

THE
union farmer

QUARTERLY

Summer 2013



Vol. 19 Issue 2



Photo: Paul Slomp, with his son Felix dressed up in a calf costume, at the “Stop GM Alfalfa” Rally outside of the CFIA Variety Registration Office in Ottawa on April 9, 2013. *(photo by Connie Tabbert of Renfrew County)*

Message from the Editor...



“Sow one and reap hundreds” – an observation far too simple to capture the attention of governments around the world, yet too profound to be ignored by those who care – civil society organizations of

farmers, fishers, labourers in countries around the world.

In that succinct phrase, Nandini Jairam, member of La Via Campesina and peasant farmer from Karnataka, India, captured the critical role that seed plays in ensuring the survival of our planet and the life it supports. Jairam was quoted in a March 31 statement from the World Social Forum in Tunisia (*If We Rely on Corporate Seed, We Lose Food Sovereignty*) saying: “There are four pillars of agriculture ... soil, water, seeds, and peasants. A seed is miraculous. A seed has life – you sow one and you reap hundreds.”

Seed is also top of mind in the NFU lately: GM alfalfa and changes to Canada’s variety registration process; intellectual property rights and farmers’ rights to save and replant seed; alterations to the balance between public and private interests and influence in research. Ownership, control and benefit from seed have been transferred to the private interests of seed companies, and Canadians risk the loss or appropri-

ation of germplasm developed over decades by thoughtlessly defunded public interest research teams who must compete against each other for limited funding. Perhaps these teams are being released to feed the private research mill – supposedly the true source of innovation.

The measure of which is more innovative – the public sector or the private sector – is relatively simple: What does the evidence say? In a report titled “GMOs: Fooling – er, “feeding” – the world for 20 years”, GRAIN calls genetic engineering a “stalled science,” saying that “Monsanto most notoriously, along with Dupont, Syngenta, BASF, Bayer and Dow, dominate GE research and patents, corner 60% of the world seed market, and control 76% of the world agrichemical market. Yet all the profitable “science” owned by these companies comes down to two and only two traits: herbicide-tolerance and Bt.” That’s it: after 20 years and billions of dollars, just two traits – regularly reinvented and repackaged in rhythm with patent expiry dates. What is innovative in that?

Just the other day (May 16), Ag Minister Gerry Ritz announced the Canadian Wheat Alliance (CWA) between the federal and provincial governments and the University of Saskatchewan. Over its first five years, the CWA will coordinate \$97 million in public money for “research and development projects to improve the yield of Canadian wheat by reducing losses under extreme weather conditions such as drought, heat, cold and diseases ... improve the quality of Canadian wheat,

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union farmer quarterly

Official publication of the National Farmers Union

2717 Wentz Avenue, Saskatoon, SK S7K 4B6

Telephone: 306-652-9465 — Fax: 306-664-6226 — E-mail: nfu@nfu.ca — Website: www.nfu.ca

PRINTED AT ST. PETER'S PRESS, MUENSTER, SK. AGREEMENT No.40063391, POSTAGE PAID AT MUENSTER, SASKATCHEWAN.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATE:

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

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

Spring greetings from Saskatchewan, where we still have large snow banks to melt as I write this report on May 7.

I would like to start by thanking all who have donated so generously to the NFU. Your donations are critical to help our ongoing work to advance farmers' interests.

I recently participated in a call with the Canadian Grain Commission (CGC) and other farm organizations to discuss complaints about Canadian wheat quality made by some of our international buyers. Apparently, gluten strength in Canadian hard red spring wheat has been low, due in part to growing conditions, but mainly because three wheat varieties that have become popular and widely grown on the prairies have gluten strength on the low end of desired standards. This issue points exactly to why the NFU is arguing strongly to retain merit and the requirement for three-year multi-location field trials as part of the seed variety registration process in those crop kinds subject to variety registration.

Currently, information about a variety's performance and characteristics gathered from field trials is evaluated by an independent committee of experts who recommend whether the variety should be registered to be commercially grown. This system was originally established to protect farmers from unscrupulous seed sellers whose claims about their variety or seed were not borne out in the field. I made the case during the CGC call that maintaining a robust variety registration system is essential to stop similar problems from becoming commonplace and destroying our markets for quality grain, especially since we will never be able to compete on volume sales. We are too far from port and transportation costs would eat up any returns from low quality grains.

AAFC and other farm organizations are proposing changes to the Seeds Act that will erode our system of variety registration testing and merit requirements, arguing that multi-year, multi-location field trials delay access to innovation. They also want merit removed from registration requirements, and varieties registered based only on data submitted by the company. This means that, in the absence of the independent information used to make decisions, farmers will become field-testers, and will bear the risks and costs of how or whether such varieties perform in the field for potentially many crop kinds.

Herein lays the trap of the innovation agenda advanced by industry and various agriculture ministers. Seed companies want total control over seed, with intellectual property advantages to allow them to maximize seed prices and collect downstream royalties on a farmer's entire production. They also want to bring new varieties to the market through the cheapest regulatory route possible, and to have the right to withdraw their varieties from the market by cancelling registration as they see fit. These changes favour seed companies and will put farmers on a variety treadmill, constantly requiring them to purchase seed for new and more expensive varieties because those same companies have withdrawn older but perfectly good varieties. Variety registration will no longer maximize public good, but will maximize private profit for seed developers.

What is not addressed in the changes proposed is their effect on the social contract between the public, government and other players like seed companies. A variety registered through our public institutions immediately becomes more valuable because it is deemed suitable for commercial planting in Canada. Farmers can purchase and plant the variety, and sell the result. If the variety is good, farmers will grow it until some need for change arises. Withdrawing a

(continued on page 20...)



A message from the...



