

# THE union farmer

QUARTERLY

Spring 2011



Vol. 17 Issue 1



*Action welcoming participants outside the Convention on Biodiversity in Nagoya Japan, October 29, 2010. Colleen Ross (NFU Vice President of Policy, centre) with staff person from Japanese farm organization Kaori Noro (left) and Miriam Boyer from Reclaim the Fields, Germany (right).*

## Message from the Editor...



Kevin Wipf

2011 promises to be a very significant year in Canadian politics. As many as seven general elections and two leadership races by major political parties will be held in Canada this year. Elections will be held in Ontario, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island,

Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and the Northwest Territories. The ruling Progressive Conservative dynasty in Alberta will also be holding a leadership race, as will the opposition Alberta Liberal Party. Of course, there may yet be an election this spring at the national level.

All of this political competition and manoeuvring means that many issues will be churned up by political parties and citizens across Canada throughout the year. There is no question that this is an important time for the NFU.

Elections provide an opportunity for issues to be brought to the political arena and debated.

Elections are significant because they are now almost the only time that citizens pay attention to politics, to the degree that they do even then. They are also a time when politicians and their political parties are particularly interested in listening to the concerns of voters.

The NFU has always prided itself on being a very active political organization. Many issues are currently on the NFU's radar including CETA, GMO contamination, Green Energy, Canadian Grain Commission user fees, Producer Cars, and of course the on-going pan-Canadian farm crisis, among others. I encourage all NFU members to not only engage politically themselves, but to also make their friends and neighbours aware of these important issues and the importance of voting. And of course, it is a time to contribute and take pride in the activities of our home organization, the NFU.

Political crises in the Middle East serve as reminders of how lucky we are to live in a stable democracy, as imperfect as it seems most days. Let's gear up for an important year, steel ourselves for the fight, and look forward to making some important gains!

—nfu—

# union farmer quarterly

*Official publication of the National Farmers Union*

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PRINTED AT ST. PETER'S PRESS, MÜNSTER, SK. AGREEMENT NO. 40063391, POSTAGE PAID AT MÜNSTER, SASKATCHEWAN.

#### **ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATE:**

**Members \$ 15.00; Non-Members \$25.00; Institutions \$35.00**  
(price includes monthly newsletter and quarterly magazine)

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY THE NATIONAL FARMERS UNION

*We believe a strong rural community in Canada is an essential part of our national culture. In the National Farmers Union, we work collectively to strengthen the farm community by: building ties between farmers in all parts of Canada, with farmers in other countries and with non-farm people; ensuring all people have access to an adequate, nutritious and safely-produced food supply; promoting equity for women and young people in the farming community; promoting social support systems that permit people in farming communities a good quality of life; promoting the development and maintenance of a Canadian infrastructure to serve Canadian goals in food production and trade; and helping governments to form fair and constructive policies related to food production and food trade.*



# A message from the...



## National President

—by Terry Boehm

I hope this spring brings a successful growing season to all of us. We in the West are particularly worried about another wet spring, and hope that we do not have to deal with the extremes that nature threw at us in 2010 again.

In November of 2010, I was invited to participate in a conference in Addis Ababa Ethiopia, discussing Farmers' Rights as outlined in Article 9 of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources. This conference had delegations from around the world, and Pat Mooney and myself were the only two representatives from North America.

One of the most contentious representatives there was a lawyer from the European Seed Association who not only sought to undermine the right of farmers to seeds as outlined in Article 9 of the treaty, but constantly advanced UPOV'91 as a solution and necessity for all matters related to seed. This was done with a certain skill so that many people at the conference, particularly those who were not intimately familiar with the UPOV system, could have been taken in. Some of the delegates from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America in particular could have been swayed as they did not understand the contradictions and traps that lay within UPOV'91.

Fortunately the NFU was there and I was able to counter every point raised by the European Seed Association lawyer. I had brought along a copy of our analysis of UPOV'91 from some years ago and printed off and distributed copies, which were very much appreciated. I also pointed out how variety registration systems and other mechanisms could be used to undermine farmer's access and use of seeds, and pointed to a future where similar

mechanisms will be used for animals if we allow the continued patenting of genes, which are now being used in animals. All this aside, what is important to learn from my experience is that events can be turned around by strong interventions by well prepared individuals. The European Seed Association would have certainly advanced their agenda if there had not been stronger counterpoints offered by the NFU.

**WE** need to speak clearly and firmly wherever we can, and not to underestimate the effect of our words and work. The forces in Europe today are particularly harmful. My example of what happened in Addis Ababa is only one of many frontal attacks on farmers coming from the Europeans via the European Commission, as a front for European pharmaceutical, chemical, and biotech companies.

The provisions being advanced in the CETA agreement are unprecedented, and the powers for these corporations that will be unleashed will make UPOV'91 look like a mosquito bite in contrast. Our governments, unfortunately, are both naive and duplicitous in this. What we are being stealthily confronted with are tools that will give private corporations the power to generate such levels of fear in the countryside, that will take near total control of what a farmer can do and how he/she produces food. The tools will be intellectual property rights enforcement measures, and later complete control of seed supplies.

We need to fight this in the CETA, but beyond that we need to remember that all of these mechanisms that we fear can be stopped if we act in solidarity. People need to say no: today, tomorrow, and in the distant future, and act with their own vision of what is right and just. They must remember that seed laws and seed systems were and are to protect farmers and citizens, not corporations that promise the moon and empty your wallets. Ask your friends and neighbors to join the NFU and add their voices to shape and advance our vision, and to say no when we need to. Thank you.

*Terry Boehm, President*

Our past convention in December seems to have generated a fair degree of concern and confusion in regard to the NFU's position on Supply Management. We had a panel at convention where a strong opponent of Supply Management spoke. It was felt that this would generate a lively debate and discussion, which it did. This **does not** reflect a shift in the NFU's support for Supply Management. However, we do recognize that systems evolve over time, and we want to develop our policy based on vigorous debate while making sure that we do not erode the principles of Supply Management.



# A message from the...



## Women's President

— by Joan Brady

I am very interested in strategic planning and feel that it is always a useful exercise to discover where an organization/system needs to be and how they will get there. Last year, after FOOD 2030, the British Food Strategy was released and I spent considerable time examining it. It was a useful document as it clearly identified some British policy priorities and began a food policy conversation across the globe.

### **NATIONAL FOOD STRATEGY**

Since January 2010, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) has been discussing and developing a National Food Strategy in order to “secure our food future”. The initiative, inspired by the British report FOOD 2030, is touted as the only strategic effort that involves farmers and their value chain. The CFA version of a strategy includes the following mission statement and strategic objectives:

**Mission** - Canada will be a leader in providing safe and nutritious food through a vibrant, competitive, responsive and sustainable farming, processing, distribution and sales sector.

**The Strategic Objectives** - Nine in total, dictate a national and international customer base that will choose Canadian product. Canadians will also choose a healthy lifestyle and have access to safe and nutritious food. The objectives state that the Canadian food chain will be driven by its diverse, innovative and profitable farm and food supply sectors. It will do so in a sustainable manner, which includes secure infrastructure and attention to a balance between food requirements and green energy. Finally, the objectives state that Canada will be a global leader in ensuring international agreements impacting food are based on science, fairness, consistency and enforceability.

