh, you must be the insurance lady". Geez, twice in one week! It usually brings a bit of a chuckle and starts a conversation, which is nice, but I always end up getting a knot in my stomach. What is a farmer *supposed* to look like exactly?

Okay, I'm not going to bore you with some tearful lament about being stereotyped and alienated by society. Nor will I give you a detailed outline on my strategy for playing hard ball with the big boys. I'll be the first to admit that I lack some valuable, notably male, characteristics when it comes to farming. For instance, it probably takes me twice as long to change a tire or the oil in the tractor. Sometimes I even look at the manual. (Gasp!) I get butterflies while trying to circumnavigate a power pole with a 60' harrow...at 10mph. When I'm shoveling grain out of an in ground hopper, I wear *two* masks and take a break every 10 minutes! Oh yes, and I scrub the grease from my fingernails nearly every night. But along with these "shortcomings" I think my decidedly female way of doing things is more of a help than a hindrance.

Whether being a woman makes a difference or not, I find it a joyous way to spend my days and am often curious why more young women aren't choosing to farm. In this day and age we surely are through with any residual sexism left over from the pre-feminist era. In the city, I have female friends who are taking leadership roles in companies without batting a pretty, mascara-clad eyelash. Some are the primary earners in their family, many choosing their independence over marriage and children. Have we somehow escaped

this gender evolution? Are we still raising our boys to be farmers and our girls to be farmwives? I understand and value the traditions that I was raised with. I bake bread and raise a garden like my mom taught me and I have a firm belief in the strength of a family to create the success of a farm. But I can't help thinking about all the young, strong girls out there who are being overlooked and underestimated.

We've been faced with nothing but grim statistics when it comes to Canadian family farms. We're now in a recession and it's time to think about some of the patterns and decisions that have put us here. For the sake of a healthy food system we need to add a new dimension to the face of the average farmer. The future relies on our ability to adapt, not to new technologies or business techniques, but to new people who see farming through a new lens.

Friends and acquaintances find my life interesting because it's abnormal. Ironically, I spend a lot of time thinking about what I can do to make what I do appear normal. I'm proud to say the NFU is undoubtedly one of the most socially progressive organizations in Canada. It must be our job to make spaces for young women on farms. Not to farm with men like men, but to farm with men *like women*. To all the gorgeous, young, capable women who are reading this: You look like a farmer to me.

Now, on to business, the NFU youth board and advisory committee are currently exploring options for programming in 2009. Thanks to the generosity of our recently retired board members and all of the donations and bids from our November silent auction, we have a few dollars to work with. We will continue our work with "Dig In!" as it makes its way across Canada to several venues, rural and urban.

Finally, with the help of new advisory committee members, our regional presence will be strengthened at meetings this spring and summer. The regional meetings offer a rare opportunity to connect with other members and grow ideas. I would encourage all members to join in on their regional meeting this year...and bring your kids please!

In Solidarity,

Kalissa Regier, Youth Vice President



Regional Reports



ONE (Maritimes)

REGION

- BY RANALD MACFARLANE

Greetings, good NFU people. I'm starting to think that perhaps the Darwinian theory of evolution doesn't always apply in Prince Edward Island. Judging by the efforts of the local bureaucracy, stupid people seem to be out-reproducing smart people by a ridiculously disproportionate ratio here.

Case in point: The "Round Table Report on the Future of Agriculture" was released. The NFU was at all three meetings to discuss the report across the island. The NFU rejected the report because it did nothing to deal with the current farm crisis. The author of the report took that "under consideration," re-evaluated the report, changed a few graphics, re-calculated his bill, and then re-released the report. After all that, the report still contained absolutely no recommendations to deal with the immediate crisis. This guy, along with a substantial cast of others, got paid handsomely for all this bull-sugar. In the end, the report turned out to be nothing more than a "heat shield" and a stalling tactic aimed at keeping the Ghiz government from having to do anything.

We have a new Minister of Agriculture. His name is George Webster. His line he keeps using is: "farmers have to think outside the box". You can always measure how ignorant a Minister of Agriculture is by the number of old clichés he or she uses while they listen to themselves talk in a press conference.

The pork producers of PEI took Mr. Webster at his word, and were actually trying something new (outside the box) by focusing on natural and Omega 3 pork production. Meanwhile, the Liberal government, of which Mr. Webster is a Minister, hired a consultant to tell them the pros and cons of shutting the hog plant down. The consultants also explained how to shut it down five months before the plant had monetary commitment problems. They had anticipated the failure of the farmers trying to "think outside the box" and didn't have a contingency plan for the industry. Now the plant jobs, not to mention virtually the entire the hog industry, are gone. There are a few large hog producers left, but their pigs are all shipped for processing to Nova Scotia or Quebec. So much for that box.

We are looking forward to the meetings on the livestock crisis with Darrin Qualman in late February here on the Island. The beef plant in Albany is still operating, but the number of beef producers is dwindling. More importantly, the cow-calf operators have seriously dropped in numbers. The new buzz from the industry is that the beef plant needs better genetics coming in, along with requiring smaller carcasses of Angus cattle. The plant is paying .20 cents less than the Ontario rail price, never mind anything above that. So cow-calf guys have to work with smaller, meaner cows to produce smaller, meaner feeders for a smaller, meaner margin.

Good luck with that. In all likelihood, the Darwinian theory will take care of that plan.

Yer's in union,

Ranald MacFarlane

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REGION

ONE (New Brunswick)

- BY BETTY BROWN

February 1, 2009, marked one year since NFU NB became an accredited general N.B. farm organization working on behalf of New Brunswick farmers.

Since our March 2008, Perth-Andover provincial convention, our membership continues to grow as well as the workload. Activities and accomplishments during the past year include:

- NFU representatives attended the Agricultural Summit in Fredericton in April and several members attend monthly meetings of the six task forces established from the Summit.
- Designed a logo and a bilingual brochure outlining the importance of accurate "Product of Canada" labeling.
- Hosted the Region 1 annual convention in Rogersville, August 9th.
- Received funding from N.B. Agri-Food Market Development Program to assist in purchasing a backdrop and promotional "Buy Local" items.
- Members participated in a number of conferences and meetings, including NB Food Security Action Network panel discussion, Oct. 16, Moncton; The National Assembly of Food Secure Canada, Nov 7-10, Ottawa; Energy Solutions for our Farms and Communities, Nov 18-19, Moncton; Conservation Council 100 Mile Fund Raising Dinner, etc.
- Jean-Eudes, Barb and I attended the 39th annual NFU National Convention in Saskatoon. Jacques LaForge, NFU member and DFC President was a guest speaker.
- The Family Farmer, our quarterly newsletter, was distributed in November, the 2009 Winter Edition was published in February.
- Letters were sent to our MPs and MLAs regarding current agriculture issues.
- Barb and I handed out information pamphlets to consumers and obtained signatures for a petition formulated by the Business &

Professional Women's Club of Moncton regarding "Product of Canada" labeling on December 5th at the Florenceville Co-op.

- NFU NB Asset Mapping workshop held January 21st in Perth-Andover.
- NFU NB showcased our new backdrop at our booth at the NB Potato Seminar in Woodstock, February 3-4. Jean Eudes and Maureen Bostock spoke during the seminar. We will take the backdrop to the NFU booth at the Atlantic Farm Mechanism Show in Moncton, March 5-7.
- During the year, several press releases have been issued on various issues and on upcoming meetings.
- The evening of February 25th at the Moncton Regional Agricultural office, Darrin Qualman will present the Farm Crisis and the Cattle Sector report. We are distributing copies of the report to various individuals and advise people to check out the NFU web site.
- March 21, we will host our second District Annual General Meeting in Sussex at the Fairway Inn, 10 am – 4 pm.
- We continue our membership drive, informing and encouraging farmers to become members.

On the farm side of life, this past year has been a disappointing year for many commodities. Mother Nature proved again that no matter how well we manage our farms there is another force controlling our fate. Almost all crops suffered as a result of weather related conditions.

We continue to sell many of our farm products below the price needed to allow the farm to successfully operate and ensure the farm family continues to produce food to feed Canadians. Since 1985 New Brunswick farmers have lived through year after year of one crisis or another

The last statistics shows that New Brunswick lost 200 farms since 2006 and more may be lost this year. Farmers need long-term solutions to the farm financial crisis over which we have little control. Over the last several years' band-aid programs have been developed, implemented and trashed. Personally, I am very disappointed that neither government is aggressively supporting Canadian family farm food production. A Canadian Food Policy ensuring Canadians have a safe, secure available supply of nutritious food to eat is long over due.

On the up side, we have more consumers who want to buy locally grown products at farm markets or directly from our farms. We continue to promote our healthily, nutritious, safe New Brunswick grown food whenever, wherever we have the opportunity to do so.

In Union, Betty Brown



REGION

THREE (Ontario)

- BY GRANT ROBERTSON

Darrin and Grant's Most Excellent Adventure

The NFU in Ontario has been focusing on our ground breaking cattle sector report. Let's be honest with each other – only the NFU could have done this research because only the NFU would be willing to take on the issues raised in it. I keep hearing from people about how we should be working together with other organizations. Well the NFU is more than prepared to do that and welcome anyone's support and assistance in making life better for farmers in Canada. The question those people should really be asking though, is why is the organization they support shying away from these kinds of issues. If they can't answer that question with an answer they like then it is time to ask them why they aren't a part of the NFU, and we in Ontario intend to do just that.

I had the great honour and privilege to spend time with Darrin Qualman, the NFU National Director of Research. Darrin is without a doubt the most thoughtful person I have met in a long time. And by thoughtful I mean both in terms of deep thinking and just a good person to be around. Darrin and I spent over 3000 km worth of traveling together over a 5 day period. I was able to understand Darrin's perspective on many issues and to realize at a very gut level just how fortunate we in the NFU are to have Darrin working with us. Sometimes we in our regions wonder about the support that goes to the national level. I know I have heard these sentiments from all regions. Yet we only need to point to the clarity and importance of the research we do to really understand why we are a national organization.

Anyway, Darrin's and my adventure began in a typical Bruce-Grey snow squall. If you are not familiar with a snow squall- think of a really bad thunderstorm – now change that rain to snow. That's about what it was like. Our day started off with a funeral, my wife breaking down in our truck (having blown the transmission) and a bunch of re-arranging vehicles. Finally Darrin and I were under way, driving to Sudbury in a near constant snow storm with drifting. We

rolled into Sudbury sometime after midnight and headed off to bed to prepare for meeting with the area Cattlemen's Association the next morning.

