



A PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL FARMERS UNION, 2717 WENTZ AVENUE, SASKATOON, SK S7K 4B6
PHONE: 306-652-9465 * FAX: 306-664-6226 * E-MAIL: NFU@NFU.CA

union farmer monthly

Want to help the Union and receive a free trip to the NFU Convention?

You can. Any NFU member* who sells 10 memberships—to new family farm members—will receive airfare to the NFU’s 2009 Convention in Ottawa and accommodation while there (maximum \$1,500 value for airfare and accommodation).

This is a historic Convention—the NFU’s 40th Anniversary. We’ll be starting out Convention by going to Parliament Hill and meeting with MPs. Then we’ll spend two-and-a-half days debating the issues, making policies, talking with old friends, and hearing from world-class speakers. By selling memberships to your neighbours and to farmers you know, you can win a trip to this important event.

Deadline for selling the 10 memberships and qualifying for the free trip is October 15. For those who sell several memberships but fall short of the 10 required, the NFU may allow membership sales to be used toward qualifying in 2010.

** **NOTE:** Because Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick have government-mandated farm organization membership systems, we regret that the NFU cannot extend this offer to members in those provinces at this time. We apologize for this restriction and will work with officials in those regions to make this offer more inclusive next year. Members in those provinces can, however, still qualify to receive free admittance to Convention. [See following article regarding how to qualify.](#)*

Sell 5 Associate Memberships and receive free admittance to the NFU Convention

Members from all NFU Regions can receive free admittance to the NFU National Convention in Ottawa if they sell 5 Associate Memberships.

Non-farmers can become Associate Members of the NFU by paying \$50. Non-farmer Associate members support and participate in the NFU’s work, but are not eligible to vote in policy-making processes at Convention.

Free admittance to Convention is a \$175 value.

Deadline for selling the 5 Associate Memberships and qualifying for the free trip is October 15. Talk to your non-farmer family members and friends now.

—nfu—

An important note to all NFU members planning to attend Convention

The NFU Convention in Ottawa will be exciting and well attended. If you’re planning to go to Convention this year, please make your reservation now. In past years, the Convention hotel filled up and people were forced to take rooms in other hotels. Book now. See Convention ad on the back page of the *Union Farmer Quarterly*.

Help document the NFU's illustrious history

Founded in 1969, 2009 marks the 40th Anniversary of our organization. The NFU is preparing a concise but detailed history of our collective struggle for justice and fair returns for family farmers. We're making a bullet-point list of our successes and actions, our big demonstrations and our big wins, milestones and major undertakings.

Here is a sample—one year from our work-in-progress document.

1985

- NFU members present brief to New Brunswick government detailing problems and solutions in the farm economy. NFU calls for establishment of a Canadian Potato Commission and National Meat Authority.
- "Agriculture: A Realistic Opportunity," detailing family farm transfers, is the priority project of the NFU youth.
- NFU presents brief to PEI's government opposing Cavandish Farm's application to purchase additional farmland. The government rejects Cavandish's application and instructs the company to divest itself of land over the established limit of 3000 acres.
- NFU presents brief to the B.C. government detailing the farm finance crisis, the extent of foreign ownership of the Peace River country, and the need for soil conservation measures.
- NFU reps. attend the founding convention of the Canadian Auto Workers.
- NFU presents brief to the Special Joint Committee on Canada's international relations opposing "free trade" with the US, pointing out that such a plan would undermine essential orderly marketing systems.
- PEI members join striking dairy workers on picket lines at Perfection Foods.
- NFU members participate in mass drought relief rally at Regina legislature. NFU Youth President Kim Korven is a featured speaker.
- NFU and Oxfam Canada announce "Brigade to Nicaragua" in co-operation with Nicaragua's UNAG.
- NFU Women's President Driver is delegate at "Forum 85" in Nairobi—a parallel conference to the UN conference on the status of women.
- Region 1 Coordinator Vessey delivers brief to New Brunswick Government linking soil erosion to "a broader failure of our agriculture system."

If you have an NFU major event or achievement you don't want missed in our list, please send that information in an email to NFU Director of Research Darrin Qualman. His email address is qualman@nfu.ca. Begin your subject line "history document" so it doesn't get lost in the email shuffle. Also, if you want to review a copy of the draft history and contribute to its re-drafting, send an email request. Again, begin your email subject line "history document." Copies of the draft history are also available by mail. Call Diane at (306) 652-9465 and ask her to mail you a copy for review. If you have an NFU Local or District meeting coming up, get a copy of the history document and take the opportunity to review it with the members at your meeting.