I attended a National Food Strategy stakeholder consultation on behalf of the NFU. In attendance were representatives from various national commodity groups, industry and other farm organizations. The strategy which had been developed previously by the CFA was presented for our consideration. The day began with two presentations that were meant to prepare the participants for eventual conversation. The first dealt with the farm sector’s financial health, which the presenter from the bank industry summed up as being hopeful because farmers could still access credit. The second spoke about the value chain and the importance of including all members in deliberations. The discussion that followed did not veer too much from the original direction to the strategy.

A related story in *the Globe and Mail* (Nov. 30, 2010) defines the development of the National Food Strategy as preparing “a long-term plan for the whole system – from field to table – by modernizing regulations, driving innovation and ensuring Canadian products are the preferred choice in international markets”. The article also insinuates that Canada is falling behind in being an agricultural force on the global market. It states that Canada is losing market share and goes on to describe producers as relying on government payments to survive, the bulk of which go to smaller farms that cannot compete internationally. The answer borrowed from experts such as David Sparling, Chair of the Agri-food Innovation and Regulation program at the University of Western Ontario, is to direct funding to research and development and the expansion of trade, rather than to government payments. The problem as defined by the CFA is a lack of vision for the industry.

The *Globe and Mail* goes on to decry farm size and farm efficiency, quoting Minister Gerry Ritz, where he stated “the Conservative government has made policy changes to focus more resources on

(continued on page 22...)



# A message from the...



## Youth President

— Cammie Harbottle

I feel like this is going to be an exciting year for the NFU Youth. We are currently planning our fourth annual youth workshop and training weekend, one of only two chances for the NFU Youth to get together in person. This year, we are moving our meeting westward to coastal BC. The meeting will be held March 10-12. It will be comprised of three days of workshops, discussions, and farm tours, along with a public evening event. The event will highlight the young farmer movement in Canada within the context of local organizations, the National Farmers Union and its policies, and La Via Campesina. We will be tapping our networks to invite as many young farmers, members of local farm and food organizations, the media, and the general public. We are looking forward to a great event!

Half of the meeting will focus on building the internal structure and capacity of the NFU Youth, and the other half will involve other local young farmer organizations with the goal of building alliances and developing the young farmer movement in Canada. So far, there has been a lot of energy and enthusiasm expressed by both NFU Youth and potential allies. For the first time ever, we are receiving more applications from NFU Youth members to attend than we have space for! We are planning to bring two members from each region plus Paul and myself. Many thanks to the regions for your support and financial contributions to this meeting, because without it this would not be possible. We will report back from the youth in the next *Union Farmer Quarterly*...

## and Youth Vice President



— Paul Slomp

2011 is shaping up to be an exciting year for the NFU Youth. It feels as though the NFU Youth are on the verge of a new era in terms of its purpose and its organizational structure. Over the course of the last several years, under Kalissa Regier's leadership, the NFU Youth was going through a phase of rallying support for young farmers and shining light on issues that young and start-up farmers were/are facing on their farms – issues like farm succession, access to financing, and getting access to farm-related knowledge and expertise. This has generated a buzz amongst the young farming community, and the NFU Youth is now in a position to start organizing ourselves to better address the issues that we are facing.

When we look at the NFU at large, there are a few major activities the organization engages in to promote, support, and advocate for family farms.

The NFU (1) Conducts policy research; (2) Runs campaigns to educate farmers and the general public on certain policy issues; and (3) Lobbies the decision makers within government to make pro-family farm decisions.

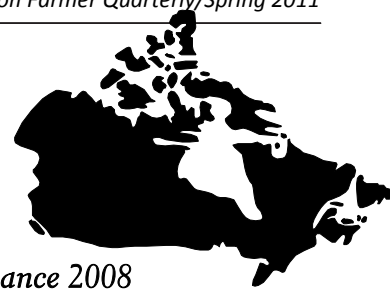
As the NFU Youth, we see ourselves like the NFU as a whole, except with our training wheels on. This is exactly where we are going to be focussing our efforts – ***Training... NFU style.***

Over the course of the next several years, the NFU Youth is aiming to build a national structure that will allow young farmers across this country to learn how to effectively conduct policy research, run campaigns, and lobby government – while at the same time learning about the rich history of pro-family-farm policies in Canada and the farm movement in general.

—nfu—



# Regional Reports



## ONE (PEI)

**REGION**



- by Randall Affleck

### Urban Laughlin Inducted into the Atlantic Agriculture Hall of Fame

Long time NFU farm leader Urban Laughlin was inducted into the Atlantic Agricultural Hall of Fame on October 28, 2010 at a ceremony at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College Alumni Theatre. The citation stated: "Urban is always a passionate voice for social justice for farmers. He is a committed advocate for farmers receiving the cost of production and therefore he promotes orderly marketing systems for all products. He rejects corporation-style farming as a way of producing healthy food." A large delegation of Islanders came to see the hanging of Urban Laughlin's portrait.

### Potato Exports

Growing and harvest conditions were favorable this year on PEI. Harvested acres were 85,000 acres in 2010, down from a 1999 high of 113,000 acres. Export markets are strong this year with several boats being loaded to service markets in Russia and Venezuela. A supply side shortage caused by the drought in Russia this summer has created the improved market conditions. However, farmers are not reporting strong prices, but expect them to improve.

### Proprietary Potato Varieties

Out of the top 35 varieties of seed potato grown on PEI in 2009, 16 are protected under Plant Breeders Rights legislation. The proprietary varieties represented about 15% of the seeded acreage. Cavendish Farms now have the proprietary rights to the variety Prospect with a total of 128 acres of seed grown in 2009. One could reasonably expect that seed royalties will soon be tied to processing contracts in a comparably cryptic manner that result in process growers purchasing company fuel and fertilizer.

### Severe Economic Hardship Cash Advance 2008

As of June 2010, 126 cattle farmers had outstanding loans of \$10.9 million from the special cash advance in 2008 called the Severe Economic Hardship program. Cattle prices have not improved sufficiently to repay these loans. The advances have been deferred twice, but the loans must be paid out by March 31, 2012. Loans can be termed out past March 2012, but interest would be charged on outstanding amounts back to the original date of the loan. Any default of payments will incur a penalty of 0.25% from the date of the advance was made to the date of the default. The default interest will be prime plus 1.5 percent on the entire outstanding default balance. Default on the cattle advance would make a farmer ineligible for the cash advances on potatoes or grains.

### Larsen's Plant Closure

In November Maple Leaf Foods announced that it was closing the meat processing Larsen Meat Packers plant in Berwick, NS April 1st. Last February they stopped killing hogs at the plant and the hogs were diverted to be killed in Quebec. Ever since the Ghiz government closed the Island's hog processing plant there has been a steady exodus of hog farms from the Island landscape ... less than 20 farms remain.

### Agreement on Internal Trade

In October 2009 Provincial Premiers agreed to revisions to the *Agreement on Internal Trade*, a 1995 interprovincial trade agreement. There is speculation that Premiers signed off quickly and quietly on those amendments to make way for the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). Europeans were not interested in a trade agreement with Canada if they felt interprovincial trade barriers would limit the scope of the agreement.

(continued on page 22...)



## REGION

**THREE (Ontario)**

- by Sean McGivern

**G**reetings my fellow NFU members,  
Over the last year I have had the opportunity to able serve you in the role as Regional Coordinator for Ontario. During this time I have spent a great deal of my time and energy trying to reach out to our many locals, which number 20 in total. As you know, Ontario is vast area, but the one thing I have found is that the issues are the same from North-to-South and East-to-West. Farmers across this great province on a daily basis are confronted with an onslaught of government regulations, which are a drain on farm families both mentally and physically.