This meeting turned out to set the tone for the rest of the tour. The attendees were very interested in what the NFU had to say. In fact, when given the opportunity for a shortened version of the presentation they opted strongly for the full deal. There were great questions from the audience and a receptive message from a Board member of the Ontario Cattlemen's Association.

From there Darrin and I made our way through heavy snow to Kingston, again arriving after midnight, this time to a screwed up reservation. The next morning saw us participating, along with many other NFU members, in a forum by TVO's *The Agenda*. From there we made our way to an evening meeting in Peterborough, another successful meeting, where we told by some in attendance that this was the year they were going to join the NFU. In attendance were a government MPP (Jeff Leal) and federal candidate and former CFIA employee. We received very interesting and supportive comments from these individuals. One of the most interesting was from Mr Leal who said quite bluntly that he hears a different message from local farmers than he does from their provincial organization. He also stated how pleased he was with the NFU study as it backed up everything local people had been telling him with facts and data.

The next day Darrin and I made our way to Renfrew – finally in relatively good weather. We made a stop along the way though, to visit the historic plaque commemorating two unfortunate wagon drivers that managed to blow up a load of dynamite and themselves. Apparently only squelchy evidence of their demise could be found. Wonder why this was even being commemorated, Darrin and I made our way through some of the most beautiful country this province has to offer.

(continued on page 25...)



REGION

FIVE (Manitoba)

- BY FRED TAIT

Your humble servant has spent four decades studying, reflecting, and commenting upon the state of our livestock industry. I share with the reader one memorable event that took place in the cattle auction ring at Brandon, Manitoba, in the early 1980s.

I had delivered two finished steers to the Brandon stockyard and had returned the following morning to see them sold. I chose my seat above the center of the auction ring a half hour prior to the scheduled start time of the sale. About 10 minutes later, I was joined in my vantage point by a farm couple in their mid-thirties. I could immediately sense they were farmers, a strong healthy looking couple, faces tanned from the sun and the wind, they projected the image of people who, at middle age and the prime of life, have experienced both the burden and the joy of hard work, a common trait to those who earn a living from the land.

As farmers always do, we engaged in idle chatter about the challenges of the past and our shared hopes for the future. They explained that they had delivered a full pen of finished Angus steers the previous day. There was a nervous tension in the air. Our task as farmers was said to be over, the quality and value of our labour would now be judged and valued by the so-called unseen hand of the marketplace. Should the unseen hand reward this farm family, they would, on this day, be able to afford to shop for some small luxury in memory of their year of toil. Perhaps a new appliance or furniture for the home, or a replacement for a worn-out tool in the shop. A quiet dinner at a fancy place in town would be a memorable event to remember over the following months of nourishing another dream in the ground.

An hour into the sale, I was struck by the quality and uniformity of my new found companions' cattle that now filled the sale ring. There had been two buyers of finished cattle at the ring that day, and while the auctioneer used his hand calculator to determine the average weight per animal, a message came over the public address system calling one of the buyers to a phone call. The auctioneer began his chant and in seconds the ownership of the product of more than a year of labour exchanged ownership for 15 cents per pound below the established market range for the day. The husband never showed any emotion as he stared at the livestock industry billboards above the sales ring. His wife opened her purse on the bench between us, removed a tissue to wipe away the tears. We did not speak again. I was at a loss for words to console the pain and disappointment that had been applied. The unseen hand carried on to the auctioneers' chant, oblivious to the loss and the pain in the bleachers above the sales ring. A half hour or more later, they rose from their seats beside me. I watched them walk to the settlement desk, pick up a cheque, and then they were gone. I never saw them again. I know that they are now only a statistic of the people who have left the farm.

My two steers sold a short time later at the established market price of the day. I picked up my settlement cheque before I tackled the Livestock Auction manager about the theft I had witnessed in his sales ring an hour earlier. He absolved himself of all responsibility. I waited for the opportunity to take the auctioneer to task for selling the best fat cattle of the morning for 15 cents below the average price of the day. The auctioneer was quite complacent. He explained the price discount was the fault of the seller. They had chosen to market their cattle at that time on that day. His role was to assist them in establishing the value of their cattle at a time of their choice. He fulfilled his role and obligation to guiding the unseen hand of the marketplace. Our conversation ended when I suggested that the unseen hand may have been assisted by the timing of the human hand that timed the phone call.

As brutal as this selective event was, it paled in comparison to what the future would bring to all farm families that produce cattle. Beginning in 1989, and continuing until this day, cattle prices would fall to a price level adjusted for inflation that would be only half of the price cattle producers had received over the previous fifty years. The unseen hand is no longer invisible. It has forever been exposed by the November 19th NFU Livestock report. Read it, distribute it and promote it. There have been enough tears and broken dreams.

In Union, Fred Tait



REGION

SIX (Saskatchewan)

- BY GLENN TAIT

I hope everyone had a grand Christmas time and ate almost as much chocolate as I did. I also hope that this bi-polar weather (is that a joke?) hasn't been too great a hardship for those of us who have to travel, work, or look after animals outside.

On January 20 and 21, the NFU operated a booth at the Cattlemen's Corral Crop Visions trade show in Lloydminster. I was only able to be there for the first day, so many thanks to John and Rose Vinek who handled the booth both days and to the other recruits they snagged for Day Two. We extolled the many virtues and advantages of the NFU, but our main objective was to spread the word about the reasons for the cattle price crisis as described in the NFU's executive summary. Interest was partial but steady and we handed out dozens of copies of the report. The passing crowd was amusing to watch. Many stopped to talk when greeted, some smiled genuinely and nodded as they walked on, and some snapped their heads away when they recognized the sign behind us as if burned by welding flash.

Agriculture Ministers from both provinces were speakers at the event. Alberta's George Groeneveld spoke after lunch and answered questions from the crowd while Saskatchewan's Bob Bjornerud spoke after supper and took no questions (he was jeered last year at the same venue). Both ministers opened their speeches by reading from the same page, saying how good it was that Alberta and Saskatchewan agreed with each other on all relevant points and could now lobby the federal government as allies. Neither minister mentioned any results from that collaboration. Minister Bjornerud continued by saying how Saskatchewan was now going to shoulder a greater share of federal program administration and immediately offer the full portion of costs that the feds demand on support payments.

He also offered a couple of eyebrow raisers. He threatened to unilaterally shut off gas and oil supplies to the U.S. if they continue to impede the import of

Canadian beef, he promised to shake up provincial crop insurance so farmers won't have to wait 3-4 years to settle claims. I called Crop Insurance in early February and they said that the standard wait time for settlements is 4-6 weeks. The only reason for waiting as long as Bjornerud mentioned would be because of unsold, hard to measure piles.....no administrative remedy for that. Mr. Bjornerud also said he wanted the province to divest itself of some of the 90 million acres he discovered it had title to. Saskatchewan only has about 50 million acres of crop and pasture.

A few days later minister Bjornerud announced that the Department of Agriculture was opening another three or four district offices while at the same time laying off about twenty people. Fifteen new positions should be created for them by the new offices, but I suppose this way, the department saves on the cost of moving staff. Several years ago the previous government had to close several of these offices to cut costs. I hope farmers are able to put the new sites to good use.

As I write this report, I am anticipating a trip with Darrin Qualman and several other NFU Board members to Billings, Montana, in mid-February to discuss the state of the livestock industry with other producer groups from the U.S. and Mexico. The tri-national conference and strategy meeting will allow us all to share research and policy directions so that we may present a united front when advocating changes to current practices in commercial beef packing and international trade.


I know we have a lot of serious work to do in Billings to bring a little justice back into livestock production, but I can't help thinking back to my university days and other carloads of people who zipped across the border for a few days.....ROAD TRIP!

In Union, Glenn Tait



REGION SEVEN (Alberta)

- BY JAN SLOMP

 ur new Region 7 board member, Doug Scott, wrote a letter to George Groeneveld, Minister of Agriculture and Food, urging the Alberta government to respect the democratic process with regard to the Canadian Wheat Board.

The response from Groeneveld, however, does not show any change in attitude. The ideology of the Alberta government continues to trump reason and democracy, despite the fact that cracks caused by their ideology are beginning to show in society everywhere.

Pipeline action needed by all NFU members!

Pipeline company TRANS CANADA/ NOVA, has proposed that the governance of 23,500 km of pipelines be transferred from provincial to federal jurisdiction. In the transfer, farmers will lose annual compensation payments, they will need to ask permits for cultivation beyond 11.8 inches, they will need permits to drive across the lines with equipment, they will lose provisions of reimbursements of legal costs in disputes between them and the pipeline company, and the maximum fine imposed on farmers not living up to these rules will jump from \$5000 to \$1,000,000 per case. The Stelmach government has so far refused to say anything in defense of Alberta Farmers.

The president of the Alberta Association of Pipeline Landowners, Jim Ness (403-577-2265) and trustee David Core (403-992-4124) are calling upon all Albertans to write to their MLAs, Premier Ed Stelmach and Energy minister Mel Knight in opposition to these proposals.

United Landowners of Alberta

Most landowners do not own the mineral rights under their land, they are however, according to legal expertise, entitled to all other things in the carrot shape part that goes from the core of the earth to the perimeter of the surface legal description and beyond in the sky (hell to heaven is the popular legal term for this). Farmers from the Pine Lake Surface Rights group have been battling an onslaught of drilling activity, tapping for Coal Bed Methane, in the

Horse Shoe Canyon formation, 400- 1000 meters below the surface. They now formed a group called the "United Landowners of Alberta". Their aim is to get 10,000 landowners to sign up as member, @ \$100 each. Once that threshold is met, the plan is to go to court, in order to challenge energy companies and the Alberta government for their assumptions that CBM is a conventional gas, extracted as part of the mineral rights. Just drilling a hole in the Horse Shoe Canyon however doesn't get you substantial production of gas, it takes micro organisms to produce recoverable gas. The companies inject a cocktail of nitrogen and other micro organism boosting substances into the formation to produce gas. The proper name for this gas is Renewable Biogenic Gas. The process of enhancing the activity of micro organisms can be described as farming, in this case not the top eight inches but a deeper formation. (Info: 403-843-2068)

The Farm Crisis and the Cattle Sector

Many meetings have been held, sharing the cattle report with members and other interested farmers across the province. The report has triggered a wide swath of acknowledgement and appreciation for the NFU. We need to do more however to mobilize more farmers and other citizens behind our 16 points proposed solutions. We met with the Alberta government on January 28th. Four staff people of the government were presented the cattle report and consequently were overwhelmed by a type of multi directional machine gun bombardment with hard nosed facts driven home by a seven farmer strong NFU delegation. Besides the proposed 16 solution in the report, our main demand has been to have the Alberta government acknowledge the facts and follow the introduction of the ban on packer ownership in the United States with similar legislation in Alberta and Canada. No acknowledgement and no commitment, has been expressed so far.