Also, work on compiling this concise history of the NFU may also form part of the basis for a video documentary on the NFU. Our organization is in discussions with a video production company and we are preparing to seek funding for the project. If the video goes ahead, plans are for the producers to travel to various parts of the country in 2010 to film NFU members and to document their stories of key NFU actions and wins.

The NFU is working during this 40th Anniversary year to document the proud and successful history of our national organization. If you want to make a contribution toward this work—a contribution of money, time, or expertise—please contact the NFU national office at (306) 652-9465.

—nfu—

Severe western drought continues: NFU pushes Minister to act

Much of Alberta (north of Calgary and Brooks and up to Grande Prairie) and parts of western Saskatchewan remain in the grips of a severe drought. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada classifies much of the area as “record dry” and the remainder as having received “extremely low” precipitation. You can view AAFC drought maps at www.agr.gc.ca/pfra/drought/maps/pr_ay_pe_s_e.pdf.

In these areas, crops are suffering, with yields in many places certain to be well below average. In some fields, farmers may harvest little or no crop. But perhaps most damaging are the withered pastures and the deteriorating potential for hay crops. Cattle farmers and others who depend on forage and grazing are seeing escalating feed bills cutting into already-negative livestock margins.

On July 3 and again on August 5, NFU President Stewart Wells wrote to Minister Ritz asking him to act swiftly to help farmers hit by drought. In the first of the two letters, Wells told Ritz: “There is extreme pessimism that federal/provincial programs in place will be anywhere near sufficient to carry farmers through this crop and livestock disaster. For many farm families, the determining factor for whether they will be able to continue farming will be the adequacy and the timeliness of your government’s response under the AgriRecovery framework. It is critical that you move with unprecedented swiftness to craft a program to deliver funds rapidly.”

To maximize the speed with which meaningful aid and solutions can flow to farm families, Wells recommended that the federal government cover the full cost of this disaster assistance—saving time by avoiding protracted negotiations regarding multi-party funding.

In his August 5 letter, Wells focused on the effect the drought is having on farmers raising cattle, sheep, bison, and other grazing livestock. He reminded the Minister that even before this drought

arrived, cattle producers were selling off their herds. Wells stated: “Many experienced, excellent ranchers and farmers are being forced to liquidate their herds and exit the cattle sector altogether. This loss of producers and their carefully assembled breeding herds is a calamity. Cattle herds, and the families that created and care for those herds, are irreplaceable. Local knowledge and decades or generations of careful genetic selection has resulted in cattle that can thrive in the various regions of Canada. When a farmer is forced to sell off a large part of his or her herd, or all of it, that farmer cannot simply buy back equivalent cattle next year.”

Wells told Ritz: “A key priority for your government, as it moves quickly to reduce the negative financial impacts of this drought, must be to minimize the expulsion of cattle producers and to limit the damage to producers’ breeding herds. To this end, the federal government must provide sufficient and timely financial aid to cattle producers hard hit by drought: aid to pay for hay, trucking hay, and pasture rental, and also information assistance to help farmers find hay and bedding supplies and alternative grazing land.”

Wells concluded: “Failure to act now to preserve our breeding herds will lead to a weakened and depleted cattle sector for decades to come. We must not be short-sighted. The speed at which the federal government moved to support the auto sector, and the billions it provided for that project, shows that, properly motivated, Ottawa can respond quickly and adequately to head off a financial blow that would otherwise have disastrous long-term effects.”

—nfu—

The incredible shrinking Western Canadian Wheat Growers

The Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association (WCWGA) has fought hard to destroy the Canadian Wheat Board, deregulate grain transportation, proliferate trade agreements, and turn farmers over to “the markets.”

In 2004, the Wheat Growers had 3,000 members. Today it has just 600. Here’s how we know:

The following is from the Evidence of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, Ottawa, Tuesday, November 23, 2004.

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Ms. Jolly, you mentioned that you represent a number of wheat growers. How many wheat growers are involved in your association?

Ms. Cherilyn Jolly [then President of the WCWGA]: There are approximately, through the 34 years of our membership—

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais: How many are there now within your membership?

Ms. Cherilyn Jolly: Well, we're growing every day. We've just gone through a recent process—

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais: Okay, so how many are there in your membership?

Ms. Cherilyn Jolly: A better example would be that we represent about 15% to 20% of the—

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais: How many wheat growers are in your organization? Is it 10? Is it 50? Is it 100? Is it 200?

Ms. Cherilyn Jolly: It's approximately 3,000.

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais: There are 3,000 registered with your organization as members?

Ms. Cherilyn Jolly: Yes.