Women's Vice President

— by Kathleen Charpentier

I came across a gem of a book, *Nature Feeds Us* (NFU) – *The Food System from Soil to Table*, first printed in 1975 by Modern Press, Saskatoon. It was a collaborative effort by NFU members across Canada, and the foreword was written by Evelyn Potter, NFU women's president and Roy Atkinson, NFU national president.

For me, the following paragraph sums up the ideals expressed in the book *Nature Feeds Us*:

"The world will not survive on the practice of conventional wisdom. The world can only survive if its capacity to produce food is extended, if the soil, water and air can be protected from pollution and from other forms of contamination induced as society rushes headlong in its pursuit of profits at any price, even if it means the destruction of mankind."

Nature Feeds Us addresses issues that remain relevant today: soil (soil composition, organic gardening, factory farming and gardening); food (nutrition, diet, additives, food pollution, advertising and packaging); marketing, distribution and corporate control of food; the food system (transportation, vertical integration and contract farming); and health (food allergies, recipes, contributions from medical doctors).

I was in awe of the layered, well-researched and informative way the book was put together. That 38 years later, these topics remain relevant is even more impressive, and proof that we in the NFU are always looking forward to stimulate debate that will create a better world for farmers and all citizens. In fact, the book's relevance is so impressive that the Women's Advisory is putting

it in a digital format so that it can be posted on our NFU website.

As I contemplated the book's title, it occurred to me that *Nature Feeds Us* is exactly what many fail to recognize in developing policies about food and farming. Nature does feed us, and when we separate ourselves from nature – from working with nature – we lose a great deal. Soil microbiological activity changes and once-fertile soils become deserts. We treat animals as factory widgets instead of living, sensing beings. Our food is so over-processed that it lacks nutritional value or worse, actually causes harm.

And yet, as a society, we yearn to be connected to Mother Earth.

Paging through *Nature Feeds Us*, I reflected about what brings people to become members of the National Farmers Union. What occurred to me is that it is probably exactly the same thing that resulted in this book being written: the belief that when we stand together for the common good of all, we are bigger in this world.

Members of the NFU are determined to create what we believe in: small and medium-sized family farms that safely grow healthy, nutritious food. This is what we stood for 38 years ago, what we stand for today, and what we will stand for 38 years into the future.

I am so proud to belong to the NFU.

*In Union,
Kathleen Charpentier*



A message from the...



Cammie Harbottle,
Youth President

Youth

Youth share experiences, discern inner wisdom; plan actions to expand, deepen connections

I don't eat pork, but I couldn't resist the ham at the NFU youth meeting. Wrapped in a few special herbs and spices, tucked into a bed of high-quality hay, the ham was left to slowly cook all afternoon while we engaged in passionate discussions about the seven pillars of food sovereignty and the benefits of a good farm organization.

This was the nature of our recent youth meeting at Waldegrave Farm in Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia.

From a rock in the Pacific Ocean to the snow-swept farmyards of the prairies; from the rock-strewn fields of southern Ontario to the strawberry fields of NB; twelve youth members came from far and wide

to participate in our fifth annual national Youth gathering, March 21-25. A combination of new and old faces brought a mix of energy, enthusiasm, and experience to the table, and made for passionate discussions and productive activities.



Alex Fletcher,
Youth Vice President

Building on experiences from previous youth meetings, the primary goal was that participants developed the skills, knowledge and resources to organize in their own regions. We also hoped to engage other young farmers in the Maritimes, and to gain an understanding of what young farmers are looking for in a farm organization. With this in mind, we used participatory adult education processes to develop knowledge and understanding of issues important to us, including the general history and purpose of unions, collectives and activism, and NFU history and policy positions. With guidance and support from NFU Women's President, Joan Brady, we had two days of meetings, games, good food and fun, followed by a full-day meeting where we hosted Maritime farmers and put our facilitation skills and new-found knowledge into action.

Over the weekend, we shared stories of our farms and experiences. We imagined what a food sovereign food system could look like and we talked about our roles, as individuals and as a farm organization, within that vision. And of course, we ate.

(continued on page 6...)



Photo: Pork and Beans! From the Red Deer River to the Red River, Blake Hall and Dean Harder enjoy Prairie Gold ham and some Harder Family Beans.

We ate very well. We ate pepperettes from Manitoulin Island, Harder baked beans, cured meat from the Mills farm (the leftovers of which, by the way, became the favorite midnight snack of my vegetarian partner...), Coral's kimchi, squash from the Frazer-Chaisson farm in Rogersville, and a fine Berkshire's leg, grazed in the heart of Alberta's grasslands.

We discovered through a series of activities and discussion that we had a whole lot of passion, experience, knowledge and expertise right there within the group. We set the context of our discussions with a brief presentation about the history of the NFU and some of the major struggles and successes over the past 43 years. It was inspiring to be reminded of the dedication, determination and initiative of farmers across the country, and of the NFU's unrelenting commitment to bring our voices to the forefront. What became apparent was what farmers' struggled with 40 years ago is not so different from what we face today; it is as important as ever for us to join forces and take action.

On all accounts, the meeting was a success. We not only discussed the challenges we face as individual farmers and members of the NFU - we started building solutions. Many of our discussions came back to communication and its importance. How can we communicate all of the important work that the NFU is doing? How can we make sure people – farmers, eaters, politicians, everyone – are aware of the critical issues that we all face? How can we engage more members – in particular, more youth? These questions are fundamental to the organization. And we NFU youth have a lot of interest, ideas, and experience in communications, both in traditional print and social media, and we have a keen interest in making things happen. Over the next months, you will see the action outcomes of our discussions in the form of op-eds, articles, blog posts, and facebook action, so stay tuned!

