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The Price of Patented Seed — The Value of Farm-Saved Seed

In 2011 farmers in Canada paid out $1.8 billion for commercial seed. Total realized net farm income that year was just over $5.5 billion. Seed costs have been rising faster than total farm expenses, a trend that is fuelled by Plant Breeders' Rights legislation and the increasing use of gene-patented seed. There are strong indications that the federal government plans to amend our current law that is based on the UPOV '78 Plant Breeders' Rights regime so that it complies with the more restrictive UPOV '91 regime. The new regime would accelerate the increase in costs by making seed more expensive and by severely limiting farmers' ability to use farm-saved seed.

The graph in Figure 1 shows the relationship between total farm expenses and commercial seed purchased for all farms in Canada, including mixed farms and livestock operations. The cost of purchased seed relative to other expenses has risen from less than 2.5% of total expenses in 1981 to over 4.5% today. These statistics do not take into account the cost of using farm-saved seed.

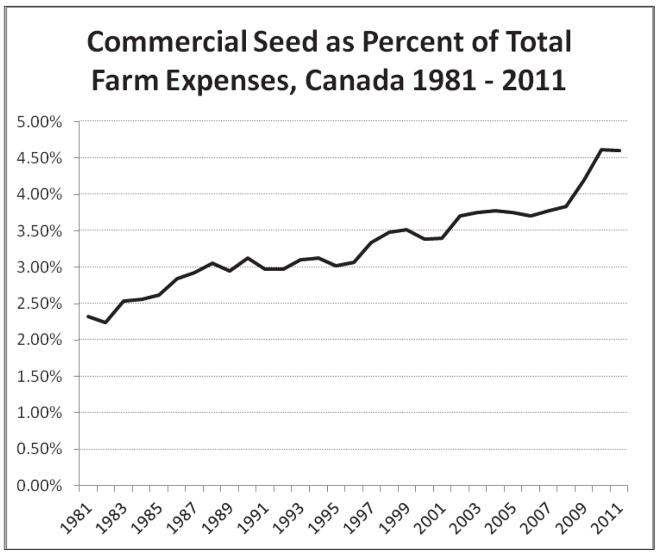

FIGURE 1— Source: Statistics Canada

Looking at prairie farms only, which concentrate more on grain production, it is clear that the farmers are paying increasing amounts for seed. Figure 2 shows that the amount of money Saskatchewan farmers paid for seed went up seven-fold between 1981 and 2011 – from $50 million to over $350 million. Seed costs are increasing faster than the Consumer Price Index, which shows the price of other goods in Canada increased by about 2.5 times during the same period (Figure 3). Furthermore, the rate of increase in seed costs is accelerating, due in part to the rise in seed prices and also due to a shift towards purchasing seed every year, particularly for canola, instead of using farm-saved seed.

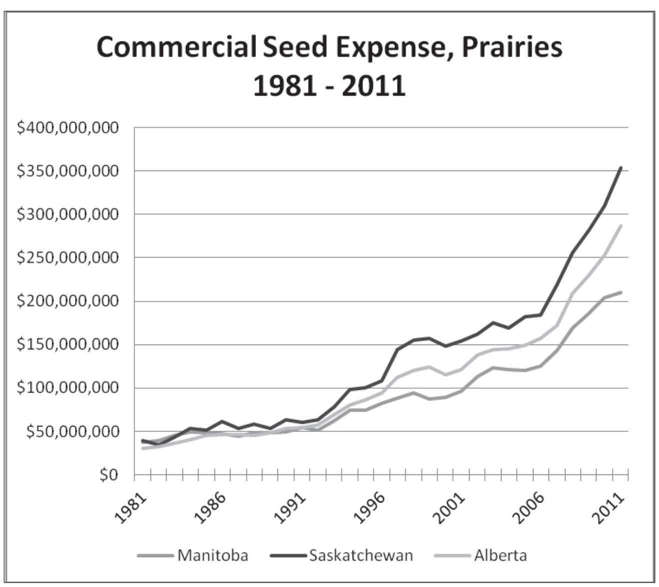

FIGURE 2— Source: Statistics Canada

FIGURE 3— Source: Statistics Canada

(continued on page 2…)

(*The Price of Patented Seed*, *from page 1…*)

Why is seed rising in price faster than other products on the market? Figure 4, the graph of per-acre seeding costs based on average Alberta commercial seed prices for wheat, barley, conventional canola and herbicide tolerant canola, is worth studying in some detail.