Over the last 50 years we have seen a mass exit of people from farming. In 1960, when Canada had half the population it does today, at the onset of supply management we had over 60,000 dairy farms in the province of Ontario producing cream and fluid milk. Today we now have less than 4,200 dairy farms and less than 55,000 farms of all types in total. The NFU has a long history of being a strong voice for supply management, but even supply management has not saved the family farm, as many would like us to believe. Clearly the numbers speak for themselves. We really need to look deeper into the opportunities and models that will be the sustainable farm models of the future if we expect to maintain the family farm going ahead.

The NFU has always been the canary in the coal mine on so many issues time-and-time again. What we have to say always seems to prove itself true with the

passing of time. Far too often we focus too much on the problems, and not enough on the solutions. We get so caught up on working to identify the underlying issues that we sometimes do not focus enough energy on pushing our agenda forward and making the noise that is required to bring the much needed attention to the serious issues that we uncover.

The one vital and the ever-so crucial piece of the pie that is needed to build a strong organization, is membership. The more voices we have, the stronger we become; the idea of many voices with one message. Conventional agriculture has done an excellent job of building their mass, now it is our time to do so. Over the last year, I have started a monthly president's call to bring all of our grassroots leaders together from each of the county locals to be able to voice their needs, concerns, and encouragements. This has proven to be a great success and has had the full support of your local leaders.

Communication is so key to building a strong organization that is transparent and alive and growing. The NFU in Ontario has a lot to be proud of. Not only are we the only growing region within the NFU, but we are also the only growing general farm organization in the province of Ontario out of the three. This growth has not happened on its own. It has come from a great deal of hard work and the efforts of many.

I can assure you first-hand that the NFU is very well respected in Ontario amongst the farming community, from the farm level right up to the provincial and federal levels of the Government.

Over the last year we at regional council have worked on many different things, but a few of the highlights would be the Green Energy Act, EnviroPig, CETA, and Bill C 36. In the future I would like to see the NFU in Ontario develop "speak-up teams" in every local to target our provincial and federal MP's and MPP's. These teams would personally go and meet with the politicians face-to-face and educate them on various issues of the day that are a concern to us.

Once you get this *Quarterly* in your mail box, I will no longer be your Coordinator for Ontario, so this will be my last note to you in this capacity. The last year has been a great experience, although sometimes challenging. I can say I am glad to have been able to serve you in this role. While I have decided to pursue other interests at this time, I can assure you that they are all farm-focused and that I hope to sometime return to the NFU in whatever capacity I can be a help.

*Sean McGivern*



## REGION

**FIVE (Manitoba)**

- by Ian Robson & Bev Stow

Region 5 NFU members congratulate our former president Stewart Wells and Manitoba director John Sandborn on their success in recent CWB elections. Election results indicate yet again Western Canadian wheat and barley producers' preference for single desk marketing. On a sober note, initial glitches in the election administration which once again increased election costs to farmers are evidence that rather than hiring a private firm, Elections Canada would be a better choice for this process.

On November 16, Bev Stow had the pleasure of attending the Provincial Throne Speech heralding the opening of the Fall Session of the Manitoba Legislature as a guest of Agriculture Minister Stan Struthers.

Bev attempted to attend the afternoon session of the hearings on proposed increases in fees for CGC services. The fees have been frozen since the mid nineties with shortfalls picked up by the Federal Government. Unfortunately, bad roads and weather prevented Bev from attending. Timing of the event around Manitoba AgDays made for reported poor farmer attendance (as opposed to ample numbers of trade representation). These costs will inevitably download to farmers.



## WATCH YOUR MAILBOX FOR THESE MEETING NOTICES

**Region 5 NFU Convention** to be held in July 2011. Please bring or send in your written Policy Resolution for debate.

**Region 5 Issues Forum** to be held April 2011.

Fred Tait has expressed concern that the ultimate goal of the federal government is to make the fees high enough to attract the attention of a buyer from the private sector. The commission could then be sold "lock stock and barrel" to a private company which would cherry pick which of the CGC's many functions to retain. In such a scenario one can safely assume that CGC functions such as the Grain Research Lab, producer risk security, oversight of licensing and bonding of companies purchasing from farmers, yearly sample and science based crop quality assessments and other regulating functions carried out by CGC will go by the wayside, and with them will go the world wide acceptance of assurance of quality and reliable standard of Canadian grain. Over time, one would more than likely see erosion of due diligence and oversight as has happened in Canada's meat processing industry.

On January 24<sup>th</sup>, Region 5 Coordinator Ian Robson and several members met with the Manitoba Ag Minister Stan Struthers. The meeting covered a wide range of topics from drainage (which has gone from a local to a province wide issue), support for the Canadian Grain Commission, stable funding for general farm organizations, continuing progress in the effort to promote short-line rail in Manitoba and exponential increases in seed costs in crops now dominated by the private sector (canola, corn, soybeans). The companies which control these seeds are shielded from any effective competition by patents and plant breeders rights along with complete withdrawal of public research in these three areas.

Current CETA negotiations, details of which most farmers are unaware, are another cause for concern. Because current EEC regulations such as bans of hormone-treated beef and GMO's in human food are grandfathered (through Appendix I) into the agreement, Canadian canola and beef products have a snowball's chance in hell of ever making it through to the European dinner tables. More than likely, as a result of this deal (should it come to fruition) farmers' livelihoods and future opportunities will be greatly reduced and complicated and the right to save seed will be

*(continued on page 9...)*





*(Region 5 Report, from page 8)*

jeopardized. The scope of CETA is enormous and will encompass sectors other than farming. Every middle class Canadian needs to be paying attention to this one. At this meeting, it was suggested that the Manitoba government should be making presentations to the Federal Ag Standing Committee on the CGC issue and on Federal Private Members Bill C-548 giving more CWB Elected Director control.

Fred Tait suggested that the Manitoba government should look into setting up a Faculty of Alternative Ag Practices at the University of Manitoba which would be a good fit with "Food Matters Manitoba", the "Hundred Mile Diet", etc. and would enhance and augment the work already being explored in this direction by Martin Entz at the University of Manitoba.

We wish you success in 2011 and hope you bring your thinking on farm issues to our attention. For example, we are quite concerned about increasingly one-sided production and marketing contracts that include gimmicks and bundling with co-purchasing.

NFU Region 5 representatives can be reached at:

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**Bev Stow**, Region 5 Board Member

Phone: 204-745-3252.

*In Union,*

*Ian Robson & Bev Stow*

## SIX (Saskatchewan)

### REGION



- by Glenn Tait

**H**owdy y'all. I'm sending this in from Houston, Texas. While I'm visiting and vacationing here I had the good fortune to attend a stock show and sale put on by the Future Farmers of America (FFA) in nearby Tomball. It was a very impressive event put on by the Tomball High School students. There are over half a million FFA members in the U.S.A., including Chapters in almost every high school in Texas of course, and also in cities like New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia. The FFA really does a great job in advancing the profile of

agriculture in the U.S. It provides agricultural education and experience and also significant leadership training.