Though there was still snow on the ground Sunday morning, I think we all left filled with the energy and inspiration necessary to sustain us for another season of farming and of activism.

In Union, Cammie and Alex



Photo: NFU Youth and Maritime farmers meet in Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia to talk food sovereignty and farming.



Regional Reports



ONE (PEI/New Brunswick)

REGION



- by Randall Affleck

New Brunswick: NFU in NB continues to lobby for a NB logo identifying NB produced products.

The New Brunswick government will close the provincial laboratory as a cost cutting measure. Farmers will have to take their samples to regional agricultural offices, which will send samples to PEI for analysis.

NFU in NB continues to encourage farmers to join the National Farmers Union and provides a monthly electronic newsletter to all members.

We would like to thank Mel Jellett, Executive Director for the NFU in NB, for her work with our organization during the last two years. She has completed her Master's degree and now must find full-time work. The part-time ED position is now open to applicants. Those interested should contact Barb Somerville by email: nfuinb@gmail.com.

Carver Commission on the Lands Protection Act: The NFU in PEI has participated in several public hearings on a review of the Lands Protection Act. Members developed an excellent brief that we presented in early April. Mr. Carver is preparing his report for a June release. Both the PEI Federation of Agriculture and the PEI Potato Board are pushing to increase the aggregate land holdings significantly. The NFU believes the current limits are adequate and that removing limits would further consolidate farm size on PEI, and open land ownership up to investment land companies.

Task Force on Land Use: During May, there is also a public consultation taking place across PEI on land use issues ranging from erosion to water quality to strip development. Over ninety percent of the land does not fall under regulatory planning. Ten percent of the land falls under municipal planning

rules. The NFU is

preparing a brief for this group too.

If you are interested in learning more about it or reading their draft discussion paper, here is the link to the consultation site: <http://bit.ly/15YDIZu>.

Erosion: This has been a particularly bad winter and spring for soil erosion on Prince Edward Island. A significant thawing event mid-winter left a lot of bare ground exposed to the wind, and there has been a lot of water erosion this spring. In the potato belt region of central PEI, I would estimate that close to eighty (80) per cent of the land remains exposed in the fall of the year.

About sixty (60) per cent of the potato market now is for long-season potato varieties that are harvested in late October, too late to establish a cover crop. With livestock numbers down so much, traditional markets for forage and barley as rotation crops have declined. Farmers are trying to grow non-traditional crops here; for example, canola, soybeans, milling wheat and grain corn. Almost all the corn planted is Roundup Ready and most of the soybeans too. Roundup use now is routine, and many believe it is having a seriously negative impact on soil structure.

District Conventions: Both NB and PEI had District Conventions this spring, and full executives were elected. In PEI, Steven MacKinnon was elected District Director replacing Elwin Wyand and Byron Petrie replaced Megan MacCallum as Youth District Director. Neither Elwin nor Megan stood for re-election. Thank you so much Elwin and Megan for your work over the past several years.

Dry Spring So Far: As I write this on May 6, it is unusually dry and a great deal of the crop has been planted. Many are spooked that it could be a dry summer like last year.

Regional Convention: Mark your calendar for the Region 1 Regional Convention to be held on August 6 at the Dutch Inn in Cornwall, PEI.

Hope everyone has a great farming year!

In Union, Randall Affleck



REGION

ONE (New Brunswick)

- by Jean-Eudes Chiasson

Si le Nouveau-Brunswick est la seule province officiellement bilingue du Canada, elle est aussi celle où l'information est la plus concentrée, la grande majorité des médias appartenant au groupe Irving. L'agriculture y joue un rôle de moins en moins important entre autres parce que nous sommes une des quelques provinces au Canada n'ayant aucune institution d'enseignement supérieur traitant d'agriculture. De plus, la politique agricole de notre province est très souvent calquée sur celle du fédéral, celle-ci étant axée sur la production pour l'exportation. Cette forme de production est louable et importante pour le milieu agricole et économique du Nouveau-Brunswick, mais c'est dommage qu'elle ne s'accompagne pas d'une politique d'alimentation locale. De plus, cet accent sur la production pour exportation est dévastateur pour les régions qui ne sont pas orientées à ces fins. Nous voyons ces régions se vider de leurs producteurs et les terres y poussent en broussailles. Les agriculteurs n'y voient aucun avenir pour leurs enfants, ou encore, plusieurs ont dû abandonner faute d'assistance suffisante.

Nous croyons qu'il faut impérativement changer les choses et ce, avec la mise en œuvre d'une agriculture parallèle, qui serait fondée sur l'alimentation de proximité et misant sur l'agriculture nourricière. Cela étant dit, si nous cherchons à changer nos communautés, nous devons aussi changer nos façons de faire en tant qu'agriculteurs. Nous devons travailler de façon plus coopérative, partager davantage nos équipements, notre travail de mise en marché et surtout, cesser de voir nos voisins comme notre concurrence. Nous devons aussi reconnaître que,

face au conglomérat agricole, l'union fait la force.

Comme l'a si bien dit Vandana Shiva, une activiste Indienne de passage à Sackville l'an dernier, nous devons faire disparaître la peur de notre être et ce faisant, le monde deviendra très différent. Comme je l'ai répété à plusieurs reprises, les agriculteurs doivent diversifier leurs méthodes afin d'y inclure la résistance active et la provocation. La désobéissance civile doit s'inscrire dans notre langage et dans nos actions. De cette façon nous donneront écho à nos paroles plutôt que de les voir se perdre dans le vent.