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REGION

EIGHT (B.C./Peace River)

- BY PETER EGGERS

NFU cattle meetings in Peace Country create momentum for change

In late January, several presentations were made about the farm crisis and the cattle sector, with a focus on the report that was released by the NFU in late November. Regions 7 and 8 did two joint presentations in Edmonton, including holding a meeting at the Legislature in Edmonton on the cattle crisis with John Knapp, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, and several other staff members of the department. The most stunning question we got during that session was: "Couldn't farmers just increase their efficiencies?" Maybe they think every cow should just have twins. The real problem is farm income, or the absence of it. Who cares about efficiencies when you can't make a living from your work?

Four meetings were held in the Peace River Region, including two community meetings with producers in Sexsmith and Farmington, one the town council of Sexsmith, and one with the County Council of Grande Prairie.

Cattle producers in the Peace River region of both Alberta and BC are looking to create positive

changes in the beef marketing system. Even though there were bad roads and inclement weather, a large number of farmers in the Peace country turned out to the meetings. There is a lot of frustration in the countryside. People have felt isolated, and as a result of that they also felt helpless, and at times, hopeless. But out of the meetings, we are getting the sense that farmers are feeling much more optimistic, and they're realizing that if we work together, we can change things.

People are also concerned about the Alberta Livestock Meat Strategy (ALMS), particularly the cost of the program, which along with the liability, is being downloaded onto farmers who can't afford it. There is also a justified perception among farmers that the interests of oil, gas and pipeline companies are being given a higher priority than landowners.

Darrin Qualman, who is the NFU Director of Research, did very thorough research on the report, and he also took it on himself to do the presentations as we travelled across the land. All four Peace country meetings were well-received. There was not one bit of criticism on the research itself. The County of Grande Prairie will distribute the briefs to the zone meetings in the north of the province to see whether the counties and municipalities in that part of Alberta will endorse it. The objective would be to get it to the provincial meeting of the counties and municipalities.

Participants at the meetings were enthusiastic about the information, and many said they will try to line up more presentations. Fellow NFU Board member Neil Peacock and I are available to do the presentations if requested. Pressure for change starts at the community level.

A great thank you to all who worked on this project – especially Neil Peacock, Jan Slomp and Darrin Qualman.

In Union, Peter Eggers

40th Anniversary Collector's Item Calendar

You won't want to throw this one away after the year is over! The women farmers of the NFU are putting together a calendar that will feature **Woman Farmer 2010**. A great gift for city folks too! This will be a fundraising activity to support woman's participation.

We need photos of you, your mom, your grandmother, your sister or your friend—in the act of growing food! We want to portray to people what farmers look like today. They look like you and me. So please, send us good quality digital photos. Be sure to have your camera set on Super Fine or high resolution. If you have non-digital photos scan them and send them. We will be choosing up to 60 photos. Send names and places, farm names, etc. with each photo.

We would like to have 2 pages per region. So that is up to 12 photos per region. Don't be shy! Get someone to take a photo of you in the barn, in the field, in the tractor, milking cows, weeding the fields, at your market stall. Diversity is great and reflects all parts of our country and the NFU! **Deadline is September 15th 2009.** But, please start sending them now! **Send photos to: cross1@ripnet.com (clothing optional!)**



Self-regulation by food companies undermines food safety

The listeriosis crisis which claimed the lives of at least twenty Canadians last summer and fall could have been prevented, says the President of the Agriculture Union – Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC).

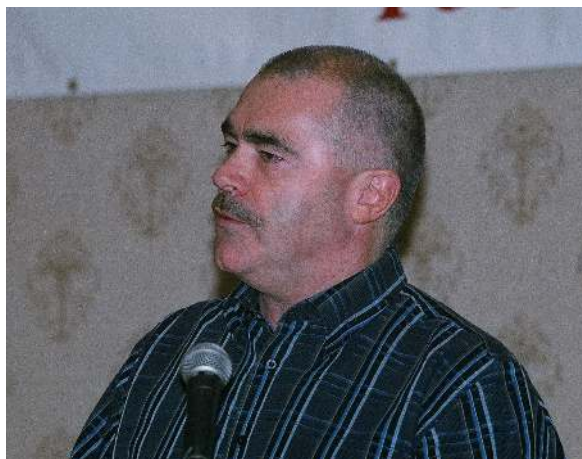
In a presentation to the National Farmers Union 39th annual convention in Saskatoon November 20, Bob Kingston said deregulation of food safety inspections jeopardizes the health of Canadians.

The union, which represents food inspectors who work at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), launched a “Food Safety First” campaign (www.foodsafetyfirst.ca) in mid-2008 following the listeriosis outbreak. The decision to go public wasn’t taken lightly, stated Kingston, and was only made after Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz began spreading misinformation about the situation.

Kingston said prior to the listeriosis outbreak, a CFIA employee was fired for letting his union see a confidential letter that was sent by the federal Treasury Board to the CFIA. “This letter outlined future government plans to cut back on inspection in slaughter facilities,” stated Kingston. “They were proposing to shift full-time meat inspection to an oversight role.” The confidential letter is posted on the Food Safety First website.

Kingston said when the listeriosis crisis first came to light, Ritz used the opportunity to claim that the tragedy would not have happened if the government’s plan to deregulate meat inspection had been in place at the time. The Minister later went on to contradict himself, claiming the current system had recently undergone no changes, that food inspectors spent half their time doing physical inspections of products on the floor, and that an additional 200 inspectors had been hired by the CFIA to do food inspections.

“Unfortunately, all those statements were complete nonsense,” said Kingston. “It turned out the Minister had a real problem reading his briefing notes. The changes to the system were implemented in 2004 when the CFIA introduced a mandatory HACCP requirement for processing plants, including the Maple Leaf plant in Toronto which was the source of the problem.”



Bob Kingston, President of the Agriculture Union, Public Service Alliance of Canada.

Kingston said the additional 200 inspectors were hired by the CFIA under the previous Liberal administration through a program announced in 2005. They were hired not to do food inspection, but to work specifically on a project to survey and eradicate foreign pests and diseases. Out of the 3,000 inspectors currently employed by CFIA nation-wide, only 1,400 are actually involved in food inspection, and they are spread thinly across a large number of slaughter and processing plants.

“In 2008, the Conservative government implemented the ‘Compliance Verification System’, which is a regimented approach to inspection,” he said. “So instead of focusing on areas in a plant where there are problems or speaking directly to workers on the plant floor, the inspectors are given a prescriptive list of inspection activities for that day, and are forbidden to stray from that specific list, regardless of what’s going on around them.”

Kingston said inspectors actually only spend about 25% of their time doing inspections in the plants, not 50% as claimed by the Minister. A lot of the inspectors’ time is also taken up driving to and from plants which they are responsible for. He noted that the inspector assigned to the Maple Leaf plant in Toronto is also responsible for five

(continued on page 15...)



(Self-regulation by food companies..., from page 14)

other plants in the city, all of which have to be visited daily. "It's literally mathematically impossible for one person to cover all those plants in any kind of an effective way," he stated.

Kingston said the changes to the inspection system were brought in after much lobbying by big business to reduce government inspection. "Big business tends to see government inspection activities as simply slowing down the production process and costing their companies money," he said. "When the HACCP quality management systems were introduced in meat processing plants, the large companies, such as Maple Leaf, argued that having these programs in place should mean less inspection, because they were now in a position to ensure compliance with health requirements on their own.

"Essentially we're talking about self-regulation. Many of these same companies were also asking for lower taxes and reduced government spending, and they found a sympathetic audience among many politicians. Under these pressures, government departments, including CFIA, were faced with program reviews and budget cuts and were receptive to any ideas that would result in less spending. This made them very easy targets for industry lobbyists to get inspectors off the plant floors. The result is that processing inspectors are now auditors who simply report to the companies how well they're performing against the company's own system, and not against CFIA regulatory or policy requirements. So now instead of taking some form of corrective action when they see problems, the inspectors fill out a corrective action request and then they wait ten days for the plant to tell them how they're going to resolve the problem some time in the next sixty days."

Kingston said the inspection system is "over-burdened" because inspectors have too much paperwork and too many facilities to look after to do an effective inspection.

"In the old days the inspectors would have slowed down a production line until the problem was fixed. They would have had a chat with the foreman and they would have

corrected the problem before they even left the facilities. And that doesn't happen anymore. So instead of conducting regular pre-operation inspections or sanitation inspections, the plant employees do those inspections now, with CFIA inspectors reading about it when they get the time," he said.

Under the old system, he added, processing plants were automatically required to report positive listeria finds to the inspector in charge, but under the new system that is no longer a requirement. "Some of the plants were not even aware that the requirement had been dropped, and even some of the inspectors were not aware, so in some facilities this was still happening," stated Kingston. "But the big facilities, like Maple Leaf, which were the ones actually lobbying to bring this system in place, you better believe they knew it. There was a long history of positive listeria finds, none of which were reported to the inspector. By the time the health people got hold of those samples, they were flabbergasted with the amount of listeria that was on the samples and the number of samples that were actually shown to be positive."

Some observers believe there is nothing wrong with food companies regulating themselves, given that it is in the company's best interests to not make their customers get sick or die. But Kingston said it is naïve to think the profit motive will guarantee safe food.

"Any inspector who has been around a while can tell many stories that disprove that theory," he stated. "If the profit motive caused people to act in their best long term interests, we wouldn't have a worldwide banking crisis right now."

"The corporate agenda is about maximizing production volumes, production speed and profits, and unfortunately this often comes at the expense of quality and safety, and it also comes at the expense of workers and the viability of producers," concluded Kingston. "This is because big companies have the political clout to write the rules of the game, and their regulations maximize their ability to achieve their goals, not ours. Cargill and Louis Dreyfuss are the largest privately-owned companies on the planet. A handful of agribusiness companies control 80% of the world's food supply, and like it or not, they didn't get there by looking out for the little guy."