Back home it seems that not too many of the agricultural advocacy groups share the NFU's concern over the proposed Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). The Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM) met with Sidney Friesen, Senior Policy Analyst for the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture, who shared with them the federal position, and they plan to present that position at the annual meeting in March. Neither the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan (APAS) nor the provincial government has returned calls at the time of writing.

We are getting touches of frost in Houston at night and the citizens are nearly apoplectic with the cold. Sometimes I zip up my jacket... sometimes.

*In Union, Glenn Tait*



## SEVEN (Alberta)

### REGION



- by Jan Slomp

As I write this report, we are a few days away from the vote in the House of Commons on Bill C-474. Some of us have urged Conservative MP's from Alberta to vote in favour. It is crucial to have this kind of precautionary measure in place before new GMO's can become available. Recently, scientific findings have been reported about negative effects on soil organisms and negative health impacts from excessive use of glyphosate. To introduce more Roundup Ready GMO's at this point would not be the right thing to do.

Since new legislation was passed last year, a \$2.00 per animal sold refund can be obtained from Alberta Beef Producers. Click on ABP's website and download the form "check-off refunds". Every six-month period, from January 1 to June 30 or from July 1 to December 31, levies can be reclaimed by submitting this completed form, faxed or emailed to ABP within one month after the six-month period.

NFU Board and Executive member Doug Scott attended a meeting with the Canadian Grain Commission. Lost services can only be maintained if the farmer is willing to pay for it as needed. Doug reported that there seems to be a change in attitude after a 10 to 15 year period of eagerness to deregulate and cut services. Commissioners are listening and seem to be open for renewed services to do what the CGC was always intended to do since its inception in 1935 – that is protecting farmers' interests in the grain trade.

As the NFU representative, in conjunction with the Council of Canadians, Public Interest Alberta and the Parkland Institute, I attended a meeting with six senior international trade negotiators of the Alberta Government. They perceived the Comprehensive

Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between Canada and Europe beneficial for Alberta. Procurement of government and community services was no concern to them as the \$10,000 threshold was already in effect in the interprovincial free trade agreement. They perceived agriculture to be the great winner in CETA – export of hormone-free beef and grains in particular. When I alerted them about the unacceptable and far-reaching clauses under the investment chapter, about seizure of bank accounts and freezing of assets in the case of an alleged infringement of intellectual property rights, they were all caught scribbling as if being unaware of it.

Finally, the Progressive Conservative Party in Alberta is in severe trouble. Although our opposition to Bills 46, 19, 50 and 36 did not prevent those bills from becoming law, it now seems to be backfiring on the government. Joe Anglin and Keith Wilson tirelessly present at meetings across the province on the extent of these bills. Landowner rights are unequivocally extinguished by the passing of these bills. Albertans are finally waking up to the dictatorial measures the government has taken; bills that bring Alberta back in terms of lawlessness, to pre-Magna Carta era (12<sup>th</sup> century), according to lawyer Keith Wilson.

Newly farmer-owned Battle River Railroad reported its first 50 grain car delivery in Camrose on December 9. Hats off to NFU members and core organizers Dennis Freidrich, Reg Enright, John Oberg and Ken Eshpeter for their unprecedented achievement.

Members in Region 7 who want a local meeting organized should contact me at 403-843-2068.

*Jan Slomp*



## EIGHT (B.C./Peace River)

REGION



- by Peter Eggers

On November 23, 2010 I had an accident. While I was unloading a highboy trailer with a self-unloading bale rack for round bales, the top bale came over the end and hit me like lightning. I did not see it coming. It knocked me over and when it came to rest the pea straw bale with a weight of approximately 1600 lbs was lying on its side completely covering my right leg. It was -25° to -30 ° C. I decided not to faint and to dig myself out. I had to bite the sisal twine. I almost uncovered myself to the point that I could see my boot. I had called out for help, and a friend and neighbor found me. He rocked the bale and I got out, three to four hours after the accident. When I got into the ambulance to take me to the hospital, my body temperature was 33.5°C. The doctors tried to save my leg, but after one week my right leg was amputated at the knee. Due to some infection my stay was a little prolonged and I was released on January 4<sup>th</sup>.

While I was in the hospital in Grande Prairie I got good care, and we are very thankful to have healthcare insurance. During the last two weeks I was also enrolled in physiotherapy to regain strength and balance. I am now an outpatient and still go to physio three times a week, until I get admitted to the Glenrose Hospital in Edmonton where I will get fitted and trained with my artificial leg.

I'm thankful for a son who is willing to do the farm chores and continue the ash contract; for family and neighbors who offered help; for the many visitors, cards, presents, fruit baskets and phone calls; and the 24/7 care my wife Levke gives me.

There is another point I like to talk about. Our farm carries Workers' Compensation Board insurance. Initially we got it because we wanted to protect ourselves if an employee would have an accident. We also enrolled ourselves. The premium for mixed farming in 2010 was 3.55%. That number fluctuates from year to year. The WCB started to pay biweekly allowance according to my coverage which is selected at \$29,000. For the employees we have to give an estimate of the wages we are going to pay for the year. The WCB also covers travel to and from the hospital for my physiotherapy, for my wife's travel to visit me, and will also cover the cost for the artificial leg which ranges from \$15,000 to \$40,000. The more physically active you need to be, the more expenses the leg. The goal for the WCB is to get me back farming as I was before — the same as my goal.

*Peter Eggers*

### We Remember ...

#### KLEIM, KURT

Long-time NFU member Kurt Kleim passed away on December 17, 2010 in Swift Current at the age of 86. He is survived by his wife, Rea, and his two sons, Gene of Pennant, Saskatchewan and Kerry of Calgary, Alberta.

#### BISHOFF, ADAM

Adam Bishoff of Keeler, Saskatchewan passed away on January 20, 2011 in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. Adam was an active member of the Saskatchewan Farmers Union and later, its successor, the National Farmers Union. He will be missed by friends, family and all those who knew him.



# What do we know about Enviropig™?

-by Terran Giacomini



The University of Guelph's genetically engineered (GE) pig, called the *Enviropig*™ is getting close to the market, but what do we know about it? The University says that society needs to decide if they want the GE pig, but how can farmers, consumers and students have their voices heard?

The *Enviropig*™ has been in the works for over a decade. The pig is engineered with genetic material from *E-coli* bacteria and a mouse, so that the pig can produce less phosphorous in its feces. The University of Guelph's *Enviropig*™ could be the first genetically engineered animal allowed into the food system anywhere in the world.

I am a graduate student in sociology at the University of Guelph with a keen interest in world food systems. A group of students and I organized a debate at the University of Guelph on October 7<sup>th</sup>, because we have been concerned about what the *Enviropig*™ means for farmers and for our own lives. What we learned surprised us, and led us to organize a rally on campus on February 9<sup>th</sup> to request that the university revoke its application for approval of the *Enviropig*™.

At our debate, the University of Guelph was represented by Dr. Rich Moccia, VP Research, and Dr. Cecil Foresberg, co-creator of *Enviropig*™. Ontario Pork declined our invitation. However, we were still able to hear from a farmer viewpoint thanks to Sean McGivern from the National Farmers Union in Ontario, who raises hogs and cattle in the Grey Bruce area. Lucy Sharratt from the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network also joined. It actually took us a long time and a lot of effort to get university representatives to agree to participate. They agreed only after we sent a very firm email that was copied to the President of the Ontario Agriculture College and the President of the University.