Note that there is not much difference in the cost of commercial seed per acre among the four crops until around the year 2000. Then, the price of canola began to exceed the price of wheat and barley. Conventional canola and herbicide tolerant (genetically modified) canola prices rose in tandem at about the same rate until 2007. Herbicide tolerant canola continued a rapid rise in price, while conventional canola prices dropped, then leveled off.

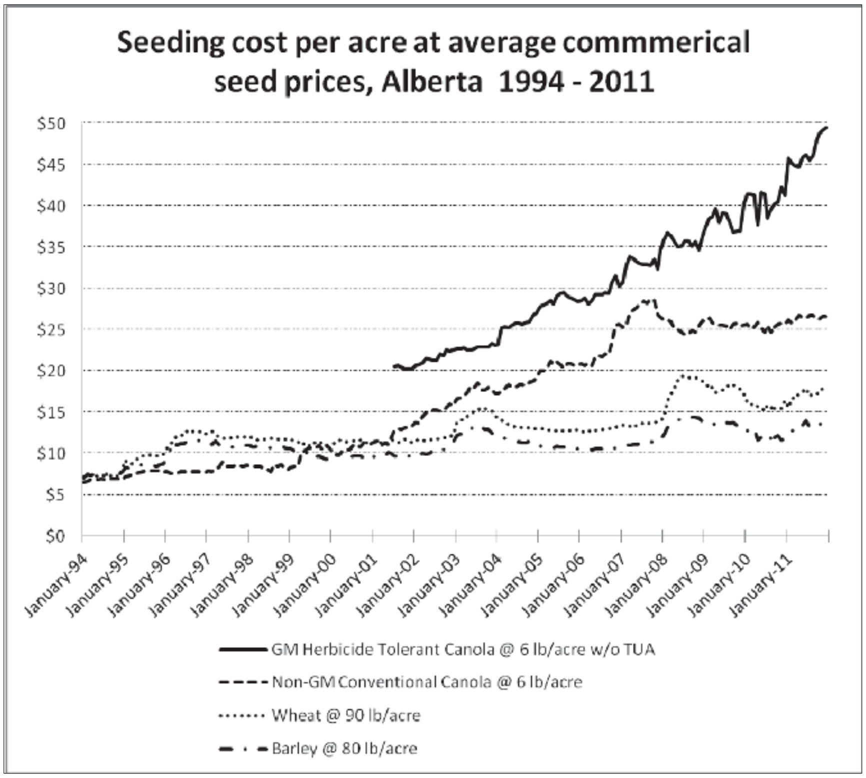

FIGURE 4— Source: Alberta Farm Input Prices, Government of Alberta

In 1996 and 1997 gene-patented varieties of genetically modified canola were introduced. First Monsanto began to sell Roundup Ready Canola, then Aventis (now Bayer) introduced Liberty Link Canola. Liberty Link included a technology surcharge within the shelf price, while Monsanto charged an additional Technology Use Agreement (TUA) fee of $15.00/acre. The Alberta government started reporting herbicide resistant canola prices in 2000, as by then a significant number of farmers were using it.

In May 2004 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in the *Shmeiser vs Monsanto* case, declaring that the presence of a plant containing a patented gene constituted patent infringement, regardless of how the plant got to be in the field. This decision increased farmers' risk of being sued as a result of planting contaminated conventional seed, and was an inducement to buy patented seed and pay the TUA (litigation chill). It may be that this decision was a factor in the 2004 price jump. The price of conventional canola peaked in 2007. By 2009 herbicide tolerant canola was being grown almost exclusively, with about 90% being patented GM canola, and about 10% non-GM imidazolinone tolerant canola which, though not patented, is subject to plant breeders rights. Only about 1% of canola grown was conventional. At the end of 2011 Alberta stopped reporting conventional canola prices.