Notre rôle en tant qu'agriculteurs ne se limite pas à la production puisque nous avons aussi la responsabilité de léguer aux prochaines générations la capacité de se nourrir. Nos gouvernements conservateurs/Irving ou libéraux/Irving ne se préoccupent nullement de cette responsabilité. Leur seule préoccupation demeure l'avidité du profit. Certes, depuis plus de vingt ans, nos gouvernements signent des accords de libre-échange avec des pays lointains, et ainsi, nous soumettent à une « course vers le bas » en matière d'environnement et de main d'œuvre. Trop souvent l'agriculture est une petite monnaie de négociation, et on se débarrasse des agriculteurs comme de la vieille ferraille à peine bonne à recyclée.

En tant qu'agriculteur, nous pouvons soit regarder passer l'histoire ou nous pouvons nous lever et devenir les architectes de notre destin. Je continue de croire que nous devons nous impliquer en matière de politique agricole afin de créer un monde où nos enfants et les générations subséquentes pourront se nourrir convenablement. La chose qui me préoccupe et la seule peur qui me hante n'est pas de faire la mauvaise chose mais de ne pas en faire assez.

Jean-Eudes Chiasson
Président UNF-N-B



NFU-O REGION THREE (Ontario)



- by John Sutherland

Why have I added NFU-O to the heading? Well, as the far as Ontario's Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Appeals Tribunal is concerned, it is very significant. The reasons for the dismissal for NFU-O's request for accreditation were finally received in mid April after months of waiting. Help in achieving this was given by the Ministry of Agriculture bringing a writ of mandamus against the Tribunal. According to the Tribunal, the NFU-O does not even have standing to apply for accreditation as a general farm organization (GFO) in Ontario, because in their eyes the affairs of Ontario members are being directed solely by the NFU. It would appear that the Tribunal has been overly influenced by some who have a lot of ill will towards the NFU-O.

This whole debacle has been the focus of the NFU-O's agenda since May 2012 when all three farm organizations were denied accreditation. During the proceedings in December, the Ministry made representations supporting our application, because in their view, some of the sections of Farm Registrations and Farm Organizations Funding Act, 1993 are being misinterpreted by the Tribunal. This same group has widened their scope of investigation far beyond what is laid out in the act. After receiving the reasons, Council held two very productive conference call meetings which went late into the night. The third meeting included many members who were part of the NFU-O's incorporation as well as members of the National Board. Their input was very instructive and enlightening. On Monday, May 6, a news release rebutting the dismissal was issued. (see www.nfuontario.ca for a copy of the release). NFU-O Council has also requested a meeting with the Ministry of Agriculture.

Our work has also continued in other areas. At the NFU-O AGM/Region 3 Convention, members issued a call for a Day of Action which was held on April 9 in 38 cities across Canada. Council member, Karen Eatwell,

worked with point persons, Ann Slater, NFU-O and Lucy Sharratt, CBAN to make the day a resounding success. Various other NGO organizations joined in making their feelings and concerns known to Federal and Provincial politicians as well as some of the organizations pushing their unwanted products. There is an effort by such companies under way to try and persuade the general public that GM and non-GM alfalfa can co-exist. I wonder if bees can tell the difference?

Bees are in the picture in another way. There are very serious concerns arising from bee die-offs. The bees are getting it from left and right. Much evidence is pointing to the use of neonicotinoid treated corn seed. The company Syngenta is issuing directions on how to avoid the poison getting to places and plants where bees go to gather nectar. This seems to me to be an admission of guilt on their part. A nation-wide campaign may need to be mounted against the use of such chemicals especially as the E.U. is proposing a two-year ban, as was reported in an article on bees in the British paper *The Guardian*. In the same article, the European Health Commissioner, Tonio Borg, was quoted as saying, "I pledge to my utmost to ensure that our bees, which are so vital to our eco-system and contribute over 22 billion Euros (\$29 billion) annually to European agriculture, are protected."

Another item coming to the forefront that is causing much debate is the possible ill effects by those who are living in close proximity to the wind turbines. They are popping up in great numbers all over southern Ontario. Some studies have been undertaken in other parts of the world, and more may be needed in Canada!

After a cold, snowy and often wet and icy late winter, the warm weather has finally arrived. The heralds of summer – grackles, red wings, swallows, vultures, etc. – have now returned. Song birds are once more starting the days with cheerful sounds. The swamps are alive with peepers making us aware of their presence. Farmers "crank up" the machines of the trade and head for the fields which will provide food for us all. However, in many areas some of those machines are bulldozers and backhoes ripping out bush lots and fence lines so as to gain the last piece of land available. Commodity prices are high. Diversity is a low priority for some. Are we creating green deserts?

*John Sutherland, Fellow Member &
NFU-O President*



FIVE (Manitoba)

REGION



- by Ian Robson

Region 5 NFU met recently with Manitoba Minister of Agriculture Food and Rural Initiatives about stable funding, and about setting up wheat or barley checkoff organizations from which farmers must see real benefit. The Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Checkoff (MCEC) of \$2 a head was set up in 2006 to improve access to federally-inspected slaughter capacity. MCEC has collected more than \$6 million, and two projects to increase capacity are under consideration.

The NFU organized three 'Days of Action against GM Alfalfa' in Winnipeg, Steinbach, and Brandon on April 9. Each was well-attended by farmers and consumers concerned about GM alfalfa's inevitable contamination of organic and other fields, despite company claims that "Thou shalt grow only as directed." Just as has happened with GM canola, patented GM alfalfa seed varieties would eventually become the only, and much more expensive, alfalfa variety choices available to farmers. Moreover, would implementation of UPOV '91 mean that farmers would also have to pay royalties on each bale or bushel of seed harvested? We'll see if the federal government listens to farmers and consumers about GM alfalfa, or to the patent holder that just wants to charge farmers more for seed.

