



union farmer newsletter



Advocating for farmland protection in Ontario

On January 10, 2022, the NFU’s National President and NFU Ontario President wrote to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, calling on the federal government to transfer ownership of the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve to Parks Canada as soon as possible in order to protect this valuable farmland from being converted to housing.

In the letter, the NFU and the National Farmers Union – Ontario (NFU-O) expressed our extreme concern about the threat to Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve (DRAP) due to the Ontario government’s plan to allow housing development on these lands. DRAP lands are located right next to Rouge National Urban Park, so development also threatens its integrity. The solution we proposed is for the federal government to quickly protect this land by authorizing Parks Canada to acquire DRAP before it is too late.

Rouge National Urban Park is the only Parks Canada site with a mandate to protect agricultural landscapes. The park includes large tracts of Class 1 farmland, which is the rarest, richest, and most fertile in the country. The DRAP lands contain 4700 acres of Class 1 and Class 2 farmland. This farmland has the potential to produce local food for diverse Toronto and area communities. Instead, the Ontario government has earmarked these lands for urban sprawl.

The Ontario government has launched an attack on the Greenbelt – an area protected from development since 2005, located around the highly urbanized “Golden Horseshoe” area. The

Greenbelt was established to protect farmland, communities, forests, wetlands, and watersheds to preserve cultural heritage and support recreation and tourism. Removing the DRAP lands to allow development would worsen the staggering loss of farmland in the province, which is already an average of 319 acres per day according to the 2021 Census of Agriculture. Furthermore, municipalities within the Greater Golden Horseshoe have already identified more than enough urban land for their housing needs projections to 2051.

Parks Canada and the Rouge National Urban Park have also notified the provincial government of their concerns regarding potential development of the DRAP, saying “Parks Canada’s analysis suggests that there is a probable risk of irreversible harm to wildlife, natural ecosystems and agricultural landscapes within Rouge National Urban Park thereby reducing the viability and functionality of the park’s ecosystems and farmland.”

Permanently protecting these lands for agriculture and natural heritage would be an invaluable public investment in natural and agricultural systems, so the NFU has asked the federal government to act quickly to acquire the DRAP and place it within the protection of the Rouge National Urban Park.

To read the NFU/NFU-O letter to Prime Minister Trudeau, visit <https://www.nfu.ca/letter-protect-the-duffins-rouge-agricultural-preserve/>



Towards a National Agricultural Labour Strategy that works for Farmers and Farm Workers

The NFU is uniquely positioned to recognize the common interests of farmers and farm workers, so we were keen to provide input to the federal government's consultations towards developing a National Agricultural Labour Strategy. Members of three NFU internal committees - the Farm Workers Working Group, the Migrant Worker Solidarity Working Group, and the Livestock Committee - formed an ad hoc working group to share knowledge and plan strategies for this task. Key points from the brief are summarized below. The full brief is posted at <https://www.nfu.ca/policy/towards-a-national-agricultural-labour-strategy-that-works-for-farmers-and-farm-workers/>

For decades, Canada's farm numbers have declined, average farm size has increased, and more farms now rely on hired workers as a consequence. The loss of farms and the shortage of farm labour have the same root cause: a cost-price squeeze that provides inadequate returns to the work of farming, whether done by the farm operators or farm workers. Paying high prices for inputs and receiving low prices for commodities results in farmers subsidizing their farms with off-farm jobs, pressure to keep wages to farm workers low, the exit of skilled people from the sector to pursue more remunerative and less precarious sources of income, and a lack of new entrants to replace retiring farmers.

Yet, there are many young people who would like to make farming their life's work. They are interested in having good jobs on farms and/or operating their own farms. Canada is a wealthy country and has the ability to ensure they have rewarding careers – if we have an Agricultural Labour Strategy that is designed to ensure farm labour is properly compensated, safe, and dignified.

We reject reducing labour costs by replacing workers with technology (robots, automation, self-driving tractors, etc.) and adopting a "just-in-time" approach to employing Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW). Canada's National Agricultural Labour Strategy must recognize the full humanity of farmers and farm workers, the role and meaning of work in their lives, and the multiple contributions to a healthy society that result from the dignity of work. The people who work on their own farms or as employees on farms are not merely "productive units" that enable input companies, commodity traders, and food processors to maximize their profits.