The TUA cost is not included in Figure 4, but it is a significant dollar amount that flows from the farmer to the seed company. In 2011 over 19 million acres of canola were grown in Canada. At $15/acre, at least $261 million dollars would have been paid in technology use fees over and above the cost of the seed itself.

While the price of canola seed was rising, the price of wheat and barley seed remained fairly steady, with only a slight increase over the 15 years of data recorded. Why the difference?

It can be argued that a key factor in the increase in both the price of canola seed and the amount of money paid out for commercial seed is the loss of farmers' ability to discipline the market by saving their own seed. In addition, older, less expensive conventional varieties have been de-registered, and thus removed from the marketplace. Before GM canola was introduced, farmers could save canola seed the same way they could save wheat and barley seed. The restrictions on saving canola seed have tightened through TUAs, contracts that prohibit saving and which authorize surprise inspections by the company to monitor compliance, through litigation chill following the *Schmeiser* decision, and through the gradual deregistration of non-GM varieties and GM varieties with expired patent protection.

The Canadian Seed Trade Association (CSTA) is increasingly vocal in its lobby to have Canada adopt UPOV '91, which would give plant breeders rights holders a level of control over seed similar to patent protection, and it would have further restrictions on saving seed through measures to control stocking (storing) and conditioning (cleaning) of seed. When you see how lucrative patented canola has been for the seed companies, it is easy to understand why they would

Making Canada UPOV ’91-Ready

Bill C-38

- Amends the *Seeds Act* to allow the CFIA President to license third parties, giving them authority over controlling or assuring the quality of seeds or seed crops, including the sampling, testing, grading or labelling of seeds.
- Requires licensees to keep records and make them available to the CFIA
- Allows the President of the CFIA to define conditions of, revoke or suspend these licenses.
- Allows the Cabinet to make regulations regarding these licenses.

Bill C-18

- Amends the *Canada Grain Act* to make every flour mill, feed mill, feed warehouse and seed cleaning mill a “work for the general advantage of Canada”, placing these entities under federal jurisdiction and deems them part of federal infrastructure for the purposes of regulation.

also like to have the ability to prevent farmers from saving wheat, barley, flax, oats, and non-GM varieties of canola, corn and soybeans. UPOV ’91 is a mechanism to transfer massive wealth from farmers to seed companies every year.

The federal government’s Seed Value Chain Roundtable has as one of its objectives *“educate and inform growers about the 1991 Convention of the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV '91) and proposed changes to Canada's Plant Breeders' Rights Act, in order to accelerate the modernization of the Canadian plant breeders' rights legislation to conform to UPOV ‘91”*. It has established a Working Group to advance this objective. The Saskatchewan government has stated its support for UPOV ’91, particularly in relation to wheat breeding. The CSTA is actively lobbying the federal government for adoption of UPOV ’91.

It is truly disappointing that some public and university-based plant breeders are also calling for the adoption of UPOV ’91. In 2010, a statement by the deans of 13 Canadian agriculture colleges suggested that farmers should expect to put 10% of their gross income towards paying for Intellectual Property Rights (royalties and license fees), with the idea that their institutions would get a share. In 2010, 10% of farm revenues would have exceeded total net farm income by $1.2 million. After many years of cutbacks to public funding, these institutions look to enhanced royalties as a new revenue stream that will allow them to continue their own work, yet this solution would come at the expense of farmers’ livelihoods.

The first leaked negotiating text of the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement included a demand from Europe that Canada adopt UPOV ’91. The National Farmers Union made this known. Public opposition ensued, and subsequent drafts of CETA have dropped the demand. However the federal government has introduced changes to legislation through Bill C-18 and Bill C-38 that would allow for the enforcement of UPOV ’91 provisions.