Ultimately they said that the *Enviropig*™ was 'one tool in the tool box' among the other strategies that already exist to address the problem of phosphorus pollution from hog farms. The audience members who spoke up predominately questioned the university

about the wisdom of going ahead with a tool that is not even needed.

Sean McGivern argued that the *Enviropig*™ will most likely be an economic disaster for hog farmers who are already in crisis in Canada. He said that the GE pig will likely come at a high cost especially because the controversy around GM food and the lack of labeling for consumers means that the *Enviropig*™ runs the risk of damaging Canadian pork producers' domestic as well as export markets.

McGivern offered a list of already existing strategies—other 'tools'—that farmers use to reduce phosphorus, which include raising pigs on a diet that supports their natural system. Farmers also use a *phytase* feed supplement which costs less than five dollars a kilogram. At 250 grams per one metric tonne of feed the supplement costs about 30 cents per hog.

At the debate, I was joined by many students who are concerned that the university has invested public resources and is pursuing commercialization of a product that has not had any public input and is so controversial. The University of Guelph has not made public their data on the pig or their application to Health Canada, even though the project has been on-going for over a decade. Yet another concern we share with farmers is that there is no effective democratic process in Canada for them to have input into policies related to agriculture and food, and that we should have a say as to whether or not GE pork should be on the market or on our forks. These questions and concerns remain unanswered and unresolved.

—nfu—

# CETA

## must be stopped!

- by NFU President Terry Boehm

The NFU received a more recent draft of the CETA after the October round of negotiations. On reading this document it is clear that our earlier analysis of the agreement was accurate and if anything, we see European positions hardening as the negotiation process continues. The only bright spot in this process is that the specific reference to UPOV'91 has been dropped in this later version. I believe that the NFU ringing the alarm on this last summer played a huge part in getting this removed. However, the agreement still references working to advance UPOV, so we remain vigilant.

This agreement, while characterized as a trade agreement, is really about limiting the role of government to act in the public interest. It essentially penalizes governments if they do anything that could impact the profits of the largest corporations in the world. What we have is a scenario where monopoly rents can be extracted indefinitely, and where governments are to create the conditions that perpetuate this by enforcing legislation like patents and other intellectual property rights as an example. The courts are to become a vehicle of the corporations to threaten people with the precautionary seizure of their property if they are alleged to have infringed on an intellectual property right. Intellectual property rights are to supersede all other property rights. Governments are also to compensate corporations for lost profits in times of civil strife (strikes), war etc. This is an additional clause to the equivalent

provisions of the NAFTA Chapter 11 investor protection measures that this agreement is to include as well. Governments can subsidize in very specific instances and sectors, for example the insurance sector. This will of course become increasingly important as natural disasters are to become more frequent with global warming. Coal is also to be freely subsidized.

What is particularly vexing is that the Europeans, or more accurately the European Commission is negotiating with these positions while the Canadians are seeking miniscule adjustments in Europe to increase acceptable GM contamination levels from 0.01 % to 0.1% and to allow this for unapproved events as well. Canadians are also hoping to gain access for hormone-treated beef products. European press and politicians including many members of the International Trade Committee of the European Parliament unequivocally state that this is not going to happen and that Canadian agricultural production will not gain significant inroads in Europe if we continue to insist on production methods that are unacceptable in Europe. Indeed Appendix 1b of the draft exempts all European GM regulations from the provisions of this agreement. What we must keep in mind is that the Europeans are able to generate surpluses in most agricultural commodities anyway and that they have east and central European neighbours right next door who can supply agricultural goods with much lower transport costs than we have. The tariff levels between Europe and Canada are very low already – averaging about 4% - so this agreement can hardly open trade any further. Unfortunately, the Government of Canada is selling this to Canadians as a free trade agreement (and our press is accepting this as well) when it really is a mechanism to redesign the function of government. This can be the only rationale on behalf of the Canadian government as the actual economic benefits are so minimal when you carefully read the text.

*(continued on page 14...)*



(CETA, from page 13)

The European Commission has the same neoliberal ambitions as the Canadian government but they are seeking to essentially re-colonize Canada for its natural resources and to open up government procurement at all levels to European companies. It states that governments cannot favour local goods and service providers for any covered procurement subject to thresholds of the Government procurement agreement at the WTO. These are set at \$135,000 for goods and services at the federal level and \$355,000 at the provincial level and at \$5,000,000 for construction projects. The information I received from Canadian provincial negotiators in Brussels in January is that the three far western provinces are willing to reduce this to \$25,000. What this procurement covers under CETA is government activities but also municipal, hospital, school and university procurement. One of the realities of this shift for agriculture is that it would be very difficult for any of these entities to establish local food systems. The further danger in all of this is that governments trying to nurture local or domestic businesses would be disallowed from doing so. Actions to favour disadvantaged areas or populations for economic development would be subjected to the investor protection provisions if they impacted corporate profits negatively. Environmental regulation would again be subject to these provisions.

Returning to the intellectual property rights (IPR) issues, one of the areas that will affect all Canadians is the effect these provisions will have on the cost of health care. The Europeans are calling for extending drug patents by the length of time it takes a regulatory body to test and approve a product. This will both increase costs but will also pressure our regulators to make hasty approvals. If a minor use is found for the drug during the term of the patent it is extended again. In addition, the data supplied by the pharmaceutical or chemical company to the regulator is to remain exclusive to the companies for 10 to 13 years. It cannot be used for other studies or a base for creating alternatives. Pharmaceuticals comprise one of the largest expenses of our healthcare system and this will add to their cost and transfer even more of our healthcare tax dollars to big pharmaceutical companies.

The precautionary seizure provisions remain in the new draft and extend to third parties accused of assisting in an ALLEGED infringement. Interlocutory injunctions also are to be used to enforce patents or other IPR's. The precautionary seizure of movable and immovable property and the freezing of bank accounts and communication of

financial data of alleged infringers by the courts on behalf of corporations is an affront to democracy. Farmers could be confronted with losing their farms, equipment, crops, and cash for being accused of having a patented gene in their crop. In addition, a third party deemed to have assisted in the so-called infringement could be subjected to the same seizure provisions. This would include seed cleaners, for example. The crops could be ordered to be destroyed or you could have an injunction placed on you to prevent you from planting your own seed. It is clear that the culture of fear that flows out of these measures would cause most farmers to comply to corporate demands and pay the price for seeds or whatever input the corporations controlled, and produce in their deemed manner. Farming as an autonomous occupation would evaporate. Those who farm accepting low returns because "I am my own boss" will be sorely surprised if this agreement comes to fruition. Just as important, if not more, is what this agreement will do to our ability to govern autonomously. As you read the 361 pages of the CETA text, it is apparent that all of the advances made by our democracies are threatened and perverted by the real power behind this agreement and our governments are duplicitous pawns in a game of power not just over our food (via seeds) but over people as part of functioning democracies. We have until the end of 2011 at best to stop this and we need to make this an issue wherever we can. The NFU has been protesting and lobbying both in Canada and in Europe but the level of knowledge is low among ordinary citizens and our government representatives. We all need to challenge our politicians to look at this carefully and not just have them cheerlead for another trade agreement. This is certainly not just another trade agreement but goes after the heart of our societies.

—nfu—



# NOUMINREN AND SHOKKENREN: A Visit to Japan

-by Colleen Ross, NFU 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President

An important element to the work of the National Farmers Union is to get a better understanding of how farmers in other countries react to and cope with the current reality of globalized agriculture. Hence, from October 19<sup>th</sup> to November 5<sup>th</sup> I visited Japan.