The crisis in farm labour goes beyond a labour shortage that threatens Canada's food production capacity. It is also

an alarm bell for Canada to heed before we lose the essential skills and knowledge carried by the people who do the work of agriculture.

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Labour shortages are having negative impacts.

Inadequate returns to farm labour accelerates rural depopulation and contributes to a decline in the quality of life for rural residents. When farmers are unable to secure a liveable income, they can't hire workers at competitive wages. The loss of farmers depletes the pool of local people with the required skills. When nobody is available to hire, work goes undone, resulting in higher risks, more farm stress, lower production, higher costs, and lower incomes. Labour shortages are a barrier to adopting practices that are better for the land but take more time.

With the exception of the supply managed sectors, Canada's markets are structured to keep prices paid to farmers as low as possible. The monopoly power of agribusiness corporations purchasing commodities is reinforced by trade agreements and export policies that pit Canadian products against those produced in countries with much lower wage rates and weaker labour standards. The leakage of Canada's food dollars to multinational corporations elsewhere reduces the amount of revenue in our own food system that could support more farmers and farm workers.

Low wages and difficult working conditions discourage young people from agricultural careers. Trade agreements make it easy to import low-priced agricultural products, but workers' mobility is tightly controlled at the border and by the rules governing TFWs. These restrictions and the lack of rights for TFWs contribute to undervaluing farm labour across the board.

Many farm workers are racialized and/or are from disadvantaged communities that are under-represented in better-paying sectors of the economy. The Farm Labour

(continued on page 3...)

(Towards a National Agricultural Labour Strategy, from page 2)

Strategy needs to increase equity within the sector, and also between agriculture and other sectors of the economy.

The federal government should also improve Business Risk Program design to ensure labour intensive operations have adequate support, and should implement a Basic Income Guarantee and/or change the Employment Insurance system program to take into account the specifics of agricultural work.

All Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW) should be entitled to permanent resident status. To keep these workers in the agriculture and agri-food sector and attract even more high-calibre, skilled foreign workers, we need to ensure they can benefit from all the rights and protections afforded to Canadian workers.

Canada must also invest in rural public housing, rural schools, rural public transit, and child-care facilities. And we need more investment in rural health care and better access to supplementary health and dental benefits and workers' compensation insurance.

Some agricultural jobs go unfilled because there are not enough people with the necessary training. Improved training programs, funding to support on-farm training, and recognition of skills acquired in previous work situations would help close this gap.

Canada needs publicly-funded financial support for transitioning to more climate-friendly agricultural methods, including research into agronomic methods that are not input-dependent and hiring agronomists to provide free and reliable extension services to promote best management practices. (See NFU's proposal for a new [Canadian Agriculture Resilience Agency](#) to support a just transition in agriculture.)

With increasing automation and use of digital technology in farm machinery, the government needs to promote on-farm innovation by assisting farmers and farm workers to access open-source information, and share their own knowledge, skills, and creativity to create and use

appropriate technologies while strengthening social relationships within their enterprises and communities. Farmers highly value their autonomy as decision-makers, which automated technology systems can undermine.

Solving the abattoir labour shortage is extremely important for livestock farmers, but increased automation cannot replace skilled, trained workers. We need government to expand butchery training programs. The severe shortage of trained butchers threatens the viability of small and medium sized cut-and-wrap facilities. A special immigration program to fast-track skilled butchers to be employed in provincially inspected abattoirs and community butcher shops is urgently needed.

Conclusion

Canada needs an Agricultural Labour Strategy that puts the people who labour - farmers and farm workers - at the centre. It must start with policies that ensure the price farmers receive for the product will return to the producer the cost of production, including a reasonable return on investment, management, and labour. This principle holds whether the buyer is a commodity trader operating internationally, a food processor serving the Canadian market, or supermarket owners buying local produce: all need to pay prices that allow their suppliers to maintain safe and equitable working conditions for all farmers and workers.

We need an Agriculture Labour Strategy that respects and values the work of farming, whether done by farmers or farm workers.