If UPOV ’91 is adopted in Canada we can expect that the cost of seeding will increase significantly, as farmers will be forced to buy seed every year and the price of seed will go up. The value of farm-saved seed cannot be over-stated. By restricting the possibility of farmers saving seed, UPOV ’91 would create a de-facto monopoly by the seed industry. Without control of our seed, we really do not have control of our farms.

—nfu—

UPOV ’91 versus UPOV ’78

The International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) is an organization established by the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants. The Convention was adopted in Paris in 1961 and it was revised in 1972, 1978 and 1991. The purpose of UPOV is to oversee a system of intellectual property rights that allows plant breeders to control the use of, and get paid for developing new varieties.

UPOV ’78, which Canada currently uses, requires the payment of license fees when buying seed from plant breeders’ rights holders. Plant breeders can charge royalties on seed for 18 years.

UPOV ’91 extends the royalty period to at least 20 years for seed and 25 years for trees and vines plus the amount of time it takes to approve the breeder’s application for rights. Royalties can be collected at any time from when seed is purchased to when the crop is harvested, used and/or sold. UPOV ’91 offers governments the option to provide for “farmers’ privilege” to save seed for planting on a crop by crop basis. This would only be allowed under limited circumstances and only if it does not unduly impinge on remuneration for rights holders. If farmers do save seed, they are not allowed to sell it, and must get permission of the plant breeders’ rights holder to store seed and to have seed cleaned for planting on their own farms. If permission is granted, the rights holder can stipulate any conditions, such as the amount of royalties to be paid.

GF2 Strategic Initiatives Fund Accelerates Globalization and Stalls Food Sovereignty

Growing Forward 2 (GF2) is Canada's five-year federal-provincial-territorial cost-shared agriculture policy framework, which will be in effect from April 2013 until the end of March 2018. The goals of GF2 were laid out and agreed to by all the Agriculture Ministers (except for Ontario) in July 2011.

GF2 includes a "Business Risk Management" suite, also known as the safety net programs (see UFQ Fall 2012) which was announced in September 2012. The "Strategic Investment" suite dollars will be allocated to attain "competitiveness in domestic and international markets" and "adaptability and sustainability for the sector" using innovation and institutional and physical infrastructure. Two billion dollars of federal funds over 5 years will be cost-shared 60-40 by federal and provincial/territorial governments. Bilateral agreements for the Strategic Initiatives portion of GF2 are currently being negotiated between each province or territory and the federal government, and should be finalized by April 1, 2013.

The NFU has analyzed GF2's "Strategic Initiatives" component and we have found that it continues and deepens the federal government's commitment to policy goals that favour globalization and corporate control of agriculture while it marginalizes farmers, consumers and the land – a process that has been underway at least since 1981. Because the final GF2 agreement between the federal government and each province has not yet been made public, it was necessary to take a "broad strokes" approach to analyzing the policy framework.

Competitiveness and Market Development funds will favour export-oriented activities and further increase the market power imbalance between farmers and agri-business. Its focus on "competitiveness" will help the biggest companies become even bigger so as to compete internationally, while smaller companies will lose market share and farmers will be asked to take on more costs and risks while being pressured to further reduce prices. We note that pursuit of competitiveness has resulted in mergers and acquisitions (as opposed to investment in new capacity) so that large sectors of Canada's food system are now owned by foreign corporations.