Kingston urged NFU members to log on to the PSAC websites, www.grainaction.ca and www.foodsafetyfirst.ca to keep abreast of developments in the campaign to ensure food safety and grain quality.

-Terry Pugh



Listeriosis inquiry dogged by conflict of interest

After stalling for months, the Harper Government finally moved in mid-January to implement a public inquiry into the deadly listeriosis outbreak which claimed the lives of at least 20 Canadians.

But the woman appointed to lead the inquiry, Sheila Weatherill, has a glaring conflict of interest. Her appointment has raised concerns that the inquiry may be more concerned with public relations than with public safety.

The tainted meat scandal, which originated at a Maple Leaf processing plant in Toronto, resulted in a massive recall of prepackaged meats. It also focused public attention on the federal government's plan to deregulate food inspection services.

On January 20, Harper appointed Weatherill, a former Edmonton health care executive. But according to a report in the Canadian press, Weatherill also currently serves as a member of Prime Minister Harper's advisory committee to revamp the public service. The advisory committee's mandate includes "branding the public service as a trusted and innovative institution of national importance."

Critics questioned how Weatherill can do that job while leading a probe into whether food safety agencies broke the public trust. University of Ottawa researcher Amir Attaran, a lawyer and biologist, is quoted in the CP story as saying: "I think it's pretty clear: Ms. Weatherill can be a cheerleader for the public service, or she can be an independent investigator of the public service. But she can't be both at the same time. In ignoring that reality, Mr. Harper has foolishly failed once again to keep conflicts of interest out of his government."

Attaran co-signed an editorial in the Canadian Medical Association Journal last October which charged that "government policy errors helped bring about" the listeriosis outbreak. Changes to government monitoring mean Canada now has some of the lowest listeria standards among developed countries, it said. It demanded a full public inquiry into Canada's food inspection system.

Weatherill is to assess what went wrong, how federal food-safety and recall systems responded, and make recommendations to Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz. Her report is due July 20.

But Liberal Agriculture Critic Wayne Easter says Weatherill's credibility is compromised already. "She will certainly be perceived as a friend of the Prime Minister," he stated. Easter said the House of Commons Agriculture Committee should investigate the listeriosis outbreak because the Committee has the power to compel sworn testimony if needed.

The Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), which represents food inspectors who work for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), is also concerned the inquiry may gloss over the problems at the root of the crisis. Bob Kingston, President of the Agriculture Union section of PSAC, said Weatherill does not have the power to compel evidence or subpoena witnesses. He also expressed concern that the investigation is an "undercover exercise" because the media will not have access to the inquiry while it is in progress. "Only after her report has been vetted by the government will it be made public," Kingston noted.

Kingston supports the idea of the Commons Agriculture Committee conducting the investigation. He pointed out that in the months since the listeriosis crisis, evidence has been mounting that Canada's food safety, inspection and enforcement systems are stretched to the breaking point. He said contrary to Ritz's claims, no additional food inspectors have been hired by the CFIA since well before the outbreak. "The CFIA simply does not have the resources to fully address food safety as well as all of its other mandated responsibilities," he said. "On average, processed meat inspectors who work for CFIA are responsible for four meat processing facilities – double the realistic workload. They are further handcuffed by a system of industry safety self-policing that does not require the inspector to be notified when company tests find bacterial contamination in the plant."

Until last July, Weatherill was paid \$915,000 a year as head of Edmonton's Capital Health regional health board. When she was dismissed as part of the Alberta Conservative government's move to integrate separate health regions into one super board, she received nearly \$3.5 million in severance and retirement pay.

—nlu—



Seed modernization at what cost?

- BY MAUREEN BOSTOCK

I will try to shed some light on the impact on potato growers of what the Canadian Food Inspection Agency calls the Modernization of its Seed Regulatory Framework.

By modernization, CFIA means to dismantle a seed regulation which has provided Canadian farmers with the assurance of quality seed for over one hundred years. In "Impacts of Crop Placement Changes in New Flexible Variety Registration System", CFIA admits that there may be increased risks of economic losses to producers under the new protocol (p. 9). While these changes have consequences for all farmers, potato farmers face unique challenges as potatoes are a cost-intensive crop and poor performance by a seed potato variety can easily bankrupt the farm.

CFIA's proposal is to divide the Variety Registration System into three parts. Crops which remain in Part 1 will continue to be subject to preregistration testing and merit assessment. Almost all of Canada's field crops are currently included in Part 1.

Crops assigned to Part 2 will require pre-registration testing, but not merit assessment. Buckwheat seed, for example, is grown on 560 ha in Canada with a total 6,000 ha of crop production. There are few active breeders and little varietal development is taking place. CFIA supports the retention of pre-registration testing of buckwheat varieties because there is no provincial testing of buckwheat and to reduce "risks to producers".

Crops placed in Part 3 will require neither pre-registration testing nor merit assessment. They will have to conform to minimum health and safety standards (ie. glycoalkaloid levels in potatoes); provide information confirming the identity of new varieties, information supporting the verification of claims and information required for seed certification purposes (ie. that tissue be virus free).

One would expect that crops assigned to Part 3 would also be minor crops. Sunflowers are one such crop, with less than 10 ha pedigreed seed produced in Canada in 2006 and a total crop production of 77,000 ha.

Potatoes, however, are anything but a minor crop, yet they have been assigned to Part 3.



Under the proposed system, new potato varieties will not require pre-registration testing nor merit assessment.

- Seed potatoes on 30,000 ha by 800 seed potato growers;
- Seed potato exports valued at \$41 million;
- 2006, 3,700 farms grew table potatoes on 150,000 ha;
- 2006, organic table potatoes grown on 497 ha;
- Value of table potato crop in 2006 \$900 million;
- 2007 \$142 million in table potato exports;
- 2004 \$902 million in frozen potato products exported;
- There are currently 156 varieties of commercial potatoes registered in Canada;
- Seven new varieties registered each year on average;
- 10 breeding programs in Canada

CFIA considers preregistration testing and merit assessment for potatoes to be excessively burdensome or ineffective. By burden, they mean the \$6,000.00 to provide six station-years of data over a minimum of 2 years of trials, with records of yield, time to maturity, specific gravity, quality attributes for processing (such as colour, texture and flavour) and resistance to

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(Seed modernization, from page 17)

disease. Doesn't \$6000 seem like small potatoes to register a new variety for a \$1 billion export crop?

The financial loss to farmers who are bankrupted by new varieties which were not properly tested and were rushed to market by private breeders will undoubtedly amount to many millions of dollars. The breeders complain that two years of pre-registration testing costs them money, when in fact it saves Canada's rural communities and the economy the heavy burden of a major potato crop failure.

In addition to losing pre-registration testing, merit assessment is being discontinued for potatoes. Merit assessment prevents a new variety from being registered if the new variety is of lower quality than a current listed variety. Losing merit assessment in itself may not seem to be very significant but when coupled with the revisions to how varieties may be delisted its importance rises significantly. Today CFIA is only concerned with orderly deregistration, not whether the deregistration serves Canadian potato farmers. With no requirement to reject inferior varieties, the variety list is not secure from speculation by corporations seeking increased profits from new technology.

If the breeder of, for example, Superior wanted to force growers to use their new Superior variety with enhanced genetics, they could request the delisting of the original Superior and replace it with a new IP variety. Once a variety is deregistered, seed potato growers will not be able to continue to produce it.

Losing merit assessment will result in higher seed potato costs and require farmers to ride a varietal treadmill as we are forced to give up potato varieties which have proven successful for no reason other than the desire of the breeder to promote a new more expensive seed potato. Current estimates place the value of GE potato varieties at least twice the price of current potato rootstock. (In India today GE cotton seed is 1000% higher than traditional seedstock.)

The current seed regulatory system was established in 1886. By 1916, there were 25 experimental stations in Canada. They were charged with responsibility to protect farmers from bogus claims and to ensure quality seed stocks. Farmers were invited to join Registration Recommending Committees to conduct merit assessment. For over 100 years we have had a system which is designed around the principle that protecting farmers is in our society's interests. Seed and seedstocks were considered a common good, not a commodity.

Farmers reported why they like the public breeding program was that they provided consistently good varieties, with increased yields, improved disease resistance and new crops being developed.

Today there are 19 experimental stations in Canada, one of which is the Potato Research Centre in New Brunswick. Employing 19 scientists and a total staff of 97, the Potato Research Centre has 18 potato releases in production across Canada and internationally, with the first commercial potato variety released in 1950. The Potato Research Centre conducts field trials on new potato varieties, collaborates with the International Potato Centre in Peru and other national breeding programs, conducts potato production studies in co-operation with provincial depts., universities & industry; and produces studies on erosion control, soil & water quality and land use on potato farms; as well as operates the Potato Gene Bank.

The Potato Research Centre evaluates new potato varieties in the following areas:

- 1) **Performance evaluation:** plant vigour, days to maturity, tuber size, length & number, eye depth, colour descriptive, yield by grades, tabulated marketable yield, defects, propensity for bruising & cracking, dormancy
- 2) **Quality testing:**
 - specific gravities
 - boil & bake scores: sloughing, appearance, texture, off-flavour, discolouration,
 - french fry test: from storage at specific temperatures, appearance, colour, texture inside and out
 - chipping test
- 3) **Disease and pest resistance evaluation:** scab, warts, nematode, late blight foliar, PVYo and PVX.

As well, every January the Potato Research Centre offers 5 to 10 new varieties to growers of all size operations the opportunity to do their own evaluations.

This system which has served growers very well is to be dismantled in the government's determination to replace protecting farmers with protecting corporate profits.

CFIA's decision to make these changes to the Varietal Registration Framework is not a stand-alone policy; it is part of an economic strategy which has changed the world food order over the past few decades. It began with consolidation of the retail sector, vertically integrating the food chain from transportation, processing and retailing. Pesticide

(continued on page 19...)



corporations followed suit and began to look for ways to control the agricultural production chain. They focused their attention on seeds when they realized that proprietary control of seeds and genetics could increase their profits. By attaching identity preservation, the value of seeds could be greatly increased. GE Terminator Technology has been developed to prevent unauthorized use of IP seeds. Seed and pesticide corporations began to lobby for governments to get out of seed production.

The Canadian government meanwhile has been pursuing its own agenda of privatization: the three D's – downsizing, downloading and deregulation with the intention to free up the marketplace. This strategy perfectly dovetails with industry's goal to stop public breeding programs from competing with private industry.