Would you like to get involved with farm labour advocacy? If you are a farm worker, you can join the Farm Worker Working Group. If you are not yet an NFU member, you can join by going to <https://www.nfu.ca/join/farm-worker/>. If you are interested in migrant worker issues, you can join the Migrant Worker Solidarity Working Group. For more information or to participate, send a message to nfu@nfu.ca.

What priority solutions should governments pursue to address labour shortages?

- ✓ Canada needs to provide Permanent Residency for all Temporary Foreign Agricultural Workers.
- ✓ All farm workers need to be guaranteed labour rights, including the right to unionize.
- ✓ A Basic Income Guarantee, along with Employment Insurance reform, wage subsidies, and/or increases to minimum wage rates are urgently required to ensure farmers and farm workers can have economically and socially sustainable careers producing food for Canadians.
- ✓ Rural agricultural work will be more attractive if the government invests in rural services and amenities, including affordable and conveniently-located public housing, affordable childcare, schools, health care services and access to affordable supplementary health and dental benefits, inter-community public transit, and other cultural and recreational amenities.

Seed Regulatory Modernization—Have your say!

Make sure you fill in the CFIA's survey on seed regulations

The CFIA is doing a stakeholder survey this winter as part of the Seed Regulatory Modernization process. It is essential for farmers to make our views known. Watch for email from the NFU for more information about how to participate. Read on to learn more about why getting involved is so important!

For corporations, increasing their control of seed would bring untold wealth to their shareholders at the expense of farmers. They are trying to get the government to change our seed regulations in their favour. We can stop them by making sure the CFIA hears from farmers clearly saying we need to keep our strong, public interest, transparent, evidence-based and robust seed regulatory system intact.

The NFU has fact sheets to explain how our seed regulations work, their value, and what is at stake if the corporate sector is allowed to weaken, or even eliminate key elements of our seed regulations. Visit <https://www.nfu.ca/campaigns/save-our-seed/seed-regulatory-modernization/> to download these fact sheets: **Variety Registration in Canada**, **Seed Grade Tables**, and **Understanding Pedigreed and Common Seed**. Feel free to print them and share with your friends and neighbours.

The need for seed regulations has been recognized since 1923 when Canada's first Seed Act and Regulations were passed. The rules were designed to protect farmers from fraud and ensure seed meets quality standards, and to protect Canadian agriculture from plant diseases — goals that are still valid and relevant. Our seed regulatory system protects farmers and agriculture at large, while supporting and guaranteeing quality standards that deliver tangible benefits to our whole economy.

The seed lobby groups CroLife Canada, Seeds Canada, and Grains Council of Canada are promoting the interests of the few global seed corporations that have already gained control of nearly 60% of the world's seed market. They are pushing for changes to Canada's rules that would limit farmers' choices, reduce transparency, lower or eliminate quality standards, remove older varieties where patent rights or Plant Breeders' Rights have expired, increase surveillance of farmers, and increase costs for farmers and independent seed growers. Their proposals,

which have been outlined in Seed Synergy and Seeds Canada documents, would result in the "canola model" for all crops: farmers paying exorbitant prices for seed, having their choice to use farm saved seed taken away, and having the available seed options being determined by a handful of global corporations.

The corporate lobby also wants to make it easier to change seed regulations in the future by putting in place a method called *Incorporation by Reference* (IBR). This gives the force of law to documents that are "referred to" in the actual regulation, but can be changed more quickly by a less rigorous process. IBR is less transparent, and more likely to be influenced by lobbyists to fast-track measures that would increase corporate power.

We support regulatory measures to limit the power of the seed giants and ensure farmers can have access to the seed we want and need, can make informed choices about the seed we buy and to ensure that public plant breeding continues to be central to variety development.

Because seed is so fundamental to agriculture, Canada's Seed Regulations have a huge role in creating and defining what it is possible for farmers to do. If regulations in the public interest that limit the power of big seed corporations are not in place, these corporations will use their power to regulate us instead. ■

Visit <https://www.nfu.ca/campaigns/save-our-seed/> for more about the NFU's advocacy for seed.



If you would like to get involved in the NFU's seed campaign work, contact the National Office at nfu@nfu.ca to get connected with our Seed Sovereignty Committee.