Innovation funds will only be available for activities arising from private-public partnerships. There is little doubt that funds will support research agendas that will be controlled by private interests for private gain, with a focus on saleable products. GF2 provides no support for public-interest, curiosity-based research. The innovation strategy also harnesses public institutions such as universities and the National Research Council to serve the corporate sector. We point to the negative effects of innovation in the area of GMOs, which have harmed markets and discounted prices to farmers. We suggest that the *International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development*, a multi-thematic approach that embraces nutritional security, livelihoods, human health and environmental sustainability provides a better model to guide policy around innovation. (See http://www.agassessment.org)

Adaptability and Industry Capacity funds will support regulatory harmonization with US and other trading partners. It will offer a regulatory environment friendly to global corporations and impose increased responsibilities and costs on farmers. GF2 accelerates the privatization of governance over food safety and concentrates decision-making over food and agriculture into the boardrooms of agri-business corporations. GF2 appears to have eliminated the popular Environmental Farm Plan program. The new environmental programs will be top-down, with priorities set by Ottawa. GF2 does not address important needs of young farmers who choose not to go down the high-input, capital intensive, long-term debt route, and thus fails to deal with renewal, a key element of sustainability.

GF2 is intimately linked with the trade agreements – responding to the conditions created by, and implementing measures agreed to in trade deals such as CETA. The NFU notes that during public consultations leading up to GF2 many people asked for significant changes to the food system to better promote health, economic justice and environmental stewardship. Their input has been largely ignored and their values reframed as niche market opportunities.

We conclude our brief by recommending that the federal-provincial-territorial agricultural strategy be re-oriented. Were Canada to instead harness these funds to policies rooted in food sovereignty and fair trade, we would create a more inter-dependent, ecologically sound, inventive, responsive agriculture and food system in Canada -- one that is governed democratically by the citizens who live and work here. —nfu—

To download the full brief, ***Growing Forward 2 – Accelerating Globalization, Stalling Food Sovereignty Implications of the GF2 Strategic Initiatives Suite*** go to http://www.nfu.ca/policy/nfu-briefs-2013

Are our pension funds retiring the family farm?

Some of the world's biggest pension funds are investing in farmland in Africa and South America. They need steady, predictable returns over the long term. Farmland is seen as a low-risk investment and a safe place to park low-risk capital in the face of increasing economic turmoil. Yet like other land-grabbing investment companies, pension funds are another set of forces that define land primarily in terms of its ability to generate a financial return, regardless of whose lives or livelihoods might be at stake now or in the future.

Farmland investment is driven by expectations that land and food prices will rise as a result of future hardships due to food scarcity, climate change, biofuel production, loss of farmland due to urbanization, soil erosion and increased salinity, as well as from population growth. What we as non-investors and citizens understand as serious problems that need to be addressed and solved, farmland investment companies consider economic opportunities. However, when our savings and tax dollars are used to purchase these investments, we may be unsuspecting accomplices.

Farmland grabbing pension investments within Canada are being supported with public dollars via the tax breaks provided through the RRSP program, and by government-backed Farm Credit Corporation financing. Public and private sector pension funds from Canada are also investing in land-grabbing abroad.

TIAA-CREF is one of the largest American pension funds, with $US 487 billion in assets under management. In 2012 it set up the TIAA-CREF Global Agriculture LLC with $2 billion provided by several international institutional investors – including British Columbia Investment Management Corporation, which looks after BC's public sector pension funds, and the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec, which looks after both public and private sector pension funds in Quebec -- to invest in farmland in the United States, Australia and Brazil.

So far, the Canada Pension Plan (CPP)has not invested in farmland grabbing, however the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board (CCPIB) has been reported to be investigating large farmland acquisitions in Australia. CPP also attended the Global AgInvesting Conference in New York in 2010, 2011 and 2012, where farmland investment was a main focus.

At the height of "RRSP season" financial institutions urge Canadians to save for their old age and reduce their taxes by putting their money into eligible investment funds. RRSPs allow people to reduce their overall taxes by deferring some income into the future when they expect to be in a lower tax bracket. Some RRSP funds, such as labour sponsored venture capital funds also provide an additional tax credit. The higher a person's income, the greater the portion of their income in the higher tax bracket and the more they benefit from the tax break available as a result of buying RRSPs.