The road to greater corporate profits requires both these fundamental changes – the elimination of competition from public breeding programs as well as the introduction of production contracts to secure profits.

For farmers, a future when contractual potato production becomes the norm, means both increased seed costs and the loss of the right to save potato seed year to year to replant.

“Where regulations impinge on corporate profits then, yes corporations want deregulation; but where people's practices impinge on corporate profits, corporations want regulations or other forms of governmental intervention to protect their interests. In the case of seeds, as we have seen, the main impediments to corporate profits were the high level of seed-saving among Canadian farmers and the open and collective public breeding programs. Public breeders supplied decent varieties at good prices for farmers who were then free to do what they wished with them. Seeds, in short, were more public goods than they were commodities. If there was going to be more corporate investment in the seed industry, if there was any hope of shifting the centre of power in the seed system from the public breeding programs to corporate boardrooms, then this picture had to change – seeds had to be commodified.” (*Devlin Kuyek, the author of Good Seed, Bad Seed*)

Can farmers make a living if the cost of seed skyrockets? Let's take a quick look at Canadian statistics:

While gross farm receipts have grown from \$15,000 in 1926 to \$150,000 in 2006, net incomes have dropped to \$20,000 in the red. The cause of this disaster is the profits multinational corporations have given themselves permission to take in exchange for

machinery, seed, feed, fuel, fertilizers, energy costs and bank interest. The combined profits of Agrium, Mosaic, Terra, Potash Corp and CF Industries rose from \$100 million in 2002 to \$1.2 billion in 2007. Potato prices have risen all of \$18.05 per tonne since 1999. This is Canadian agriculture, where farmers lose money and corporations get richer.

There are other consequences to farmers if potatoes leave the arena of “public goods”. As potato seed increasingly becomes the property of corporations, the genetic diversity of potatoes may be threatened. With profit being the driving force rather than public interest, there is the potential for unconscionable disposal of genetic resources, such as the example of the corporation which sent to the landfill all but the most profitable seed in its warehouse upon the takeover of an international seed house.

Plant breeding was described by W.T. Bradnock, the director of Seeds Division of Ag Canada in the 1980s as resembling “the creation of a mosaic with contributions from different sources needed to complete the design.” Modern breeding programs tend to seek a single gene to provide resistance to disease. These products of vertical breeding have been found to convey short term resistance when compared to horizontal breeding programs, such as the work of the Loo family of PEI who selected Island Sunshine from varietal crosses which survived exposure to Late Blight. As we move closer to the day when IP potato varieties dominate the registry, we sacrifice the possibility of a broader genetic diversity.

To sum up then, it is suspect that a 30,000 ha seed crop such as potatoes is being accorded no more protection than the 10 ha of sunflowers. The loss of merit assessment combined with easing of deregistration will result in high-cost IP potatoes replacing older, proven varieties. Corporations achieve the cessation of public breeding programs competing with private while the federal government furthers its privatization initiative by moving closer to getting out of crop research and development altogether. When we ask who will benefit from the loss of pre-registration testing and merit assessment, it is all too clear that it will not be farmers. —nfu—

—Maureen Bostock is an NFU member from Ontario.

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Bringing food sovereignty home

- BY CATHLEEN KNEEN

The language of food sovereignty was originated and popularized by La Via Campesina (of which the NFU was a founding member). They promoted it at the World Food Summit in 2002, and it was fleshed out in February 2007 at an international forum in Mali, West Africa. This forum was attended by almost 800 people: peasant groups, artisanal fisherfolk, nomadic pastoralists, forest dwellers, and many others whose mode of existence is marginalized, threatened, and in some cases has been destroyed by the forces of the industrialized global food system.

Among the participants at this assembly were a handful of Canadians, mostly from the NFU but also including a couple of NGO representatives and myself as the Chair of Food Secure Canada. Confronted by the reality of devastation of subsistence livelihoods around the world, and inspired by the powerful spirit of solidarity among such an incredibly diverse group of people, we found ourselves committing to integrating food sovereignty into our work here in Canada.

With support from Heifer International, a group of members of Food Secure Canada have now organized a national process to engage Canadians in working through the implications of food sovereignty for Canada. The result of our collaboration is the People's Food Policy Project (PFPP) which will commence in the early months of 2009 and run to 2011. This process is building on the work of La Via Campesina and its affiliates in developing and refining the concepts of food sovereignty, and on the history of the movement in Canada for what has been termed 'food security'.

Thirty years ago, the People's Food Commission, generated by a group of young activists from community organizations,

farm and fisheries groups (including the NFU), churches and unions, among others, held hearings in 75 communities across Canada. The Commission's regional and national reports exposed the deep flaws in the food system and pointed to the probable social and environmental outcomes, which are now painfully visible in the increased line-ups at the food banks, widespread diet-related chronic disease, contamination of land, water, and wildlife, and the destruction of apparently limitless resources such as the Northern Cod.

Many of those young people (somewhat older now) are still involved in a growing pan-Canadian movement for justice and sustainability in the food system. Across Canada, a host of projects have been undertaken – everything from stream remediation on farms to school breakfast programs, as well as skill-building and community-building projects. People are seeking to reclaim the food system at the local level and build a system based on a different set of principles, and rooted in respect: for traditional wisdom, for ecosystems, for people struggling to feed themselves and their families.

From this community base, people have also engaged with the policy-making process – in terms of school food policy, for example, or a municipal food charter or Food Policy Council. Despite these efforts, however, food policy in Canada remains dominated by governments and industry and does not reflect the reality of people on the ground, as NFU members know all too well. This is a perfect moment to launch the People's Food Policy Project, which can build on all of this to generate a grassroots Food Sovereignty Policy for Canada.

To do this, the Coordinating Committee of the PFPP has contacted a number of people across the country as "animators". These are people who are already engaged in community mobilization around food in one way or another, who will use the analytical and popular education tools developed by the project to add a "policy lens" to their work. We have looked

(continued on page 21...)



(Bringing food sovereignty home, from page 20)

for people who have an understanding of food sovereignty and who are well connected to community work on food. Starting with about 18 people, we are hoping to dramatically increase that number.

The People's Food Policy Project will explore how Food Sovereignty and the principles it embodies can be relevant and useful in working towards the goals of the Canadian movement for food security. The project's ultimate goal is a package of food policies, generated by the people working on food issues across the country, which will together provide a just and sustainable food system – food sovereignty – in the face of the imminent breakdown of the current globalized food system. We hope and intend to engage a broad range of organizations in this project, and across the country we are looking for support from non-government organizations, including the trade union

movement, faith-based organizations, and international development and community-based groups.

This is indeed a massive undertaking, but long overdue. Any NFU activist who is interested is urged to contact Colleen Ross (crossl@ripnet.com), who is a member of the PFPP Coordinating Committee, or Cathleen Kneen at Food Secure Canada (cathleen@ramshorn.ca). Fundraising is ongoing, to augment the project core funding from Heifer International and to help with travel and other expenses of both the project coordinator and the animators, particularly as their number increases. —nfu



LICENSED ABATTOIR FOR SALE.

Well-established business on a 2-acre lot with two other businesses on it.

Very clean facility with epoxy flooring throughout; temperature-controlled rooms.

On-site composting, saves a lot in rendering costs – government approved. Great product flow.



The two other businesses on site are:

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\$375,000 for the whole development. Owner retiring.

The site can be viewed by logging onto:

www.meatandbbqcentre.com

or call

613.279.2204 or 613.279.3006



NFU takes mailing list questions to RCMP

The National Farmers Union has asked the RCMP to conduct an investigation into the practices of five Conservative MPs in regards to the round of Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) elections held in late 2008.

During the recent CWB Director elections, five Conservative MPs used taxpayers' money to try and get anti-CWB candidates elected. The Conservative MPs sent letters directly to farmers telling them how to vote and who to vote for. As well, it seems that the mailing list used by the Conservative MPs was identical to the CWB voters' list.

According to the law, the CWB election voters' list is only supposed to be available to the candidates involved, and there are strict rules in place to ensure the proper use of the private information contained in the voters' list.

"There have been several conflicting stories coming from the Conservative MPs themselves regarding the mailing list that they used to promote anti-CWB candidates during the election," said Stewart Wells, President of the National Farmers Union. "Given that it is an offence under the CWB Act to break the CWB Act or its regulations, it seems that the only way to get to the truth is to ask the RCMP to investigate, and that is what we have done."

"It seems to us that the first step of an investigation would be to establish whether or not

the CWB voters' list was actually used by the Conservative MPs. Farmers are angry about the abuse of democracy by the Conservatives, and farmers have sent over fifty of the letters to the National Farmers Union. It appears that in every case the name and address on the MP's letters is identical to the name and address in the farmer's CWB permit book—including typos and corporate names. The information in the CWB permit book is also supposed to be protected by Canada's Privacy Act of 1983," continued Wells.

Besides the voters' list issue, there are other outstanding problems with the Conservative MPs' actions, including their violation of the MPs' Conflict of Interest Code. According to the MPs' Code, MPs are not supposed to help their friends become "...a director or officer in a corporation, association or trade union..."

As well, the Conservative MPs have refused to register as third party intervenors, an action that shows they think they are above the laws that apply to other Canadians.

"The National Farmers Union expects accountability from all MPs, right from the Prime Minister down to the loneliest backbencher, and we are hopeful that the RCMP can help provide some of the accountability that is being denied by the Conservative MPs," concluded Wells. —nfu—

Alberta government must let farmers decide direction of CWB

The Alberta Government must respect the wishes of farmers and stop spending taxpayers' money on a campaign to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB), says Doug Scott, a Board member of the National Farmers Union (NFU).

In a letter to Alberta Agriculture Minister George Groeneveld, Scott said the recent CWB Director elections have confirmed strong support for the single desk marketing advantages of the CWB. The election results also prove that farmers want to

continue to exercise control over their own marketing board through the CWB Board of Directors. Scott said it is clear farmers don't want governments to dictate the direction of the CWB.

Scott, who farms near Waskatenau, said the voter turnout in last fall's CWB Director elections was "nearly equal" to the turnout of the recent federal general election, so the government is obliged to recognize the democratic wishes of producers.

(continued on page 31...)