Safeguard markets and choice with mandatory, transparent regulations for gene edited seed

In a September media interview, federal Agriculture Minister Bibeau promised the organic sector guaranteed traceability needed to avoid gene edited seed, but as of press time, had not yet delivered. In early December, we met with her senior advisor on this issue. We reiterated that both conventional and organic farmers need to have meaningful choice regarding the seeds we use, and that failing to provide transparency through mandatory regulation and disclosure creates huge risks to Canada's reputation and could result in loss of markets. The federal government needs to ensure reliable and accurate information is provided to Canadians through regulation, a responsibility that cannot be delegated to self-interested companies or their associations.

The proposed Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) regulatory guidance for gene edited seed would let companies assess whether their product contains foreign DNA or meets one or more of the CFIA's five Plant with Novel Traits (PNT) triggers for regulation. If the company decided their seed is "non-novel" the CFIA would not be informed the product exists. However, the fact it was gene edited is still detectable. Gene editing makes significant changes to a plant's characteristics and distinct changes to a plant's genome even if foreign DNA used in the editing process is removed prior to marketing -- thus the new plant is not equivalent to plants that are not genetically engineered.

Both the use of gene editing techniques (the process) and the existence of novel characteristics (the product) are significant for sensitive markets. Gene editing detection tools will allow buyers to test shipments and potentially reject them or discount their price if gene edited seed is found. Canada's reputation would be damaged if we are seen to be selling gene edited products without identifying them. Farmers would be completely blindsided by market rejection. If detection leads to market rejection, the impacts would extend well beyond the specific shipment, and could affect the entire commodity, as was the case when Canada lost the entire European flax market after GM Triffid flax was found in Canadian shipments.

Detection technology already exists, and faster and less expensive testing methods will quickly become available, including for situations where the company has not disclosed which gene sequences were changed. And to enforce patent rights on gene edited varieties, companies will require tools to detect them (see CBAN's fact sheet [Patenting on Genome Editing in Canada](#)).

Gene editing can be applied to all crops, including staples like wheat, and crops that are becoming more popular as healthy choices, such as lentils and peas. The potential for losses due to market rejection is many times higher than from Triffid. The CFIA's proposed regulatory guidance would make it impossible to segregate gene-edited varieties, jeopardizing whole crops and markets if/when a gene edited variety is discovered in shipments to sensitive markets.

The biotech industry lobby group CropLife is proposing a voluntary listing of gene-edited varieties its companies have decided do not trigger regulation. A voluntary list controlled by those interested in selling products without disclosing their gene-edited status is an unacceptable conflict of interest.

Since new methods and techniques of gene editing are constantly being developed, the future risks from gene edited plants are truly unknown. We need mandatory government regulation and disclosure of all products of gene editing to protect the government, conventional and organic farmers, and the public from future risks stemming from the technology's economic, health and environmental impacts.

Take action to let Minister Bibeau know your opinion!

- ✓ Send Minister Bibeau a message by email (marie-claude.bibeau@parl.gc.ca)
- ✓ Go to www.nfu.ca/GMseedaction to send an instant letter
- ✓ Go to CBAN's page <https://cban.ca/take-action/no-exemptions/> to send your own or a pre-written letter that includes the seed packet image.
- ✓ Share this information widely



Farmers are not celebrating CETA's 5-year anniversary

- by Cathy Holtslander, NFU Director of Research and Policy

September 21, 2022 marked the five-year anniversary of CETA's provisional application, and it is no surprise that farmers are not happy with the results. CETA is the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement. The agricultural chapter was one of the last areas to be agreed upon. The media presented it as a politicized trade-off between allowing the EU more access to our supply managed dairy market in return for gaining more access to the EU's market for Canadian beef. The NFU's skeptical analysis has proven to be accurate.

We pointed to the EU's long-standing opposition to the use of hormones in beef production and to the tight integration of Canada's beef sector with the American market, which does not have these restrictions. Also, the EU bans a growth-enhancing drug for hogs, which is still allowed in Canada though no longer widely used. Because Europe is largely self-sufficient in beef and is a major exporter of pork, there was little market space available fill even if Canadian producers were able to meet the EU's requirements. The EU abolished its market-stabilizing quota system for dairy production before CETA was finalized, leading to an overproduction crisis, as farmers tried to sell more milk to make up for rapidly falling prices. Seeking access to some of Canada's dairy market did not solve the structural problem their deregulation created.