One Canadian farmland investment company, AgCapita, is RRSP eligible. As of 2011 (most recent information available) it had purchased $12.8 million worth of Saskatchewan farmland. RRSP-eligible mutual funds are considered "accredited investors" and thus allowed to purchase shares in Assiniboia Farmland Limited Partnership, which has purchased approximately 115,000 acres of Saskatchewan farmland and Bonnefield Financial, which has 15,000 acres so far.

At least two RRSP mutual funds, Golden Opportunities and SaskWorks, have invested in farmland. SaskWorks has invested $20 million in the farmland investment company Agco Ag Ventures, and Golden Opportunities has invested $3.5 million in Assiniboia (via ADC Enterprises) as well as another $2.5 million in Input Capital Limited Partnership, a division of Assiniboia Farmland Limited Partnership. Farm Credit Corporation, which is funded by Ottawa, has provided some of the financing for Assiniboia's land acquisitions.

These companies tend to buy land from retiring farmers and farmers struggling with debt. Because of the foreign ownership restrictions in place, only Canadian investors may buy into companies investing in Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba farmland. Saskatchewan land is the primary target due to the amount of arable land, the lower relative price per acre, and also because the companies can often obtain the land's mineral rights and thus additional revenues from oil and gas development.

These investment companies make money by renting land to farmers, usually on a cash rent basis (thus avoiding the risks of farming), and they expect to eventually sell the land or the whole investment company at a profit in the future. Their ability to pay

(continued on page 6…)

(*Pension funds*, from page 5)

high prices for land makes it more difficult for bona fide family farmers, especially young people, to acquire land to expand or start farming. The companies' focus on the annual rate of return to investment means that their management directives are highly focused on short-term market returns. They also assemble land into large parcels in order to implement their scaled up approach to management and production.

The way these investment companies are restructuring farms physically and organizationally has implications for the future of farming. Higher land prices make land less accessible for family farmers. The dramatic increase in size of farming operations, with larger fields, bigger, heavier equipment, fewer shelterbelts and fencerows, and more drainage of wetlands has significant ecological impacts on the land. The shift in ownership also raises questions about rural democracy – if the land-owners (ratepayers) are increasingly investment corporations and the increasing farm size further reduces the population, how will Rural Municipality elections and subsequent decision-making be affected? Whose interests will be served?

The success of farmland grabbing efforts is also an indication of failure of agricultural policy in Canada. We know that the average age of farmers keeps rising. The proportion of Canadian farmers under the age of 35 is now less than 8%. Farmers carry enormous debt loads which are often secured by their land. Instead of being able to pass the farm to sons or daughters, land is being sold to pay off debts and, if possible, provide a retirement income. For too many farmers, the wealth created over a lifetime of farming has been consumed by input suppliers, grain buyers, food processors, and oil companies.

Meanwhile, the city-dweller and wage labourer must depend on pensions that are funded by the stock market. Many watched their savings shrink when the "dot.com" and housing bubbles burst. Farmland isn't going anywhere, and it seems like a safe investment. Yet, if in a decade most of Canada's farmland is owned by large corporations, what will that mean for our food security and our sovereignty as citizens? —nfu—

Working Hard to Keep the PFRA Community Pastures Public

One of the many shocks delivered in the March 2012 federal budget was the unilateral decision to defund the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) community pasture program and transfer its 2.2 million acres of federal crown land to the provinces over the next six years. There was no prior consultation with the provinces or the pasture patrons (farmers who lease grazing space). Ranchers and others who value this land, its history and its biodiversity quickly began to organize to stop the pastures from being privatized and keep them intact for current users and as a legacy for future generations.

The PFRA Act was passed in 1935, in the middle of the Great Depression and the Dirty Thirties to rehabilitate land that was affected by drought and soil drifting. With the support of the Saskatchewan and Manitoba governments, the federal government assembled (at no cost) severely degraded land that had been abandoned by homesteaders or acquired by the provinces. The PFRA was tasked with conserving the land resource, which it did by focusing on cattle grazing and breeding in place of the bison herds that had maintained the ecosystem for thousands of years prior to cultivation. The PFRA lands were thus planted to grass or left as native prairie, and professional pasture managers were hired to look after the land and cattle.