Packers and retailers paying cattle farmers half of long-term normal prices:

NFU meetings on livestock crisis focus on solutions

The National Farmers Union (NFU) hosted a series of community meetings across Canada in an effort to overcome the devastating income crisis facing livestock farmers. The meetings focused on a groundbreaking research report released by the NFU in late November, entitled "The Farm Crisis and the Cattle Sector: Toward a New Analysis and New Solutions."

The report concludes that the collapse of cattle prices affecting family-farm cow-calf producers and independent feeders is due primarily to the problem of the rising power and profits of food retailers and beef packers.

The report also suggests a number of solutions aimed at restoring farmers' market power and raising farm-gate prices for cattle.

"Cattle farmers need to know that the prices they are receiving today are half of what retailers and packers paid back to farmers between the end of the Second World War and 1990. They need to know how retailers and packers are driving down farmers' prices. And they need to know what farmers can do about these problems," said Darrin Qualman, NFU Director of Research and author of the report.

The NFU meetings examined issues such as captive supply (packers owning or controlling cattle, with the clear potential to suppress prices), increasing corporate concentration (an especially critical issue in light of the proposed

Tyson/XL sale), the effects of trade policies, and the growing power of food retailers to take ever larger shares of citizens' food dollars, leaving farmers with less.

Neil Peacock, a cattle producer from Sexsmith, Alberta and an elected member of the NFU Board of Directors, said "the report delves into the real issues facing family farm cattle operations in Canada, not the distractionary issues touted by the multinationals and the federal and provincial governments. The report also includes real solutions to the income crisis that, if adopted, would return wealth to the family farms that raise livestock."

"It is ironic that many of the recommendations in the NFU report mirror the sentiments put forward in many of the Alberta Beef Producers (ABP) regional meetings as resolutions that were defeated when they got to the ABP annual meeting in Calgary," Peacock added.

The meetings began January 17 in Sudbury, Ontario. Following a round of meetings in that province, a series of events were held in Alberta and BC the last week of January.

In early February, a round of meetings in Manitoba took place. Meetings were scheduled for Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick in late February.

To download a copy of the NFU report on the livestock crisis, log on to www.nfu.ca.

(continued on page 24...)

Packers are paying farmers about half of what packers paid in the 1940s, '50s, '60s, '70s, and '80s. Feeder cattle and calf prices and cull cow prices are similarly about half of their pre-1989 averages.



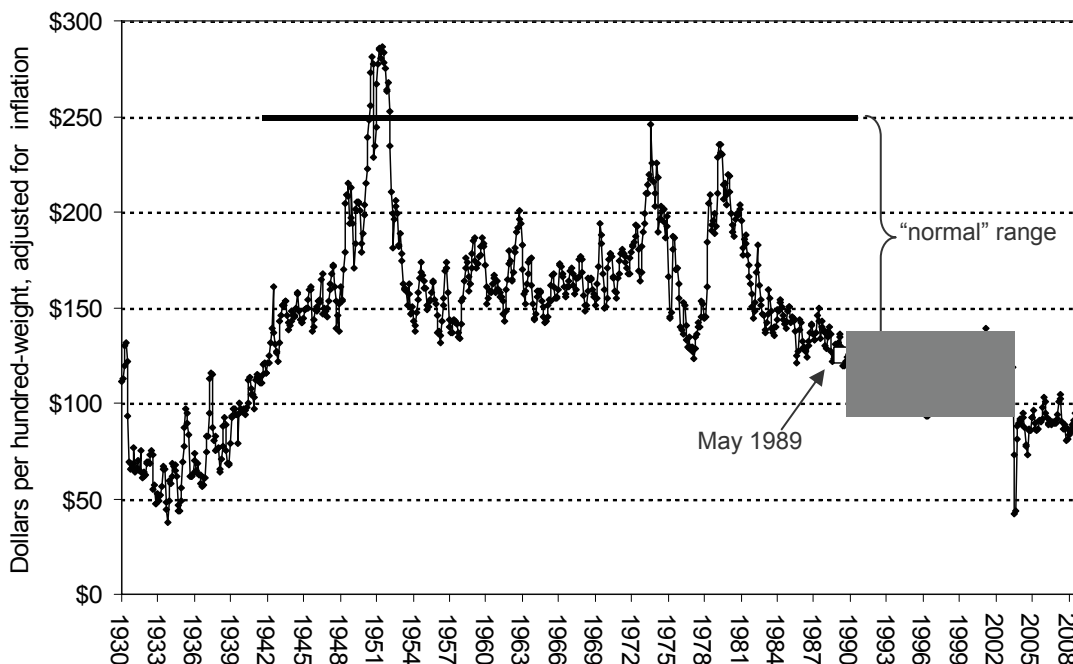
(Packers & retailers paying cattle farmers..., from page 23)

Historic price trends for cattle

This graph shows Alberta slaughter steer prices from 1930 to mid-2008. Prices are based on live-weight. The graph lists monthly prices, in dollars per hundred-weight, adjusted for inflation. (\$100 per hundred-weight = \$100 per hundred pounds = \$1 per pound.)

Alberta fed (slaughter) steers: January 1930 – August 2008

Sources for all graphs and all figures listed in the NFU reports, available at www.nfu.ca



The graph reveals several distinct periods. At the far left are the low prices of the Great Depression. Then in the early 1940s, slaughter-steer prices returned to a more normal range. The graph's two horizontal grey lines mark the top and bottom of a horizontal channel that defines the price range from 1942 to 1989. During that period, prices rose and fell, *but not once in the 47 years between 1942 and 1989 did the price of Alberta slaughter steers fall below \$120 per hundred-weight. Never did prices breach the line that marked the bottom of the post-Depression normal.*

Then in 1989, Alberta fed steer prices *did* drop below that \$120 per hundred-weight line. After '89, cattle prices continued to oscillate, but they did so within a *much* lower range of values. The grey box highlights the prices for the 14-year period from 1989 to 2003.

In May 2003, a single case of BSE triggered a series of events that caused already-low prices to fall still further. At the far right, we see the prices since 2003—since the first discovery of BSE. Prices during this recent period echo those of the Great Depression.

In 2008, prices for Alberta slaughter steers averaged \$91 per hundred-weight. But the inflation-adjusted average price for the nearly 50-year period between 1942 and 1989 was \$167 *per hundred-weight*—almost double the recent average. Packers are paying farmers about half of what packers paid in the 1940s, '50s, '60s, '70s, and '80s. Feeder cattle and calf prices and cull cow prices are similarly about half of their pre-1989 averages. These half-price cattle are bankrupting farmers.

—nfu—



(Women's President Report, from page 4)

package of pro-active food and farming policies. What I love about this project is that it is so collaborative. It includes representatives of First Nations communities, health and welfare groups, community kitchens and food banks, farmers and ordinary citizens that are concerned about the future of food in Canada.

The NFU is a member of FSC, and as such, we have an opportunity to lend our voices and our years of experience as food producers and food/farming activists. We have members from across Canada ready and able to get involved. There are several ways for us to get involved, as discussion leaders or participants, in local Food Sovereignty workshops or kitchen table meetings. For those in remote areas, teleconferencing or virtual web-based meetings are options, so that distance will not be an obstacle to participation.

Already the NFU Women's Advisory Committee has learned about this project and are unanimously in favour of working with many diverse partners from across Canada.

The NFU, as a founding member of La Via Campesina and a co-creator of the Food Sovereignty Declaration, have a responsibility to work alongside our fellow Canadians in our collective struggle for meaningful change. Our government is in turmoil, and I don't believe for a second they know what ails them. But, we have the cure. Let's get involved in this important project. It is starting now. Read Cathleen Kneen's story about the project on page 20 of this issue and learn how you can effect change now.

In Solidarity, Colleen Ross

(Region 3 Report, from page 9)

After Darrin was shocked into caffeine wonderland thanks to NFU Renfrew President Dave Mackay's strongest coffee ever, the meeting proceeded with local government MP Cheryl Gallant in attendance, along with a large number of local media people. Lots of great discussion and questions ensued, including from Ellard Powers who played an important role in getting the report under way.

The next two nights saw Darrin and I in large meetings in Elginburg and Elmwood. (Near Kingston and Owen Sound). As invited guests of the Frontenac Cattlemen's Association, Darrin and I were able to witness a resolution being passed to go to the OCA convention that was similar to one passed in Sudbury. In Elmwood the same resolution was going to be going forward to local cattlemen's meetings.

All in all, the trip was truly successful. Everywhere we went the NFU was well received. It is clear the National Farmers Union in Ontario has become a highly respected voice for family farmers. The growth we are seeing and that respect has everything to do with the work done in the past and the incredible commitment NFU members across the province have shown.

A big thank you to all the people who made this tour such a resounding success, with front page media coverage in a number of areas. But most of all, a big thank you for the work and commitment of Darrin Qualman.

*In peace and solidarity,
Grant Robertson*

(Region 7 Report, from page 12)

A few independent auction mart owners have contacted us with their appreciation of the report as well as with the information of rapidly losing merit for their auction mart existence, as all of them need the presence of Nielsen Brothers reps in the sales barns to function. All of them know that the Nielsen Brothers Empire, includes more and more auction barns, cattle financing, cow calf operations, feeding operations, trucking companies and packing capacity.

Counties and MD's are also expressing interest in the NFU report. Make sure your counselors have

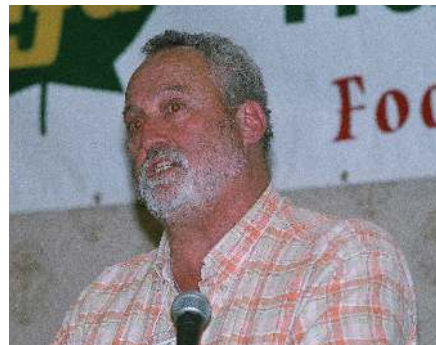
read it and support the coalition demanding governments to come on side.

I urge all members hereby to make sure MLA's, MP's and county counselors have read the report or you can offer them to present the report in person. Your coordinator is also willing to come out to meet with counselors, politicians and farmers in your neighbourhood to present the report and get people committed to our solutions! Phone 403-843-2068.

In Union, Jan Slomp



Via Campesina's strength continues to grow since founding in 1993



Paul Nicholson of Via Campesina.

Via Campesina, the grassroots movement founded fifteen years ago to unite family farmers around the world, is gaining strength, says Paul Nicholson, a member of the International Coordinating Commission of La Via Campesina.