The following is from the Evidence of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, Ottawa, Tuesday, May 14, 2009.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Your membership is under 1,000. Is that 900, 800, 500, 300? Could you be more precise?

Mr. Blair Rutter [Executive Director of the WCWGA]: We currently have about 600 members, but it fluctuates from year to year.

The Wheat Growers have experienced a membership decline of 80% in just 5 years. The organization seems to be evaporating—farmers deserting them. It is incredible then that the Harper government includes them in every policy discussion, hires their key people as staff, and pretends that the Wheat Growers represent the majority farm opinion. The farmer rejection of the Wheat Growers tells a different story. —nfu—

NFU Online!

**Memberships are easier to get and
donations are easier to make**

The NFU now has a **secure website** where members and non-members can **make donations, buy memberships, and renew memberships using their credit cards.** You can use your Visa or MasterCard. All transactions are secure and confidential.

Go to :

www.nfu.ca

or directly to

<http://nfu.ca/store/membership.html>

Thanks to all NFU members for their generous and steadfast support.

It's real, and it's on the loose.

*Briarpatch's new sister publication, **The Sasquatch**, focuses on Saskatchewan news and events from a radical, grassroots perspective. To subscribe or learn more, visit www.sasquatchnews.com*

 **the
sasquatch**
news with bite

The NFU will have three new Presidents after Convention

Stewart Wells has announced that he will not be seeking another term as National Farmers Union President.

Wells was first elected to the NFU Board of Directors in 1997 and appointed Regional Coordinator that same year. He was elected President at the 2001 Convention in Regina and has retained that position for the past 8 years.

NFU Women's President Colleen Ross has also stated that she will not be seeking re-election for the Women's President position. Ross was elected Women's Vice President in 2002 and elected Women's President in 2003. She has also been active in the international work of the National Farmers Union.

Nigel Smith, NFU Youth President, is stepping down from that role. Smith has been Youth President since 2006. Before that, he served as Region 3 (Ontario) Youth Advisory Member.

Ross, Wells, and Smith all intend to remain *very* active within the NFU, locally and nationally.

Elections for each of the three Presidents (NFU President, Women's President, and Youth President) and their three respective Vice-Presidents are held each year at the National Convention. With three incumbents stepping down this year, this promises to add even more interest to an already exciting 40th Anniversary Convention in Ottawa.

—nfu—

NFU Cattle report now available in French

The NFU has distributed tens of thousands of its well-received *The Farm Crisis and the Cattle Sector: Toward a New Analysis and New Solutions*. Additional copies are still available. If you need additional copies for events, neighbours, or to distribute through networks, please request copies from Diane Neufeld at the National Office, (306) 652-9465 or neufeld@nfu.ca.

The NFU, with the generous assistance of some of its members and supporters, has created a French language version of the brief. If you have a way of distributing these briefs in New Brunswick, Quebec, or elsewhere, please call Diane to obtain copies.

This summer, the NFU is drafting a pamphlet on captive supply, and one aimed at non-farmers—that highlights the negative effects of packer and retailer power on the families who buy beef and the workers who process it. Look for those in late summer.

NFU strongly critical of move to require visas for Mexican citizens

In a July 14 news release, the NFU worked to explain to the media and Canadians the links between free trade, the resulting destruction of farms, and the growing problem of violence in Mexico and emigration from that country. Here is part of that news release.

Food products—staples such as corn and beans—are flooding into Mexico. Since the 1995 implementation of North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), US corn exports to Mexico have quadrupled. These products are flowing south at prices below Mexican farmers' cost of production, and below the cost of production in the US. Subsidies enable farmers to produce below cost. NAFTA dictates that Mexico must allow this food in. The NAFTA timetable required that on January 1, 2008, Mexico remove its final restrictions on the imports of staple food products—opening its border completely to imports of corn and beans.

Mexican farmers have been devastated by low prices for corn and other crops. Farm families have been forced off their land, and forced to relocate to large cities and border-town maquiladoras. NAFTA's body-blow to Mexico's farm sector has meant a rapid rise in the number of Mexicans who are landless, unemployed, poor, and desperate.

This growing number of desperately poor Mexican citizens has created social unrest and instability and, in some cases, a pool of people willing to work for the drug cartels. Expanding drug cartel violence, the attendant corruption of some police and justice officials, a growing sense of lawlessness, declining safety, and declining economic prospects have driven many Mexican families to flee their homes—some have come to Canada to try to obtain refugee status.