The purpose of the trip was to attend the UN Convention on Biodiversity meetings in Nagoya where I watched countries such as Canada, Brazil and Australia make a complete mockery of the United Nations foundational principle to protect and defend the rights of all peoples and the survival of the planet. Through blocking consensus on important text that would ensure the protection of the world's biodiversity from corporate management, the final text was weakened and this extravagantly expensive conference basically allowed countries and corporations to continue to pillage the earth without accountability or ensuring that farmers, indigenous peoples and communities are compensated. Canada even won the prestigious "Doo Doo Award" for being the most obstinate, thick headed and uncooperative country at the event. Go Canada!

To brighten things up following the dismal biodiversity meetings, several days were spent traveling to more remote and "rural" regions of Japan for a series of more informal meetings with farmers, hearing their stories and sharing ideas. The two main farm organizations in Japan are NOUMINREN and SHOKKENREN. Together with the NFU, we are all members of the international farm organization La Via Campesina. La Via Campesina has 148 member organizations from 69 countries.

NOUMINREN in English basically means, "Japan Family Farmers Movement". Its main office is located in Tokyo. SHOKKENREN is the "National Coalition of Workers, Farmers and Consumers for Safe Food and Health" in Japan, which is a network of organizations including NOUMINREN, labor unions, women's groups, consumer groups, etc. This coalition was founded in 1990 in order to protect people's food, health and agriculture.

Members of NOUMINREN recognize the vital importance of collective marketing. One example of how these farmers have survived and thrived in an increasingly hostile marketplace are tea and rice farmers who share processing equipment and market their unique high quality products together. Farmers are joining forces to increase sales and find new and innovative ways to sell their food directly to consumers. NOUMINREN has staff available to assist with marketing schemes - to help farmers "think outside the box" in terms of production practices and sales. In Japan, as in Canada, it is rarely easy and not always socially acceptable to adopt methods different to those of your neighbors. But, more so in Japan, this can be a serious issue for farmers and their families. Yet the brave members of NOUMINREN were united in their determination to do whatever it takes to survive and ensure a future for anyone wanting to farm.

NOUMINREN members also recognize the importance of working closely with coalition partners. As members of SHOKKENREN, they consult regularly with others, hearing from consumer groups, workers' unions, institutions and health specialists. The information that they share helps NOUMINREN members better understand the concerns that Japanese society has regarding food and the environment. NOUMINREN farmers are then able to think more strategically about how they can farm and deliver nutritious foods to a market that is slowly growing, meeting the needs of some of the 120 million Japanese people wanting to support NOUMINREN farmers.

Meeting with struggling rice, tea and vegetable farmers impacted by trade agreements that would dump cheap imported foods onto the Japanese marketplace

*(continued on page 16...)*



sounded a lot like home. Hearing how an increasing number of young Japanese families are looking for quick, cheaper meals with less emphasis on traditional foods that are nutrient rich sounded like Canada too. The ever rising incidence of cancers, diabetes and obesity was also a common story, although I have to admit I did not see nearly as many overweight people in Japan as in Canada! Yet many Japanese are still fiercely proud of their traditional foods such as rice, sushi, sashimi and miso eaten several times a day by the majority of people and served with great pride.

The loss of young people wanting to farm is evident. I was able to visit more than one small farm though where progressive young adults were joining together cooperatively to farm. This is a daring act of bravery in Japan where conformity is simply a part of the culture and to go against what is expected of you is essentially mutiny. It was good to encourage these young people and let them know that there is a growing movement in Canada of young people seeking careers of farming, many of whom are from non-farm backgrounds. Good opportunities for exchanges exist for mutual encouragement, sharing knowledge and building solidarity.

All in all, in Japan, as in Canada, we need a paradigm shift. But, as I said to one young farmer named Gen and his partner Yoko, we can't wait for the shift to happen completely. We have to be (and already are) the agents of change. Portions of society are waiting for leaders to make that change. Consumers are increasingly demanding

transparency in labeling for example - don't we have a right to know what we are feeding our children? If we don't want to feed our children foods containing GMO's then we have a right to do that but we need labeling laws to inform contents more accurately. When farmers in Japan and indeed in Canada begin to grow food that consumers actually want to eat there is success, gratitude and wellbeing on both sides. Gen and Yoko are taking the lead whether they know it or not. They just need more encouragement and to know that they are not alone in their struggle and that their frustrations are shared by farmers everywhere.

The National Farmers Union has a lot in common with our brothers and sisters in NOUMINREN and SHOKKENREN. On either side of the globe we are doing what we can to ensure that the family farm that is producing safe, nutrient-dense foods is the focal point for food security and food sovereignty in our respective countries. The NFU, along with our international counterparts in La Via Campesina, will continue to work at all levels as we struggle for the rights of farmers and consumers. —nfu—



*Via Campesina protest outside the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya Japan, October 2010. Colleen Ross, accompanied by Japanese farmers from Via Campesina member organization in Japan, and allies. Protesting the corporate takeover and agenda that is currently influencing the United Nations.*



# Growing Forward II may leave farmers and eaters with nothing to eat

-by Colleen Ross, NFU 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President

The future for farms and food, according to some alleged experts, will focus primarily on more genetically engineered crops and livestock, more international trade agreements, tighter controls on farmers rights, no support for local food or infrastructure, tighter regulations, and more land used for growing monocultures for bio-fuels. This was the resounding message at *The Future of Farms and Food Conference*, which was absurdly touted as the “first annual Canadian agriculture policy conference.” This is not true.

The conference was an initiative of the Canadian Agriculture Economics Society (CAES) and co-hosted by Agriculture Canada. It was held at the Chateau Laurier Hotel, Ottawa, January 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011. According to the organizing committee, made up of CAES members and academics, the information presented was “cutting edge” and will evidently “shape both national and international agriculture policy.” Panels were made up almost exclusively of professors, CEO’s, and industry representatives. No actual farmers were asked to speak.

There were a few farmers in attendance, including producers of dairy, poultry, beef, hogs, grains, oilseeds, fruits, and vegetables. The farming sectors were well represented by actual farmers on the floor. The response from those of us that lined up at the microphones served as a

hardy slap-down, especially on the final morning after the closing panel. It was the highlight for me, to hear farmers and a couple of other rational people tell the organizers that their vision for food and our farms has a lot of gaps and is seriously short-sighted, offering nothing new or encouraging, economically viable or exciting for farmers.

Yet, *The Future of Farms and Food* is indeed an exciting topic. The NFU has done excellent research, which proves that regardless of market access, new technologies, biotech crops and the host of other “solutions” that have been marketed to farmers, rural Canada and farmers are not any further ahead. Our overall debt continues to outrun our income, and outside of supply management there is no hope for stability.

Some of the policies we need include the following: government support for the rebuilding of infrastructure in our rural communities, including processing facilities; the rebuilding of our transportation routes, especially in the prairies; the elimination of redundant trade; the replacement of “free” trade with fair equitable trade; the scaling back of burdensome, inappropriate regulations; and, the re-investment in appropriate public research.