The Community Pasture Program now employs around 300 people, including 80 pasture managers – professional cowboys – whose responsibilities are year-round and round the clock. The managers and range riders live on site and provide their own horses and tack. The pastures are currently used by 3100 farmers to graze about 220,000 head, according to the carrying capacity of each block. The PFRA's objectives include stabilizing small farms, so smaller producers get first priority when grazing privileges are allocated. The less land a farmer owns, leases or rents, the closer to the front of the line he or she goes. This approach gives young farmers starting out easier access to affordable pasture. The PFRA pastures also promote herd improvement by offering breeding services using high quality bulls and stallions. Nearly three-quarters of the land has been restored to native grassland. The nearly 2 million acres of community pasture in Saskatchewan, for example, provides habitat for 31 species at risk (including the burrowing owl, swift fox, black-tailed prairie dog, sage grouse, loggerhead shrike and piping plover) and represents 10 percent of the remaining grasslands in the province. After decades of such management, the land is now a model of both social equity and ecological integrity.

The pasture program is (or was) funded through two revenue streams. The costs of meeting conservation objectives are (or were) covered by the federal government while the costs of providing services to the patrons are covered by patrons' grazing fees. A 2008 assessment of the pasture program showed that its annual $22 million cost resulted in a $54.9 million per year public benefit. Public benefits include carbon sequestration, biodiversity, wildlife and waterfowl habitat, endangered species preservation, fragile ecosystem protection, watershed and wetland protection, and flood protection, recreational activities related to wildlife and waterfowl, heritage sites, soil conservation, community economic development, scientific research access, technology transfer, income distribution, reduction in program payments due to land-use changes, commercial activities and benefits to rural municipalities.

There are 87 community pastures subject to the federal government's transfer orders – 24 in Manitoba, 62 in Saskatchewan and one in Alberta. The lone Alberta pasture will be closed in 2014 and the land transferred to the Canadian Forces Base Suffield near Medicine Hat. Five Manitoba pastures will be transferred in 2013: Westbourne, Lakeview, Gardenton, Pansy and Sylvan Dale. In Saskatchewan, ten pastures are on the 2013 list: Excel, Keywest, Estevan-Cambria, Wolverine, McCraney, Fairview, Newcombe, Park, Lone Tree, Ituna Bon Accord.

In Manitoba the provincial government is open to keeping the land public. Pasture patrons there have organized an association and proposed a business plan that would retain the current staff. The plan has been submitted to the Manitoba government for consideration. In Saskatchewan, however, Agriculture Minister Lyle Stewart, announced in August that the land is to be sold at market value, with preference given to patrons. In deciding which pastures to sell first, Stewart considered factors such as land titles and oil and gas activity.

The stakes are highest in Saskatchewan, with the most pastures, largest number of patrons and largest land base. Saskatchewan has also been targeted by companies interested buying up large tracts of farmland for speculation (see *Union Farmer Quarterly*, Spring 2013) as well as those interested in potash, and oil and gas exploration and development. Large Alberta-based feedlot owners and backgrounders may well be looking to pick up some less expensive land in Saskatchewan. Agriculture Minister Lyle Stewart has said he's been approached by buyers that have offered to purchase all of the pastures, and others that have offered to buy all the southern pastures. Individual patrons have been also approached by real estate companies with offers to repurchase land at double the price, according to Trevor Herriot, a Saskatchewan author and naturalist who has been a leading voice on this issue.

The Agriculture Union of the Public Service Alliance of Canada estimates that the combined market value of the pastures is in the neighbourhood of $1 billion – more than the patrons could hope to pay up front or to finance from their grazing operations. Furthermore, if the pastures are privatized, the full cost of operating them will fall upon the patrons. If they are able to manage the pastures to the level achieved by the PFRA to date, they will be subsidise the considerable public benefit that results. If they cannot achieve those standards, the overall value of the pastures will be diminished, to the loss of Canada as a whole, including future generations.