Farming in Minister Ritz's post-farmers' Canadian Wheat Board is going as expected: no protein premium - no price premium; quality squabbles with buyers; difficulties with picking selling price and delivery dates. Calls for higher yielding, lower quality grain means higher income for elevators because they will see higher volumes delivered at lower prices. As well, the CWB's logistical support for rail shipment is gone - a fact lamented even by the WGEA. Elevator basis pricing hides demurrage that companies pay at port. The former Wheat Board often earned 'dispatch' - a premium for early loading - which in some years, paid the operational costs of the farmers' CWB. Now, filling a vessel at Vancouver may have to move

Region 5 Annual Convention

Saturday, July 20, 2013

Onanole, Manitoba - 1 PM to 5 PM

The Convention will be followed by a potluck barbeque. Please attend, present, debate and/or vote on the member resolutions that will help guide our regional work in 2013-14. Check your mailbox in the upcoming month for more information.

to several terminals, with each move requiring a tugboat at a cost of \$25,000.

We had a booth at the successful March conference of Food Matters Manitoba. Free-range and organic pork, chicken, lamb and beef producers need access to local abattoirs that might be threatened because of trade or food rules under CETA or TPP.

Ore and mining exploration equipment could now be shipped through Churchill because there is less summer ice. Despite a subsidy post-Wheat Board, 2012-13 grain shipments through the port were lower (as predicted). Grain companies don't like using Churchill, and there is no Coast Guard service.

Dean Harder, Matt Gehl and I spoke with agriculture students at the University of Manitoba Diploma Course about the NFU, and Bev Stow and I spoke at the Seedy Saturday event at Canadian Mennonite University about NFU seed policy.

Join us on July 10 in Winkler for Wilfred (Butch) Harder's induction into the Manitoba Agricultural Hall of Fame, and recognition for his active service as a farm leader in Manitoba, including the NFU.

FYI:

- Farmers can still join the Class Action suit seeking damages for the loss of CWB marketing services. Call me at 204-858-2479 or the National Office for more information.
- Check out our letter (posted on the NFU website) to MP Merv Tweed, chair of the Federal Standing Committee on Agriculture and Food, about seed registration.
- Federal cuts to the Canadian Grain Commission are appalling, as is privatization of bonding.

In Union, Ian Robson



SIX (Saskatchewan)

REGION



- by Ed Sagan

A reminder to all Saskatchewan members: *Have we each signed up two new members yet?* We need lots of help to keep the NFU strong and active during these politically hostile times. Invite neighbours, friends and family to join our efforts to protect farmers and their small and medium-sized family farms as primary producers of food.

The April 11 *Manitoba Co-operator* reported that Chinese companies are complaining of poor quality wheat, and that poor processing consistency in the CWRSW class might prompt them to switch to buying Dark Northeast spring wheat from the U.S. So much for Ritz's free market grain sales!

The board of the NFU Property Consortium agreed to defer National Office rent payments for the last 5 months of 2013 due to financial constraints. The amount deferred of \$7875 will be repaid starting January 2014 over 36 months.

I attended an auction last week at a farm purchased by a B.C corporation, which now owns 700 quarters (about 14 square miles) of Saskatchewan farmland – and there are similar purchases across the province.

In Solidarity, Ed Sagan

Matt Gehl, Region 6 Board Member

Jim Farnley from the University of Regina was the keynote speaker at the Canadian Wheat Board Alliance's (CWBA) AGM in Regina, Feb. 20 – 21. His presentation, "Parliamentary Democracy or Parliamentary Autocracy - What is at Stake?" outlined how the Harper government has changed the Canadian political process. We also heard about how Bill C-18 has affected short line rail, public interest plant breeding and Canadian grain grading and inspection. Emily Eaton, also from the U of R, spoke at the banquet about social movements – their roles and formation.

There was a CWBA meeting to discuss strategy for the upcoming year, and one of the decisions was to hold

meetings in Saskatchewan. The first was in Raymore on March 3, and despite near-blizzard conditions, more than 40 people attended. Ralph Goodale, Malcolm Allen, Cathy Sproule, Jim Harding (retired professor) and representatives from Idle No More, the Pasture Patrons and the Indian Head Tree Nursery each spoke. I talked about the dangers of the increased interest of foreign investment companies in buying Saskatchewan farmland.

Shane LaCasse of Stark & Marsh [accounting] spoke about changes to AgriStability at the Swift Current District NFU annual meeting in Cantaur on March 26. He was very critical, saying that Conservatives have "gutted the program;" that it provides disaster relief coverage instead of compensation for farm income deviations; and that "It's called a business risk management tool, but it's actually a [federal] budget risk management tool." We also talked about working with allies to ensure that food and agricultural policy is driven by farmers and consumers rather than agri-business.

Almost 60 people, including urbanites, rallied in Regina on April 20 to support retention of Prairie Pastures in the public domain. Experts spoke about the need for virgin grasslands to ensure biodiversity in the Canadian prairies. There was also strong support for the Indian Head Tree Farm and Community Pastures among participants at a Fort Qu'Appelle meeting.

Glenn Tait, Region 6 Board Member

Twenty-five NFU and Canadian Biotech Action Network members and supporters rallied in front of Ag Minister Gerry Ritz's office in North Battleford on April 9 at noon as part of the nationwide Day of Action against the possible release of genetically modified alfalfa by Forage Genetics Inc. We received a lot of media attention and drew enthusiastic honks from many passersby. Marcella Pedersen, Region 6 Women's Advisor, gets the prize for the best sign slogan for "*Hands Off My Honey!*"

Region 6 Annual Convention

St. Michael's Retreat Centre
Lumsden, SK - June 26 to 27

*Please call the National Office
(306-652-9465) to register.*



REGION

SEVEN (Alberta)

- by Jan Slomp

Andrew Nikiforuk gave us this quote in his essay, *The Energy of Slaves*: “*Seeing all the wealth from quickly exploring all energy resources and stimulating excessive use of it, it looks as if we are like other nations, we worship money and the possession of it. We have the two Roman conditions; stupendous wealth and inevitable massive corruption and moral blight.*” You would think this is the expression of a contemporary critic of what is going on in Alberta or Canada as a petro-state - where environmental protection is gutted to clear the way for an all-out wholesale of natural resources. However, this quote is from Mark Twain, who wrote those words after seeing a close up of the activities of Rockefeller’s Standard Oil and its massive exploration in the early nineteen hundreds, more than a hundred years ago.