As evidenced by the conference in Ottawa, farmers and citizens must attend regional Growing Forward II consultations to give input and reality checks, and not let these people get away with determining our future without consulting us first. Farmers and eaters should have say in the future of our food and our farms. —nfu—

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*NFU Vice President of Policy Colleen Ross owns and operates Waratah Downs Farm in eastern Ontario along with her partner John Weatherhead.*



# Are Farmers' Markets fooling us?

- by Ann Slater, NFU Region 3 Board Member and Joan Brady, NFU Women's President

Farmers' markets are an ancient tradition built around farmers bringing their farm produce, whether that be fruit, vegetables, poultry or livestock, from the farm to local villages and towns to sell in the town square or other public spaces. Across Canada and North America, more and more farmers' markets are springing up, with an increase in the number of both vendors and shoppers at many markets. In Ontario, the number of farmers' markets has been increasing steadily since the late 1980's. This suggests the increased interest in farmers' markets is not just a result of the increasing interest in local food, but that farmers' markets have contributed to creating the interest in local food. It has also created an interest in those who merely re-sell produce from the Ontario Food Terminal or other wholesalers.

Despite the growth of farmers' markets, it is difficult to find a definition of a 'farmers' market'. The image of rows of farmers selling their own fresh produce is a great marketing tool, and touches our desire to support our local farmers. In fact, a 2009 Farmers' Markets Ontario Impact Study showed that 93% of farmers' market shoppers rated buying from bona fide local farmers as important, and 69% went to farmers' markets to support local farmers. In addition, the shoppers interviewed assumed that all the vendors at farmers' markets were local.

As many farmers' market vendors and shoppers know, not all farmers' markets are filled with local farmers selling fresh, local produce. Resellers, or vendors who purchase produce from wholesalers or food terminals, are regular vendors at some farmers' markets, and for shoppers visiting those farmers' markets it can be difficult to sort out who are the real farmers and who are the 'pretend' farmers. A main motivator for shopping at a farmers' market is to understand the story and production practices behind the food that is purchased. The discovery by a shopper that all vendors are not necessarily local farmers, could affect not only their relationship with the vendor in question but all farmers at the market. For both vendors and shoppers, a farmers' market is very much about building relationships based on trust and mutual respect.

Individual farmers' markets and provincial farmers' market associations are looking at strategies to separate the 'true' farmers' markets from those farmers' markets with 'resellers'. Individual farmers' markets are able to

create by-laws and rules and regulations which focus on local farmers, bakers and food processors, and prohibit resellers from selling at their farmers' markets. In some cases, the by-laws are written so that farmers can sell some produce from neighbouring local farmers/food producers, as long as the bulk of the produce sold is from the vendor's farm and that produce from neighbours be identified.

Farmers' Markets Ontario (FMO) has two programs designed to highlight the true or 'bona fide' vendors at farmers' markets in the province. The *My Pick* verification program identifies farmers' market vendors who sell only their own produce through farm inspections, signage and marketing material. FMO is also involved in the *My Market Certified Local Farmers' Market* program in the Toronto area, which verifies all vendors at the market sell only what they produce themselves.

In Alberta, you must *Make It, Bake It, Grow It In Alberta* to sell at an Alberta Approved Farmers' Market. Membership in the BC Association of Farmers' Markets is only open to those farmers' markets who are comprised exclusively of vendors who make, bake, grow or raise their product and the majority of the vendors must be selling products of BC origin. Although not as strict, Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia, also has restrictions on which markets can be members of the association, favouring those markets who are focused on real farmers and local produce.

For the past two years, the Perth/Oxford NFU Local in southwestern Ontario has given financial support to the St. Marys Farmers' Market to help the market promote the local farmers and local produce at the market. When discussing the request, the local executive made the decision that it would only support farmers' markets that are producer-based and have regulations prohibiting resellers. Whether you are visiting a farmers' market as a shopper or considering becoming a farmers' market vendor, ask questions and find out if the 'farmers' at the market are all true farmers and whether or not the farmers' market itself is a farmer-focused market.

—nfu—



# The Beingessner Award for Excellence in Writing

*The National Farmers Union (NFU) would like to congratulate Charly Allen (19 years old) of Wolfe Island, Ontario, who is the first runner up of the inaugural Paul Beingessner Award.*

*The Beingessner Award is part of the NFU Youth's Campaign for New Farmers, and is given to the author (age 21 years or under) of the best 500-1000 word essay on agriculture and food issues in Canada. This year's theme was The Importance of Family Farms in Canada.*

*The Beingessner Award is named after Paul Beingessner of Truax, Saskatchewan, who passed away in the spring of 2009 in a tragic farm accident. Described as the "god-father of modern shortline railways" by former NFU President Stewart Wells, Paul was instrumental in the founding of Saskatchewan's first shortline railway, Southern Rails Co-operative. Beingessner also worked with the Ministry of Highways Short Line Advisory Unit supporting the efforts of other farmers to start shortline railways, served as a Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Delegate, and was an ardent supporter of the Canadian Wheat Board. In his later years, Beingessner was perhaps best known for his weekly column on farming and transportation issues with a social justice focus featured in papers across Western Canada.*

*Below is Charley Allen's essay.*

## Importance of Family Farms in Canada

—by Charly Allen

Inspiration comes in many forms. Yesterday, in a seldom-visited drawer, in a seldom-visited university residence building, abandoned in the heart of a Canadian industrial stronghold, I came across a treasure trove of a roommate, a gold mine of convenience. From a drawer I had thought empty, I was suddenly confronted with the baleful glare of several hundred prepackaged knife-and-fork-and-napkin sets, standing like minutemen at the bottom of the disused cranny had been their home for the last eight months. I revisited my brief mental list of reasons why one might stockpile disposable cutlery – had some meteorological catastrophe caused a worldwide shortage? Had drought crippled the fertile spoon-growing regions of Central America? Or had the solemn ranks of polyethylene originated from a single promiscuous pair, multiplying like a fungus in the dark?

The mechanisms underlying one's decision to subsist on disposable utensils alone for an eight-month period were perplexing, and they jolted into my attention a phenomenon I had been subconsciously noting for months. At no time was it more apparent than during move-out week, when the clamour of garbage trucks had become a daily rather than a weekly occurrence, a parade of minivans greedily swallowed the contents of every apartment unit, and the flotsam of a year's study spilled out into the street. Items that arrived with the best of intentions departed like unwelcome houseguests or inmates on parole: small appliances squatted sadly on the sidewalks, watching mountains of Styrofoam packing spring up, perhaps driven by the tectonic activity of old shoes.

I could easily have chosen any aspect of this spectacular carnival of waste as the topic of my writing, but I will limit myself to one in particular – food, and its provenance and consumption. The fork-and-knife find is emblematic of the indifference of my peers to the meals they eat – convenience is a highly prized commodity, and eating often becomes a chore, an unwanted

*(continued on page 20...)*



interlude between whatever pivotal activities fill the student's time. And they must be crucial indeed, if the time to wash a fork cannot be spared (Did my roommate moonlight as an air traffic controller?). In the peculiar and insular community that is a university, it is easy to take for granted the enormous infrastructure that is in place to ensure one can order a pizza at midnight, or a banana in midwinter.