“A huge portion of Mexican citizens rely on farming to support their families. Our trade policies—ostensibly aimed at finding ‘markets’ for our grains and meat—have devastated market prices for those Mexican farmers. Bankrupted farmers have been forced from rural areas and into cities. Those cities are increasingly lawless and dangerous—poverty and desperation has fueled the rise of organized crime. Many Mexicans are now trying to escape. Some are coming here. We need to connect the dots. Many of the Mexicans coming to Canada are refugees from NAFTA,” said NFU International Coordinator Martha Robbins.

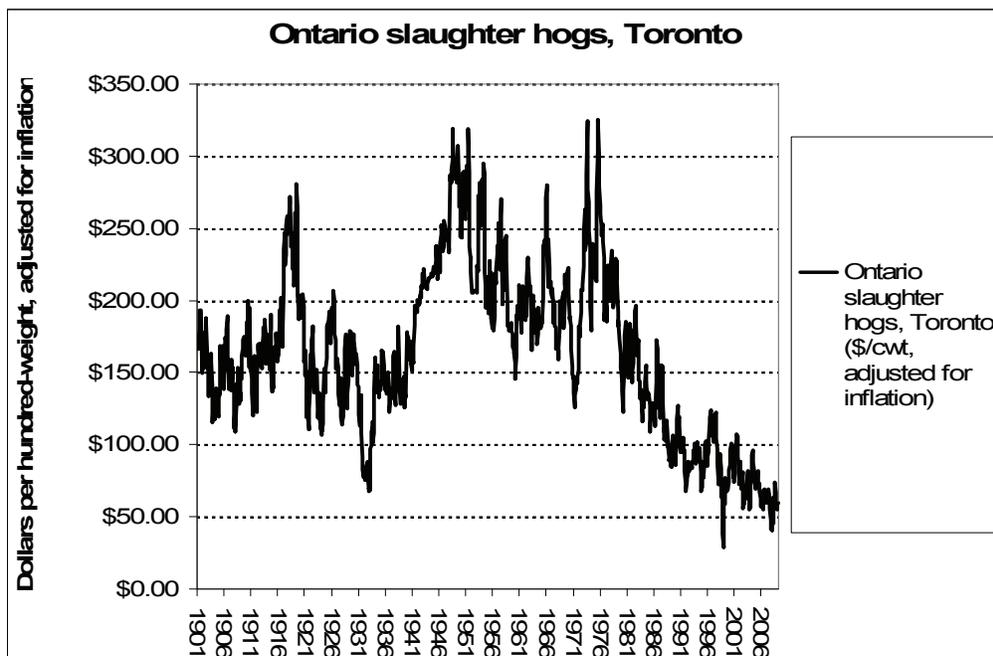
Robbins added: “There is irony here. As we are forcing open Mexican borders to our products, we are closing our borders to a significant portion of the Mexican people. We are working to block the flow of people which is, to a significant extent, a result of our work to speed the flow of goods.”

The NFU believes that the effects of NAFTA on farmers in Mexico is unjust and massively damaging. This latest move by the Canadian government to require visas is just the most recent immorality flowing from the so-called trade agreement. The NFU strongly opposes the policy requiring Mexican citizens to have a visa to visit our country. —nfu—

Canada's government/corporate hog policy: Gross negligence causing massive farm financial harm

Adjusted for inflation, hog prices during the decade of the 1930s averaged \$131 per hundred-weight, live-weight (all prices per hundred pounds, not kilograms). Last year, hog prices averaged approximately \$61 per hundred-weight. It is nearly impossible to believe, but hog prices today are not just equal to those of the 1930s, they are not just below those of the 1930s, they are *half* of the prices that farmers received during the 1930s. And prices today are *one-quarter* of price averages that were normal for several decades after the 1930s.

This graph is created from Statistics Canada data. It shows 108 years of Ontario hog prices: January 1901 to March 2009. The prices are for live-weight hogs, in dollars per hundredweight. Graphs of hog prices in Manitoba, Alberta, the Maritimes, and other provinces and regions would look nearly identical.



The NFU is contributing analysis and data to a major report on the hog sector. That report will look at the ill-conceived and disastrous government/corporate plan to build a Canadian hog sector based on mega-barns and exports to the US. It will look at the rapidly-expanding gap between what consumers pay for pork chops and bacon, what farmers get for market hogs, and who's pocketing the windfall in between. It will look at government cheerleading for the massive expansion of hog production, particularly in western Canada. It will look at the rapid expulsion of family farmers as the hog sector was industrialized and corporatized. And it will grapple with the problem of how to recreate sustainable, broadly distributed Canadian hog and pork sectors within a larger context of trade agreements, corporate concentration, retailer profiteering, and government confusion. —nfu—