



**National Farmers Union
Presentation to the House of Commons
Agriculture Committee**

**On the issue of
Standards of Fusarium Blight Toxin levels in wheat**

**Ottawa, Ontario
October 20, 2009**

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Introduction

On behalf of our thousands of family farm members, the National Farmers Union (NFU) welcomes this opportunity to put forward our views regarding fusarium standards in wheat.

The NFU advocates farm policies which enhance farmers' economic power in the marketplace, promote environmental sustainability, and strengthen rural communities. Our organization is also a member of La Via Campesina, an international network of organizations representing millions of family farmers and fisher-folk around the world.

Section A: Background to the current Fusarium problem

As far back as 2003, the National Farmers Union has been calling for action on the issue of increasing incidence of fusarium—see attached letter. We are pleased that the Standing Committee on Agriculture is now conducting hearings concerning fusarium, but we do wish that more attention had been paid to the issue when we were raising it 6 years ago.

Fusarium is a plant pathogen with serious implications for farmers, their crops, livestock and the general public. Many crops are affected by different strains of fusarium, with varying negative results. Fusarium is also commonly known as “scab” and affects wheat, barley and other small grains in both temperate and semitropical areas.

Scientific journals from around the world are reporting increased fusarium damage to crops. It would not be inappropriate to compare the worldwide increase in fusarium to the H1N1 flu pandemic. Fusarium infections can then lead to the development of vomitoxin, or DON (deoxynivalenol).

Also, within Canada, the University of Manitoba is reporting that a new race of the vomitoxin—chemotype 3-A - is replacing the previous 15-A chemotype. The problem is that chemotype 3-A produces more vomitoxin. Vomitoxin is measured in parts per million (ppm), and vomitoxin can be harmful, or even fatal, in livestock and humans.

Recommendation #1: Tightening the standards regarding fusarium will be a hardship on farmers, but with escalating levels of vomitoxin occurring, the alternative of not tightening the standards may open the door to a reputation-destroying incident similar to BSE. The NFU recommends that we all follow the science very closely.

Section B: Canadian Scientific Findings

Publicly-funded Canadian researchers have recently had peer-reviewed articles published in international scientific journals like the European Journal of Agronomy—see M. R. Fernandez et al, 2009.

Among other findings, Canada's public researchers have discovered a link between the incidence of fusarium and the previous use of glyphosate formulations. That is to say, the more widespread the use of glyphosate formulations, the higher the incidence of fusarium. In fact, the Canadian research shows that of all the crop production factors—these are the factors that can be controlled by farmers—the previous use of glyphosate formulations is the most important—more important than the variety the farmer chooses, more important than all other agronomic practices.

Copies of these studies are available from the NFU.

Section C: The Obvious Course of Action

Obviously, scientists and farmers need more knowledge about both fusarium and vomitoxin. The Canadian studies on the subject all call for more research. The problem is that Canadian researchers have been hamstrung by insufficient funding, hiring freezes, and generally poor working conditions.

In fact, in a survey recently completed by the Privy Council of Canada, Ag. Canada Research Scientists responded with the lowest percentage of people satisfied with their conditions within the entire Public Service. Only 35% of AAFC Research Scientists agreed with the statement: “I am satisfied with my department or agency”, while the government-wide response in agreement was 68%.

In short, the fusarium problem and the fusarium research problem serve to highlight a severe crisis within our publicly-funded research facilities. **We desperately need better working conditions, better staffing levels of both scientists and support staff, better equipment and facilities and a new commitment to publicly-funded and publicly-owned research in Canada.**

Continuing to let our publicly-funded Canadian research languish, erode, and eventually disappear will be extremely detrimental to fusarium and vomitoxin research and will not serve to protect the food supply for humans or livestock. We cannot make good decisions unless we have reliable scientific findings based on our own conditions here in Canada.

Recommendation #2: For our publicly funded research establishment, the NFU strongly recommends better working conditions, better staffing levels of both scientists and support staff, better equipment and facilities, and a new commitment to publicly-funded and publicly-owned research in Canada.

Section D: Suspend further Registration of Glyphosate resistance crops until the linkage to fusarium is understood

Canadians everywhere are being encouraged to take preventative measures like increased hand-washing and staying home from work if they suspect the H1N1 flu. Why are we not taking preventative measures to stop the spread of fusarium? Not seeding infected seed is an obvious step, but there are other easy steps as well.

Recommendation #3: Stop making the fusarium situation worse. Given the seriousness of fusarium and vomitoxin, and given the unambiguous Canadian research conducted so far, it would be prudent so suspend all further registration of crops in Canada that are resistant to glyphosate. When we know that the previous use of glyphosate is the most important crop production factor leading to the increased incidence of fusarium we must simply suspend the further registration of the crops that increase the use of glyphosate. Also, certified seed lots should be tested for fusarium levels, and the results clearly reported to the seed buyers.

Respectfully submitted by the National Farmers Union