Speaking to the NFU national convention in Saskatoon in November, Nicholson, who is also the international representative for the Basque Farmers and Ranchers Union in Spain, said the vision for “food sovereignty” put forward by family farmers is the only viable solution for solving the global hunger problem and the growing environmental crisis.

“Sixteen years ago, there was no voice for family farmers at the international level,” stated Nicholson. “There was no organized farmers’ movement to defend our livelihood and our values and our way of life.” He noted that a meeting in Nicaragua in 1993 drew together a dozen farm leaders from many different countries, and the seeds of the new movement were planted.

“I remember the Canadian NFU President at that time, a man named Wayne Easter, said there was a need for having a family farm voice at the international level,” said Nicholson. “Since then, at each critical decision-making point in the movement’s history, the Canadian NFU has been there.” He noted that Nettie Wiebe, another former NFU President, was a key architect of the Via Campesina’s food sovereignty policy.

While the initial strength of the Via Campesina was concentrated in Europe and the Americas, its political and numeric strength is now coming from Africa and Asia. He said the Via Campesina has a membership of 300 million rural families and is recognized as a major player in the global debate on food policy.

“We are at the table stating our requirements and strategies,” he stated. “What has given us this strength internationally is the fact that we are an authentic movement. We are a true family farm movement. We are not a lobby group for transnational corporations. We are a cohesive and united movement of farmers,

fisherfolk and social movements. It is remarkable that when you hear a Via Campesina statement, it can be said by an African farmer, a European farmer, an American farmer or an Asian farmer. Our statements represent what we are and what we want to achieve.”

Nicholson said family farm organizations around the world have a unique opportunity now to push for meaningful policy changes. “The agro-export model of industrial agriculture has failed,” he said. “The energy crisis, the food crisis, the climate change crisis and the financial crisis all have the same root cause. It is a crisis of capitalism.”

He added the crisis won’t be solved by bailing out big corporations or pushing for increased trade. “We must change our policies,” he said. “Food sovereignty is the solution for farmers and urban people alike. It is family farmers who feed the world. Corporations don’t feed the world. Only 10% of the food produced on the planet is exported, the rest is produced and consumed locally.”

He noted that in the coming year, a hundred million people will go hungry around the world, a testament to the failure of the current corporate-driven system. “In Europe, one family farm disappears every minute,” he added. “Food sovereignty is a goal that can be achieved, but it won’t happen in a top-down manner. Food sovereignty is a process that starts at the local level and builds up to a global level. Strategically, it is important that the Canadian NFU, the US-based National Family Farm Coalition and the European Coordination Via Campesina work together because we have many commonalities. Political decisions which affect the whole world are being taken in Europe and North America and we have a huge responsibility to intervene and influence the decision-making process.”

-Terry Pugh



Proposed tax incentive actually subsidy to seed companies

A proposal by the Canadian Seed Trade Association (CSTA) for a federal tax incentive to encourage farmers to purchase certified seed is actually an attempt to create a major subsidy for multinational seed and chemical companies.

The CSTA is currently lobbying the federal government to implement a tax incentive to allow farmers to claim 155% of the cost of certified seed as an expense on their income tax returns.

In a letter to federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty, NFU Vice-President Terry Boehm said the CSTA's proposal amounts to an attempt to use the tax system to subsidize seed companies. He noted that while the proposal may be attractive on the surface, farmers will end up paying higher costs in the long run.

"The CSTA is an association of 140 seed companies that includes large multinational corporations like Monsanto, Syngenta, BASF and Bayer, which dominate the global seed trade," he pointed out. "The tax incentive scheme is nothing more than an attempt to foster dependency by farmers on these companies for their seed in the long run. It is part of a systematic plan of using seed as a platform for control."

Boehm pointed out that seed companies have drastically increased the price of seed for many crop varieties. "In only a decade, the price of certified canola seed has gone from \$1.00 per pound to \$5.00 and \$6.00 per pound," he stated. "At the high end, this translates into an expense for farmers of roughly \$300 per bushel for canola. Meanwhile the farmer can expect a return of only about \$9.00 per bushel for canola."

Boehm noted that while farm-saved seed is perfectly suitable for replanting, the use of patents and obligatory

contracts, combined with rules that hinder access to seed treatments, has largely stopped farmers from saving and re-using their own seed. "This has allowed these companies to extract \$100 million from farmers on an annual basis on canola alone," he said. "The most expensive seeds in Canada are canola, corn and soybeans, the crop types cited by the CSTA where certified seed usage is highest."

Boehm dismissed the CSTA's claim that royalties from certified seed sales will lead to higher farm incomes based on increased yields of new varieties. "If that was true, the simple introduction of new seed varieties would have solved the farm income crisis years ago," he stated.

The CSTA estimates the tax incentive proposal would mean a reduction of between \$89 million and \$170 million into the public coffers. Boehm said the federal government should instead invest that sum into public plant breeding programs which result in varieties that can be used freely by farmers for seed saving and re-use.

He noted that a large number of conventional, non-GM, canola varieties have been deregistered in the last few years, leaving farmers almost no choice but to pay a high price for seed varieties containing gene patents. Prices of seed for those GM varieties are set by the big companies which hold the gene patents.

"It is logical for these companies to want to expand their market," concluded Boehm. "However, they can do that by offering real value to farmers in the quality of their varieties, rather than by using the tax system to entice farmers, and intellectual property measures like patents to force farmers, down one path." —nfu—



ROBERT HARRISON

Robert (Bob) Harrison of Graysville, Manitoba passed away unexpectedly on Sunday, January 11, 2009 at his farm. He was 71.

Born June 5, 1938 in Carman, Bob is survived by his beloved wife of 39 1/2 years Judith (nee Robertson); his children Rob, Frances (Kelly Boddy) and Stewart; his sister Ethel (Alvin Hook), niece Alex (Clarence Rhymer) and extended family members.

Although Bob was a lifelong farmer, as a young man he spent time working in the Alberta oilfields, then moved to BC to take a welding course. Returning to Manitoba, he worked as a welder with CNR (Symington) and Dominion Bridge. He and Judith moved back to the home farm in 1971 to raise their family. Bob and Judith were each other's best friends. Bob had a strong commitment to justice and responsibility. He served his community as a school trustee and later on, a municipal counselor. He was a Graysville 4-H Beef Club member in his younger days and served as a leader later on when his children followed in his footsteps. Bob had a quick wit and a keen memory. He held strong opinions and had the courage to stand up for what he believed. There was no better or more loyal friend.

He cared deeply for his family, who will miss him profoundly.

To quote one of Bob's heroes, Sir Winston Churchill: "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."



Therefore Be It Resolved

RESOLUTIONS FROM THE NFU'S 39TH ANNUAL CONVENTION

NOVEMBER 20TH TO NOVEMBER 22ND, 2008 – SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN

Editor's Note: At the conclusion of the NFU national convention in Saskatoon in November, 2008, several resolutions were left unresolved. The following resolutions were adopted by a special meeting of the NFU Board of Directors on January 21, 2009.

RESEARCH ON FOSSIL FUEL

BE IT RESOLVED that the NFU call on the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) to begin a thorough analysis of the likely effects to the agri-food sector of the "end of cheap fossil fuel".

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the NFU call on the University of Guelph to undertake similar/complementary research.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that part of this research include policy options, to ensure that the onus is on food security.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this resolution be presented to the National Convention in Saskatoon to address this issue at the federal level, so that it may be addressed by the federal government, federal research facilities and other provincial governments and research facilities.



Dave Lewington of Ontario and Randall Affleck of PEI during debate on resolutions at the recent NFU Convention.

MEMBERSHIP FEE INCREASE

BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of the NFU investigate the appropriateness of a membership fee increase and present back to the membership regarding appropriate timing and amount of a membership fee increase at the 2009 national convention.

ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE ENERGY CONSERVATION POLICY

WHEREAS for every tonne of environmentally sustainable energy produced, we would conserve one tonne of fossil

fuel which would reduce air pollution and also reduce the costs associated with the production of food. This would result in the creation of sustainable employment, and

WHEREAS the environmentally sustainable energy conservation policy would reflect a new green energy economy that would produce new power source industries, facilitate new employment, and end the current carbon tax debate,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the National Farmers Union develop a new environmentally sustainable energy conservation policy for water, fossil fuels, and natural gas supplies which could be accomplished by supporting the development of the following technologies:

- electric energy from ocean waves;
- solar energy;
- thermal energy; and wind energy.

COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN LABELLING

WHEREAS farmers in Canada support the principle of country-of-origin labelling adopted by the agricultural community, and

WHEREAS we have learned that the U.S. Country of Origin Labelling (COOL) is apparently interfering with the free movement of farm products including livestock across the border into the United States,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the National Farmers Union, who supports country-of-origin labelling, immediately take action to investigate to correct the inequality where the United States has apparently shut our Canadian farm products including livestock due to their new U.S. labelling law COOL.

GMO LABELLING

WHEREAS GMO crops are increasingly poisoning life on earth and threatening farmers' and eaters' rights to make informed choices, and

WHEREAS GMO crops are limiting and infringing upon farmers' rights and abilities to farm in other ways,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the NFU strengthen its advocacy for mandatory GMO labelling.

—nfu—



Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Last November, five Conservative MPs spent thousands of taxpayers' dollars advocating on behalf of anti-CWB candidates in the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) elections. The Conservative MPs sent letters directly to farmers telling them who to vote for. And now one of the unanswered questions is: "Did the Conservatives use confidential CWB voters' list information as the basis for their mailing list?" The RCMP is now investigating the matter.

David Anderson, Conservative MP for Cypress Hills – Grasslands, said in mid-January that "We used nothing that wasn't publicly available, so I feel totally comfortable with the situation."

If this is the case, I would urge Mr. Anderson to cooperate fully with the RCMP investigation and immediately explain to everyone how the Conservative mailing list so closely mirrors the names and addresses used in the CWB elections.

Yours truly,
Ron Watson, Lancer, SK



Dear Editor,

An editorial by Will Verboven in the January 19, 2009 edition of the Alberta Farmer Express warns that cattle farmers in the province should be wary of the National Farmers Union (NFU). He suggests, ominously, that the NFU is "circling around, ready to pounce on any opportunity to share in any possible future checkoff spoils".

At a time when farm gate prices for cattle are at record lows, the checkoff of three dollars a head on the sale of each and every cow constitutes a sizeable "sales tax" that every farmer is forced to pay.