In 2014, then NFU Vice President of Policy Ann Slater said "CETA gives Europe a significant part of our market, and Canadian farmers get empty promises in return."

Today, we can see how empty those promises were.

- Canadian production of cheese stopped growing in 2017, while both consumption and imports from Europe increased. Between 2016 and 2021 our population grew by 3 million, yet dairy cattle numbers did not increase, costs rose, and nearly 1,700 dairy farmers have lost their livelihoods. The human cost of these farmers' stress and losses cannot be quantified.
- CETA did not change the EU's ban on beef produced with the use of hormones. In spite of CETA increasing Canada's tariff-free access from 23,200 to 50,000 tonnes, Canada's (hormone-free) beef exports to the EU were a mere 1,418 tonnes in 2021.
- CETA added 80,549 tonnes of pork to Canada's existing duty-free quota of 7,000 tonnes under the World Trade Organization (WTO). Yet, in 2021 Canada exported only 568 tonnes of pork to the EU, down nearly 90% from the 5,000 tonnes exported to the EU in 2011!

- Prior to CETA, EU already supplied Canada with 3% of our cheese, or 13,400 tonnes, tariff-free through a WTO-based exemption. As of 2022, CETA allows the EU to supply an additional 16,000 tonnes tariff-free. In 2021, Canada produced 592,370 tonnes of cheese of all kinds, while the EU exported 1,385,135 tonnes of cheese, including 26,070 tonnes to Canada, up significantly from 15,269 in 2016.

CETA was negotiated behind closed doors, so we will likely never know how these agricultural measures figured in Canada's overall strategy for this deal. However, the outcome was not difficult to predict, and suggests that CETA cannot, and will never deliver on the promises made to the beef and pork sectors, but will continue doing serious harm to our dairy farmers.

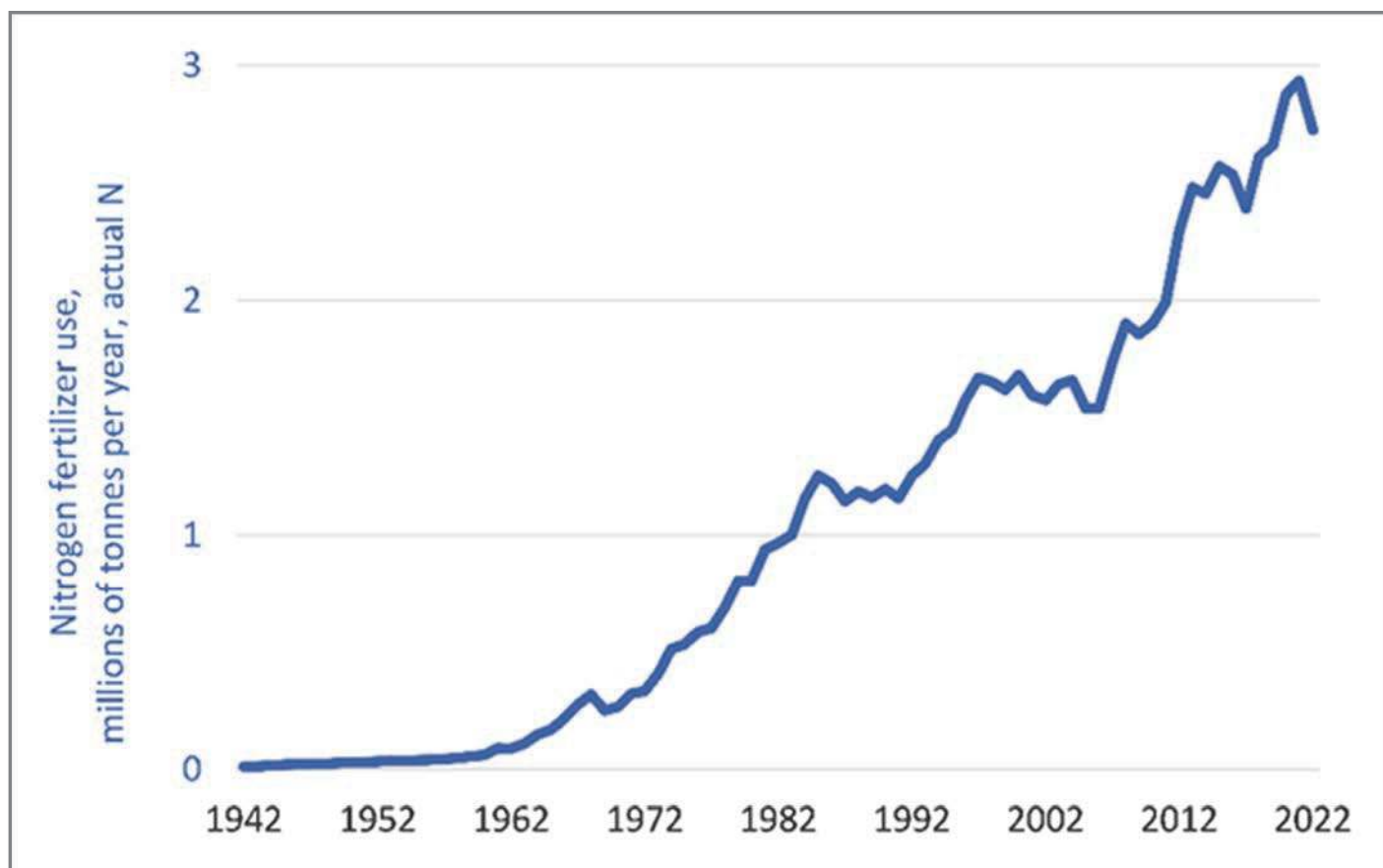
One small consolation is the federal government's commitment not to give away any more of our dairy market in post-Brexit negotiations with the United Kingdom. Also, Bill C-216, a Private Members Bill introduced by Bloc Quebecois MP Louis Plamondon that would outlaw any further give-away of Canada's supply managed markets in future trade deals, has been reinstated as Bill C-282, and hopefully will become law during the upcoming session of Parliament.