Royalties held hostage: A few years ago after the royalty review by then premier Ed Stelmach, a modest increase in royalties on energy exploration was proposed. The Calgary-based energy sector revolted by holding back investment and keeping their rigs in the yard. The Alberta government had already seen their revenue from natural gas declining due to the massive buildup of reserves and lower prices. And the revolt by oil companies was a serious threat to their other revenue stream. They quickly met the energy sector’s demands to set real royalties lower, to collect them only after three years of royalty-free exploration and to provide other royalty holidays as well. After the dot.com bubble and the housing bubble, energy exploration (and buying

up foreign farm land) is the next bubble. Tax incentives and straight subsidies from the Alberta government are helping the bubble grow, and there is renewed, hyped-up drilling activity everywhere.

Only Treaties protect environment: The NFU is now an official endorser of Idle No More, the movement that started with First Nations and that works closely with the national coalition, Common Causes, to which the NFU also belongs. As food producers, we depend on clean water for our farms and households. The passing of the federal Omnibus bills last fall clearly now makes all Canadians dependent on the treaties signed by First Nations, that bind the government to protect food and water resources. This means that Region 7 is predominantly Treaty 8 territory.

No oil insiders for energy regulators: The NFU wrote a letter opposing the appointment of Gerard Protti as head of the new super-energy regulator in Alberta. Protti was formerly the CEO of Encana, and more recently, the head of CAPP (Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers). How can we trust that a person like Protti will protect the public interest if he is so deeply imbedded in private energy exploration? With Protti as regulator, the interests of the energy sector will trump all other uses and functions of the land. Chief Adams, our Treaty 8 brother from Fort Chipewyan has also used strong words to condemn Protti’s appointment. We will continue to be alert and to work with Chief Adams, Treaty 8 people and Idle No More.

GMO alfalfa: Many Region 7 NFU members participated in protests and rallies and met with MPs on April 9, the Day of Action against GMO alfalfa in Lethbridge, Calgary, Red Deer, Camrose, Edmonton and Grand Prairie (Region 8). In Camrose, 65 people met with MP Kevin Sorensen who listened to our compelling arguments for about 45 minutes, after which he brought up the conversion of Mark Linus, former Greenpeace activist, to GMO enthusiast. We mentioned that Linus is not a scientist, and that his conversion means nothing in the face of overwhelming evidence supporting the risks associated with the development of GMO crops in general, and Roundup Ready crops in particular. The latest testimony is from Dr. Thierry Vrain from Courtenay, BC, who was working for Agriculture Canada. About ten years ago, he became very concerned by studies done in Europe and elsewhere that showed flaws in the North American approval guidelines.

Region 7 Annual Convention

Saturday, June 15, 2013

Thorsby Community Centre

We will be visiting the Mueller goat dairy after the meeting and before the potluck supper.

Watch for details coming to you soon!

In Solidarity, Jan Slomp



EIGHT (B.C./Peace River)

REGION



- by Peter Eggers

Would the Alberta government poison you to fix their budget deficit?

In the Peace River country near the town of Peace River are the westernmost tar sands deposits known. They are different from the world-famous Fort McMurray tar sands projects because the deposits are much deeper, and extraction is not by open pit mine but by drilling.

Bitumen is separated from the sand by boiling the product in large vats with emulsifiers. The vessels are heated by natural gas to over 100°C, producing aromatic hydrocarbons that are vented from those tanks. Shell Oil does not vent; they installed technologies to contain vapours. But others are venting the emissions.

In the area live residents and farmers affected by the hydrocarbons. Carmen Langer's grandfather homesteaded in 1929 and the family has been farming ever since. On February 11, 2013, the Langers shipped their last cattle. Due to the poor air quality, not only do the cattle have health issues but also the people. There are maybe 30 people directly affected.

The Alberta government says that the smell from hydrocarbons is not harmful. Ian Johnson PhD, an expert in this subject, has been working in the area to monitor air quality for three years and does not agree. He has found quite the opposite, and that Alberta Environment modified the monitoring so those harmful substances would not be detected. He has written to the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, as well as the Ministers of Energy and Health. But always, the same result: everything is okay.

Why is not the best technology in use, as Shell shows? It is available, so does the government cover up and lie on behalf of industry? What is the effect on the whole ecosystem? Frogs and ducks are not found in these areas anymore! Emissions must alter the quality of food produced in the area. And the people who live with the smell and the health threats. When you smell the hydrocarbon odour, your brain is being damaged. When the odor is strong, livestock and wildlife move as if they are drunk. As rancher Carmen Langer says, Premier Allison Redford seems concerned more about the budget deficit than adopting policies and actions that are environmentally, economically and socially sound.

