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OP-ED ARTICLE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NOVEMBER 12, 2009

RITZ MUST STAND UP FOR FARMERS' MARKETING SYSTEMS AT WTO

By Colleen Ross

National Farmers Union Women's President

The upcoming World Trade Organization (WTO) talks in Geneva are targeting farmers' marketing agencies – including supply-management and the Canadian Wheat Board single desk. I predict that Ag Minister Gerry Ritz will return home from the current round of negotiations announcing that these so-called “state trading enterprises” are no longer legal under WTO trade rules and set target dates to dismantle both the CWB and supply-managed sectors. While the Conservatives will blame the WTO, it is consistent with their own agenda. Meanwhile, the US and EU will not budge on farm programs.

The loss of supply-management and the CWB were narrowly averted during the last round of WTO talks in 2005 in Hong Kong. At that time, representatives of farmers' organizations, led by the NFU, forced the Canadian trade delegation to back away from a bad deal in Hong Kong. The Canadian government was obliged to stand firm on the issue due in part to a resolution passed by the House of Commons stating solid support for the supply-management system. That resolution was introduced by the Bloc Québécois MPs and received unanimous support in the House just prior to the WTO ministerial meeting in Hong Kong.

However, there does not appear to be unanimous support among MPs during the current round of WTO talks. A resolution presented to the Commons International Trade Committee on November 4, 2009, by Peter Julian, an NDP MP and a member of that committee, was blocked by Conservative MPs on the committee. The resolution called on Canada's trade negotiating team to defend the Canadian Wheat Board and supply-management at the WTO negotiations.

The resolution read as follows:

“That the Committee recommend the government immediately instruct Canada's negotiator to indicate clearly and formally by way of the appropriate means at the World Trade Organization, that the text currently circulating at the Agriculture working group undermines and weakens Canada's ability to maintain State Trading Enterprises and Supply Management systems, and that consequently, the text as currently before the working group on agriculture will not be signed by Canada as

part of the negotiations on the Doha round of the WTO, and that this be reported to the House.”

Canadian farmers must realize how vulnerable these farmers’ marketing systems are. In December of 2005, during the WTO round of negotiations, I was in Hong Kong along with my colleague, NFU President Stewart Wells. I recall vividly how close Canada came to losing these agencies at that time. There was tremendous pressure on Canadian officials to surrender the CWB and supply-management, but we were there to stop them from giving away what is left of the family farm in Canada. The current text at the WTO shows that pressure is continuing. It is imperative that the Canadian government provide clear direction to our country’s negotiating team that supply-management and the CWB single desk are not on the table. Farmers that value these marketing agencies need to speak out now and let our trade negotiators and Gerry Ritz know that it’s no deal.

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