NFU's recommendations for a food system that works for Canadians:

- Shorten supply chains by developing and supporting infrastructure needed for a thriving domestic market;
- Create webs of interrelated production, processing, storage and distribution facilities to increase resilience within the food system by ensuring that multiple pathways exist to meet our needs;
- Use regulatory tools to rebalance power between large corporations and Canadians – farmers, workers, and consumers;
- Ensure regulators operate in the public interest to regain public trust and support the well-being of Canadians;
- Maintain, create and support institutions that provide stability, such as supply management and single desk marketing, to ensure there is capacity to plan and manage unexpected circumstances;
- Build strong 21st century public institutions to lead farm and food system emissions reduction and climate adaptation.

See the NFU's brief [From Fragile Supply Chains to Resilient Interdependent Networks](#) for more information.

Working to increase sustainability and decrease emissions



The graph above shows Canadian nitrogen fertilizer use (actual N) in tonnes per year. Note the near-doubling since the mid-2000s. Canadian agriculture is becoming more input dependant—more fossil-fuel dependant. As this occurs, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and other environmental impacts are increasing. To learn more about fertilizer use, environmental impacts, and ways to reduce input dependence, please read the NFU’s report *Nitrogen Fertilizer: Critical Nutrient, Key Farm Input, and Major Environmental Problem* available on the NFU website, www.nfu.ca, by pressing the blue button labelled “Climate Action.”

The NFU is working on multiple fronts to reduce agricultural emissions, help stabilize the climate, and catalyze the transformative changes needed if we are to take effective steps toward authentic sustainability.

The NFU is one of 20 organizations on the new **Sustainable Agriculture Strategy** Advisory Committee (SAS-AC). For more on the SAS, see the story in this issue of

the *Union Farmer* magazine. **Note that there is currently an initial consultation phase open and that closes March 31st. Please plan to provide input into that consultation phase.** Visit the NFU website for resources you can use to help you make your voice heard.

To learn more about the year-long Sustainable Agriculture Strategy process and how you can provide input, please monitor NFU publications and consider becoming a member of our Climate Committee. ■



If you would like to become a member of the NFU’s Climate Committee, please send a request to National Office at nfu@nfu.ca.