Clearly, farmers need to be mindful of who, exactly, is separating them from their hard-earned money. If they look closely, they'll soon see that it's not the NFU.

The NFU is not responsible for low farm gate prices for cattle. The credit for that goes to Cargill, XL and Tyson, and their strategic use of captive supply methods to manipulate cattle prices. The credit also has to go to the Alberta Beef Producers, which continues to extract its large share of the checkoff "sales tax" from the sale of every animal, thereby insulating itself from any financial worries.

The Alberta Beef Producers is an organization that claims to represent the interests of each and every cattle farmer in the province, yet somehow always seems to adopt policies that benefit the big operators at the expense of the family farmer. Any time a grassroots resolution challenging the status quo comes out of an ABP county meeting, it is always deftly assassinated from the podium by the ABP leadership at the organization's general meeting in Calgary.

It's instructive that Verboven refers to the checkoff fund as "spoils" when he indignantly warns that anyone other than the ABP might access it. The ABP has always viewed the checkoff funding as its private treasure trove. The ABP has collected more than \$70 million since the BSE crisis, and there is little evidence to indicate it was put to any use other than paying ABP staff salaries and helping offset advertising expenses for the big packing companies. Certainly there is no evidence of any initiative aimed at raising farm incomes or increasing farmers' market power.

The NFU, by contrast, is a non-partisan, democratic, voluntary, direct-membership organization. Despite a very modest budget, the NFU has shown that solid research and concrete benefits are achievable if the members' money is spent wisely. The analysis contained in the research paper: "The Farm Crisis and the Cattle Sector: Toward a New Analysis and New Solutions" brings forward new and useful information that the ABP has chosen to downplay or ignore. The report can be viewed at www.nfu.ca.

That is why farmers choose to invest in the NFU, because they understand that by working together, they can bring about positive changes. Given a refundable checkoff and a choice of organizations to direct their checkoff toward, a significant number of farmers in Alberta would certainly opt for the NFU or one of the other organizations that make up the Beef Industry Alliance.

Yours truly,
Neil Peacock, NFU Board member, Sexsmith, Alberta



Dear Editor,

As a new year begins, it is the season of "New Years messages". As usual most things written about the beef sector will start out by assuring the reader that next year can only be an improvement, before going on to list the unforeseen obstacles that arose to thwart the fortunes of producers in the year just passed.

Can it really be a coincidence that year after year something happens that unfairly wipes out the returns a producer should have received for his hard work and investment? Despite what Governments, the media and most beef producer organizations will tell you, the answer is no – it is anything but a coincidence. Proof of this is contained in the "**Farm Crisis and the Cattle Sector: Towards a New Analysis and New Solutions**" document published recently by the National Farmers Union. This presents a thorough analysis of our current predicament as well as suggesting some possible solutions.

The report charts seventy years of cattle prices from the Great Depression through to present day, and when they are adjusting for inflation, a clear pattern emerges. Those of us in the primary beef sector have not been crippled by a series of freak events beginning with BSE in 2003 as many suppose, rather, since 1989 there has been a systematic collapse in prices received by producers to values approximately half those that prevailed in the 50 years prior. The evidence documented is compelling – the demise of producer's returns coincides exactly with the arrival of the two large US packers in Alberta and the era of corporate concentration that this precipitated. The policy of increased beef production aimed at the export market has been disastrous for Canadian primary beef producers largely because there is no competition in the processing sector. Tremendous wealth is still being

(continued on page 30...)



Letters to the Editor

(Letters to the Editor, from page 29)

created in the beef production process, but that wealth currently accrues to only a few very powerful players, while the majority of us are left to fight over the crumbs.

Most producers will not be surprised by the findings of the report, as they confirm what we have suspected for a while. The report also highlights the profound lack of curiosity shown by politicians and most beef producer organizations into investigating the true causes of the crisis in the beef sector. Time and again we are told that next year will be better, if "we" can just export more beef our cattle prices will improve – yet history clearly shows that this is not the case. Other excuses commonly cited for our plight are high grain prices, the high dollar, ethanol and SRM removal costs. The report conclusively proves that none of these are significant causes of our current problems. If producers want to improve their fortunes they must act on this report – it does no good to nod our heads in agreement and allow it to gather dust on our kitchen tables. We must hold our elected politicians and industry officials accountable for their lack of action and misinformed excuses.

The National Farmers Union is organizing public meetings across the country to share the report and develop possible solutions with producers. Everyone is welcome to attend the meetings and share opinions. If we are to precipitate change we must take every opportunity to share this report with our fellow producers, other producer organizations, media outlets and politicians. The old adage that "information is power" holds true - this report contains the information we need to improve our circumstances. Let us rise to this challenge and maybe we can look forward to a New Year's message that won't be lamenting another disastrous year for beef producers. Copies of the report are available to download from the NFU website (www.nfu.ca) or by calling (306) 652-9465.

Iain Aitken, Rimbey, AB



Dear Editor,

A common thread that ran through the resolutions passed at the 39th annual convention and published in The Union farmer was to lobby the Government to do this or that. Although this may be a necessary evil, to me it is like pounding ones head against a brick wall. It is common knowledge that politicians have only two jobs. One is to get elected and the other is to get re-elected. In order to achieve these goals things like honesty and integrity have been set aside and they have prostituted themselves to big business. The current Government's agenda regarding the CWB is only one in a long line of Governmental actions that back this up.

The only chance we have of getting meaningful changes is to mobilize the voting public by educating them to the realities of the plight of their food security system, namely us, the Canadian family farmer. Most people in this country are disconnected from the source of their food not only physically but also mentally. To most of them the food comes from the grocery store. How it got there or where it came from rarely enters their mind. The main concern is availability and cost. Granted there is a small but growing number of consumers who are waking up to the realities and are more conscious of their shopping decisions.

Our message should not only be put in the farm publications, which in effect is preaching to the choir, but also strategically placed in the media so that consumers will be made aware of the situation. After all, without the support of the consumers we are dead in the water. We can not compete with slave labour, lack of environmental regulations, and other unethical practices used by big business at home and abroad in order to pad their pockets and those of their investors. If we want to reverse the trend of becoming share croppers for big business, we must find ways of circumventing the current way of doing business.

Governments are reactive not active, so if a large segment of the voting public were to want a viable family farm population in this country then politicians would have to institute policies and regulations to accommodate this or risk losing an election.

Wayne Sabine, Circle S farms, Tilley, New Brunswick

HARVEY WEIR



Harvey Carleton Weir of Perdue, Saskatchewan, passed away December 20, 2008 at the age of 80 years. Harvey, affectionately known as "Uncle Harvey" to almost everyone, was a long-time member of the Saskatchewan Farmers Union and the National Farmers Union. He was a much-respected and loved member of his community, and will be sadly missed by friends and family alike.

Harvey was born July 22, 1928 in Leney, Saskatchewan, and grew up on the family farm. He and his brothers were natural farmers, and Harvey was especially proud of his Charolais cattle herd. Harvey was never without a smile, and his love of the land was as great as his love of music. Harvey was a talented musician and the sound of his guitar was something his children and grandchildren will never forget. He was a practical man who had an artistic side – one of his favourite hobbies was making bottle openers out of railway spikes. Long-time NFU national convention goers will remember Harvey as the man who was in charge of the "hospitality" room.

Harvey is survived by Helena, his wife of 57 years, and his children: James (Janet) Weir, Monica (Robert) Fleming, Jeff (Gail) Weir, Darrel (Sarah) Weir, Janeen Weir, Christina Weir, and numerous grandchildren, as well as his sister Evelyn Boucher and Bessie Weir, and brother Cholar (Thirza) Weir.



(Alberta government must let farmers decide, from page 22)

"The Alberta Conservative Government has spent many millions of taxpayers' dollars on a so-called 'market choice' campaign over the past several decades," he noted. "Despite this expensive and pervasive campaign, the farmers of Alberta continue to use reason and common sense as the foundation for their decisions regarding wheat and barley marketing. We strongly suggest the time has now arrived for the Alberta Government to step back and allow farmers to democratically decide the future of their marketing agency, the CWB."

Scott said the Alberta Agriculture Minister should also encourage his Conservative colleagues in the Harper Government in Ottawa to:

1. Drop their legal appeal regarding the gag order imposed on the CWB in 2006;

2. Reimburse farmers for the severance package paid to Adrian Measner as a result of the firing of Mr. Measner without cause – an event triggered by the Harper Government;

3. Replace the Harper-appointed CWB Directors with qualified individuals chosen by the elected CWB Board of Directors;

4. State publicly their opposition to allowing the World Trade Organization (WTO) to destroy the single desk marketing advantages of the CWB.

"Given farmers' strong support for farmer control of the CWB and the CWB single desk, the Alberta Government should listen to farmers and step back from its campaign to destroy the CWB," Scott concluded. —nfu—

NFU CONVENTION DVDS ORDER FORM

Presentations by several keynote speakers at the National Farmers Union convention were recorded on DVD, and are now available through the NFU office.



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NFU INCOME TAX SERVICE

2009 MANITOBA RURAL VISIT SCHEDULE

<u>TOWN</u>	<u>HOTEL</u>	<u>DATES</u>
SWAN RIVER	SUPER 8	FEBRUARY 17 TH & 18 TH
ROBLIN	ROBLIN MOTOR INN	FEBRUARY 19 TH THROUGH 25 TH
GRANDVIEW	---	FEBRUARY 26 TH
MORDEN	MORDEN MOTOR INN	MARCH 4 TH TO MARCH 11 TH
MELITA	---	MARCH 2 ND
KILLARNEY	---	MARCH 3 RD
ARBORG	ZANS FAMILY INN	MARCH 16 TH TO 19 TH
FISHER BRANCH	INTERLAKE MOTOR HOTEL	MARCH 16 TH AND 17 TH
MINNEDOSA	GATEWAY MOTEL	MARCH 23 RD AND 24 TH
HAMIOTA	HAMIOTA MOTEL	MARCH 23 RD TO 25 TH
RUSSELL	RUSSELL INN	MARCH 26 TH AND 27 TH
VIRDEN	---	MARCH 25 TH
TREHERNE	CREEKSIDE HIDEAWAY HOTEL	MARCH 30 TH TO APRIL 1 ST
GLADSTONE	GLADSTONE HOTEL	MARCH 30 TH AND 31 ST
PORTAGE	CANAD INNS	APRIL 6 TH TO 9 TH
CYPRESS RIVER	---	APRIL 13 TH AND 14 TH