On Thanksgiving, Christmas, and several other self-declared holidays, I return to my family's home, a budding organic farm near Kingston, Ontario. There, for a few weeks a year, I am unplugged from the elaborate life-support system that sustains my classmates and witness, in microcosm, the efforts that go into feeding a nation. Trees and peas are planted, poultry is perceived as more than protein on legs, and the refrigerator is filled year-round with often enigmatic seasonal produce (is it any wonder supermarkets don't airlift lamb's quarters, year-round, to the seasonally bereft public?). The knowledge that one's dinner has traveled less than two hundred yards from peat to plate is a potent antidote to the commodification of food that has gripped the Pop-Tart-fuelled, breakfast-cereal-powered, Spam-abetted, bipedal conglomerations of corn starch that inhabit the postsecondary institutions of today. Eating from a family farm, or even a friendly farm, reforges the tenuous link between eater and eatee, sweeping aside what paradigms the intrepid eater may have harboured about the source of their food, and its importance to their lives. It circumvents the long and tortuous path that much of our food is forced to navigate en route to our plates, and shuns the preservatives and airliner fuel that guide it along its way. It supports the judicious management of our natural resources, the notion of the farm as a closed system rather than a flowchart. It is dropping off the gastronomical grid, and it may well be the quickest route to good health, environmental responsibility, and large, irregularly shaped, and peculiarly coloured carrots.

I generalize, of course – I have jointly alluded to the organic farmer, the “locavore”, the purveyor of free-range and ethically raised livestock, as well as all those who embrace the ideals of sustainable agriculture, and rail against industrial and large-scale

control of our nation's larder. It is naïve to paint all family farms with the same optimistic brush, when they too, after all, are subject to the realities that drive their industrial counterparts to ill practices. Nevertheless, I believe that it is the small farmer that is best equipped and most likely to uphold the ideals that will feed our future and safeguard our soil, water, and air.

Do I mean to say that a brief visit to a farmer's market, or even a lengthy association with a sustainable farming cooperative, is enough to tremble the foundations of the modern eater's psyche? Perhaps not. Whether or not one cares to notice, the eater of today is a lost soul, adrift in a sea of nutritional science and pseudo-science, unwilling to cede the time and money required to genuinely *feed*, rather than sustain, oneself. They are kept afloat by the abundance of petroleum they were fortunate enough to inherit from an ill-fated troupe of dinosaurs. The cost of this convenience is poor health and environmental degradation, trends that have both come to be considered the norm. Family farms are among the last relics of the day when the social and environmental benefits of keeping Canadians alive and walking through ethical, responsible, and sustainable means were respected. This was less due to scientifically verifiable knowledge than to the accumulated body of experience that generations of self-sustenance, community, and hard work had yielded. The return to prominence of the family farm can only be driven by a fundamental renewal of the Canadian eater's *attitude*, a reconfiguration of the automatons that roam the supermarkets of 2010. Then, perhaps, the plastic fork can be relegated to the museums and punch lines where it belongs.

—nfu—





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*(Report from the Women's President, from page 4)*

research and development and new markets. We want to make sure that farmers get their money from the marketplace not the mailbox.”

I was frustrated by the lack of real consultation, the assumption that the CFA spoke for all Canadians, and that we all need to agree on the endpoint. As a matter of fact, I believe there is very little in the strategy to engage consumers, a very important participant in any conversation about food and the future. In fact, significant change will not occur without some public support and understanding of the issues. I commented to the organizers that as written, the Strategy was not really about food but rather was an Agri-business strategy. The devil, as they say, will be in the details, as some of the action plans will be developed in the upcoming months. It will, I am afraid, be more of the same.

In the CFA National Food Strategy there is very little analysis of the root of the problem – a farm income crisis – that has resulted in mounting debt, lack of new entrants, and no acknowledgement of the extreme levels of capital needed to finance slim margins of production. Efficiency, Competitiveness and Innovation – the catch words of Agriculture in the current millennium are rather empty when we consider a future that may include many more billion mouths to feed, with less energy and expertise in changing climate conditions. Somehow, I don't feel so secure.

*Joan Brady,  
Women's President*

*(Region 1 Report, from page 6)*

The revised agreement has potentially negative consequences for farmers, and farm leaders were not consulted about the changes. The language of the amended agreement does not adequately protect the regulatory provisions required to manage supply management industries. Since technical measures are not clearly defined, what can or cannot be challenged under the dispute resolution procedures is murky at best. For example, a panel decision in the fall of 2010 ordered changes to the Ontario Milk Act in a dispute between western oilseed processors and the Ontario dairy industry regulations regarding imitation dairy products. Commercial interests could undermine Provincial regulations under the dispute resolution procedures that were strengthened in the new agreement, which now include financial penalties for non-compliance.

### *Preservation of Agricultural Land in Nova Scotia*

An interesting report on land has been published this fall by the NS Agricultural Land Review Committee. The committee was appointed to investigate preservation of agricultural land in Nova Scotia. It determined that for the province to provide enough food for Nova Scotians based on the Canada Food Guide, it would require 53,000 hectares of extra land in food crops at current average yields. Several challenges to meeting this land deficit were identified. First, declining farm profitability has resulted in farm-land abandonment. Also, development pressures are removing and fragmenting farmland. Thirdly, loss of fertility appears to be increasing therefore depleting the soil's capacity to produce food. Finally, rising sea level is threatening the high quality dyke land, which accounts for almost 10% of the active farmland base.

*Randall Affleck*





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Youth Advisory Committee: *Farrah Carter*, Sackville, NB; *Caitlin Hall*, Palmerston, ON; *Annalisa Schoppe*, Poplar Point, MB; *Brenda Bakken*, Archerwill, SK; *Lara Smith*, Rycroft, AB.



## NATIONAL FARMERS UNION FINANCIAL SERVICES

NEWDALE SHOPPING CENTRE, 2999B PEMBINA HIGHWAY, WINNIPEG, MB R3T 2H5

PHONE: (204) 261-0500 - FAX: (204) 275-5396

### NFU INCOME TAX SERVICE 2011 MANITOBA RURAL VISIT SCHEDULE

<u>TOWN</u>	<u>HOTEL</u>	<u>DATES</u>
SWAN RIVER	SUPER 8 MOTOR HOTEL	FEBRUARY 15 <sup>TH</sup> & 16 <sup>TH</sup>
ROBLIN	ROBLIN MOTOR INN	FEBRUARY 17 <sup>TH</sup> TO 24 <sup>TH</sup>
MELITA	---	FEBRUARY 28 <sup>TH</sup>
KILLARNEY	---	MARCH 1 <sup>ST</sup> AND 2 <sup>ND</sup>
MORDEN	MORDEN MOTOR INN	MARCH 3 <sup>RD</sup> TO 10 <sup>TH</sup>
ARBORG	ZANS FAMILY INN	MARCH 14 <sup>TH</sup> TO 16 <sup>TH</sup>
SHOAL LAKE	---	MARCH 21 <sup>ST</sup>
RUSSELL	RUSSELL INN	MARCH 22 <sup>ND</sup> TO 24 <sup>TH</sup>
TREHERNE	CREEKSIDE HIDEAWAY MOTEL	MARCH 28 <sup>TH</sup> TO 31 <sup>ST</sup>
PORTAGE	CANAD INNS	APRIL 4 <sup>TH</sup> TO 8 <sup>TH</sup>
FISHER BRANCH	FISHER BRANCH MOTOR HOTEL	APRIL 11 <sup>TH</sup> AND 12 <sup>TH</sup>
MINNEDOSA	GATEWAY MOTEL	APRIL 13 <sup>TH</sup> & 14 <sup>TH</sup>
CYPRESS RIVER	---	APRIL 11 <sup>TH</sup> TO 13 <sup>TH</sup>