(continued on page 8…)

Photo by Hamilton Greenwood

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There has been strong outcry in support of keeping the pastures public. Two new organizations have formed: *Public Pastures—Public Interest,* which brings together rural and urban Canadians who share an interest in conserving the great public grasslands of Saskatchewan; and the *Community Pasture Patron's Association of Saskatchewan* (CPPAS), formed at a meeting of over 250 people (including NFU representative, Region 6 Board member Glenn Tait) in Saskatoon on January 23.

Ian McCreary was elected president of CPPAS. At the meeting, he said "The PFRA pasture has been in my family for three generations…It forms the opportunity for us to be in the cattle industry and many people are in the same boat. And if we lose access to that PFRA pasture, we lose a significant part of our livelihood."

CPPAS's first priority is to delay the transfer of the first 10 pastures so that no pastures are transferred before the start of the 2015 grazing season. They also want to negotiate several issues on behalf of the members including lease rates; valuation of pasture improvements and recognition of investments already made by patrons; security of tenure; compensation for any costs incurred in the protection of wildlife species; and compensation for the recreational values provided, such as hunting.

At the January 23 meeting, Minister Stewart reiterated that the government's priority is to sell to patrons "first". He suggested that the cost of purchase is probably too high for the patrons and as a result they would likely end up leasing – but from whom? Apparently, the possibility of selling to a third party has not been ruled out. He said that ecological values would be protected through 'no break, no drain' conservation easements and federal Species at Risk legislation.

Such protection, however, is inadequate. Conservation easements may be time-limited, and landowners can apply to have them lifted. If a conservation easement is violated the only recourse is court action by the holder of the easement – which in this case might be either the provincial government or the purchaser of the land. On privately owned land the Species at Risk Act (SARA) only covers only migratory birds and aquatic animals, and comes into effect only if the federal government initiates a protection plan or order. Saskatchewan has drainage laws already in place, but in the past few years they have been regularly broken, a problem often cited when spring meltwaters hit western Manitoba. And, as we know, the Canadian Wheat Board was also protected by law, but that did not save it.

Minister Stewart also suggested that it would unfair to taxpayers if the land is not sold. Yet the land was acquired nearly eighty years ago for no cost. The pastures have not been paying rent to the province during this time (though since 1979 the federal government has been paying RMs the an amount equivalent to the property taxes they would have collected if the land was privately owned). If the government's desire to sell the land is based solely on the need for dollars to fill a gap in the provincial budget, there are other revenue sources that could be tapped instead. The public opposition to privatizing the pastures has already had an impact, but the pressure to keep the land public needs to continue.

The value of the community pastures cannot be captured with a price tag. They are part of our cultural and natural heritage -- not ours to dispose of, but a trust we owe to future generations. In addition to supporting the livelihoods of over 3,000 farmers and 300 pasture employees and their communities, the regenerated soil stores carbon, absorbs spring runoff and torrential rains and provides nutrients and moisture for the grass to grow. The grass feeds thousands of cattle that provide us with beef, the ground holds intact archeological and historical sites, and the extensive grasslands are among the few remaining refuges for some of the world's most endangered species. To abandon these lands to the marketplace would be to sell our heritage and lose a piece of our soul.

"If we allow them to be degraded ... we're going to have an ecological disaster on our hands, the same kind of disaster that founded the PFRA in the 1930s." - Trevor Herriot Leader Post, Jan 7, 2013

For more information:

Protect the Prairie **http://www.protecttheprairie.ca**

PFRA Pasture Posts **http://pfrapastureposts.wordpress.com/**

Public Pasture – Public Interest on Facebook **https://wwwfacebook.com/PublicPasturesPublicInterest**

Trevor Herriot's blog **http://trevorherriot.blogspot.ca**

Distribution of Public and Private Benefits on Federally Managed Community Pastures in Canada, by Suren Kulshreshtha, George Pearson, Brant Kirychuk, and Rick Gaube, Society for Range Management, 2008.