On April 9, we participated in the Day of Action against the release of GM Roundup Ready alfalfa. Thirty-one people turned out in front of MP Chris Warkentin's office in Grande Prairie. Unfortunately, he was away on holidays, but stated the next day in the Grande Prairie Herald Tribune that the decision had already been made by the former Liberal government, so their Conservative hands were tied. Farmers will have to decide. The Wheat Board Act was also written by the Liberals if I remember correctly, and who changed that? If farmers have to decide, then at least tie any contamination liability to the patent holder – in this case, Monsanto – and force them to contain their technology to the land specified by contract. How can you have a privilege like a patent on life and not be held liable against unwanted contamination? If GM alfalfa can't be contained, it should be prohibited. It has the potential to alter Canadian agriculture – and nature – so that every consumer has to eat GMO-contaminated food. And that's not even thinking about future trade implications. On one hand, the government is signing trade agreements with whoever wants one, and on the other hand, it is promoting domestic agriculture that makes it harder to sell products abroad! We have clearly an urgent need to adopt a better framework for decision-making.

In Union, Peter Eggers



Op Ed:

Conference Board Food Strategy Consultation a Smokescreen

- by Ann Slater, NFU-O Member



For those of us who care deeply about locally based food systems and who recognize the role food can play in strengthening our communities, ecosystems and economies, it can be tempting to jump at each and every opportunity to get a piece of our vision mentioned in larger discussions about food and agriculture. As part of its Canadian Food Strategy project, the Conference Board of Canada invited organizations and individuals to public consultations across Canada during the winter. The National Farmers Union received such an invitation. Some local food activists suggested that it was important to attend. Others turned down invitations, citing concerns that the strategy will be a Canadian Food Industry Strategy, not a strategy to provide sufficient, healthy, safe and culturally appropriate food to all Canadians.

The Conference Board of Canada's food strategy work is funded by private companies and government bodies. The Board describes itself as an applied research organization. The Canadian Food Strategy it is developing is really just another private-public partnership project whereby private interests benefit from public research dollars. Given that the project is being funded by large food companies, it is no surprise that the focus of the strategy is to create more profit opportunities for these research 'investors,' such as Loblaw (Canada's largest food retailer); Maple Leaf Foods (one of Canada's largest food processors and agri-business companies); Nestlé (the world's largest food processing company); and Heinz (a US-based multinational food processing giant).

Calls for the Canadian government to adopt a national food strategy have and continue to come from a variety of places including Olivier De Schutter, the UN's Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, and the Peoples Food Policy, a project led by urban and rural food and farming advocates. No doubt the Conference Board of Canada hopes that by including public consultation in its research project it will build support for its own vision for our food system. Instead of harnessing the widening public energy and interest in food to create a food strategy for the public good, the government invested in the Conference Board of Canada's project, once again putting the interests of corporate Canada ahead of the interests of Canadian citizens advocating for a just and ecologically sound food system.

Nutritionists and food activists would be happy to see Canadians eating at least five servings of fruit and vegetables per day, which is one of the desired outcomes under the Healthy Foods section of the consultation. Those five servings could easily come from unprocessed or minimally processed fruits and vegetables grown by local farmers and distributed directly to eaters through local food co-ops, farmers' markets or small retailers. However, other "desired outcomes" listed under the Healthy Foods section include industry-developed healthier food choices, quicker approvals for foods with health benefits and food product innovations. Unprocessed food is both healthier and more affordable, but encouraging its consumption limits opportunities for food

(continued on page 15...)



processors and manufacturers to make money by breaking fresh produce into components and rearranging the components into innovative but healthy edible products.

Adding a few local and healthy food references to the list of desired outcomes in this food strategy does not alter its overall focus. As a farmer committed to providing food to my local community, my whole farm – not just a small piece of it – is geared towards working with nature to grow food for local people. Those of us committed to a food system that gives citizens a say in how our food is produced and where it comes from need to continue to work

together to bring our vision forward. We also need to consider whether providing our input at each and every discussion of food and food strategies will help bring about a real shift in thinking about food.

The Conference Board of Canada's food strategy consultation should be understood as a sophisticated and expensive “push poll”. Under the guise of seeking our opinions, its true purpose was the promotion of the vision of its corporate investors. It was not a genuine opportunity to advocate for an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable food system. —nfu—

Editor's Note: The online survey is closed, but you can read about the Conference Board of Canada and its Centre for Food in Canada Strategy at www.conferenceboard.ca/cfic. The “Research” link on the left side of the page will take you to 20 research papers written to inform the development of the draft strategy. There is also information about the process available on the Food Secure Canada website: www.foodsecurecanada.org. Look under the ‘Blogs’ section in the left menu of the home page.

This content of this article was originally published as an op ed on February 20, 2013. The editor made slight changes in the article to reflect the fact that the consultation process has closed.

The Paul Beingessner Award for Excellence in Writing

Working with the family of Paul Beingessner, the National Farmers Union has established an annual literary prize in honour of Paul and his contribution to rural and agricultural journalism. Paul Beingessner was a farmer, an activist, and a writer who defended Canada's family farms until his tragic death in a farm accident in the spring of 2009. His widely-read and respected weekly columns brought a fresh and progressive perspective to rural and farm issues. Young writers are encouraged to submit their work to the Paul Beingessner Award for Excellence in Writing.

Award Criteria and Details:

- There will be two age categories – 15 years and under, and 16 years to 21 years. A \$500 prize will be awarded to one essay in each age category for a non-fiction letter or essay 500-1000 words in length.
- Your essay should deal with the topic “*What should governments do to help tomorrow's farmers succeed?*” You may create your own title.
- Deadline for entries is October 15, 2013.
- The prizes of \$500.00 will be awarded at the NFU Convention in November 2013.
- All or some entries may be published by the National Farmers Union.

Send entries to the National Farmers Union:

By email: nfu@nfu.ca or

By mail: National Farmers Union, 2717 Wentz Ave., Saskatoon, SK S7K 4B6

We will confirm that we received your email submission within a week. If you do not get a confirmation email, please resend your entry or phone the office at (306) 652-9465.



Proposed Low-Level Presence Policy Serves Biotech Seed Industry, not Farmers

(adapted from comments submitted to the federal LLP consultation process by NFU-O)

In late 2012 and early 2013, the federal government held consultations on its proposed policy and framework for managing the low-level presence (LLP) of genetically modified (GM) crops imported into Canada. The NFU in Ontario participated in the sessions and submitted comments.

LLP refers to the presence in imported grain, food and feed of small amounts of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) that have not been approved by Health Canada. The proposed LLP policy would allow such imports to be contaminated with unapproved GMOs up to crop-specific threshold levels as long as the genetic modification was approved for food by at least one country that Canada deems to have an adequate regulatory system. Higher levels of contamination would be subject to an as-yet undefined risk assessment process to determine whether or how enforcement would proceed.

The LLP policy would selectively suspend Health Canada regulations that currently

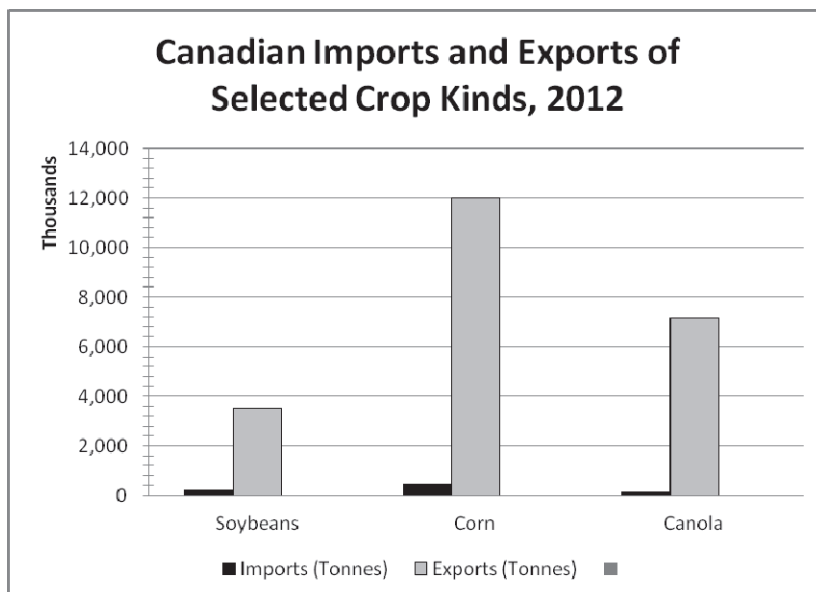
disallow the presence of all unapproved GMOs in the food and feed supply. According to an AAFC spokesperson, “The objective is to minimize the disruption of trade and to create more predictability.”ⁱ Yet, the background information posted by Health Canada notes that there have been no LLP incidents in Canada to date.

That there have been no LLP incidents is not surprising. Canada’s trade in GMOs is decidedly one way. Only three major food crops are genetically engineered: soy, corn and canola. Canada produces and exports all of them. Our imports are miniscule in comparison (Graph 1).

Canada’s LLP policy would thus remove for importers a trade barrier that does not really exist. Not surprisingly, the demand for an LLP policy is being driven by the global GM seed industry rather than Canadian importers. The seed industry seeks a global regulatory system that would permit sales anywhere once a single country approves a new trait.ⁱⁱ In addition,

Canada is marketing its LLP proposal as a model to be adopted by other countries.ⁱⁱⁱ Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz has promoted the development of “pragmatic and transparent methods to manage the low-level presence of unauthorized genetically modified crops”^{iv} at various international events. In effect, Canada is preparing to, and encouraging other nations to adopt a “faith-based” regulatory system – where we put our trust in other countries’ regulators with no accountability or responsibility to Canadian citizens through elected officials or public institutions.

(continued on page 17...)



Graph 1

Source: USDA



The LLP policy puts trade at the head of the Canadian regulatory system – and seems to also put wishful thinking ahead of evidence. It is highly unlikely that Canada’s willingness to accept small quantities of unapproved GMOs in our food will overcome the reluctance of Japanese and European consumers, for example, to do the same. Based on research and their own principles and values, they have – and are likely to continue to – autonomously reject GM products already consumed in Canada’s mass market.

The proposed LLP policy is unlikely to result in regulatory change elsewhere, or increase access in those target markets for crops contaminated with GMOs they have not approved. However, Canadian farmers are likely to experience additional risks and costs, as pointed out in the NFU in Ontario’s submission^v to the federal consultation process.

Because the proposed LLP policy does not include penalties for non-compliance, there is little incentive for an importer to keep its shipments clean.

The proposal fails to disclose that an LLP policy could lead to contamination of crops by unapproved GMOs. Nor does the policy include a protocol to ensure that imported LLP grains are not used as seed in Canada – indeed the policy is completely silent on how LLP could increase the risk of introducing unapproved GMOs into Canadian agriculture. If planted as seed, contaminated grain would become a source of unapproved GM traits that could contaminate other crops. Similarly, the LLP policy would eventually jeopardize Canadian exports and/or re-exports (e.g.

processed food and feed products) because of their genetic contamination. Markets for non-GM crops and foods, whether organic or not, would become more unpredictable, and farmers and processors would bear the costs of any markets lost.

As we have experienced with canola and flax, Canadian farmers would lose markets and/or suffer price discounts due to GM contamination. Increasingly compromised regulatory regimes will reduce quality standards and help global agribusiness search out and use the lowest-cost sources for inputs. The consequence would be lower prices for commodities, including those produced in Canada.

Continuing to release more species and varieties with multiple GM traits into a co-evolving natural world is folly. We invite unknown problems into our territory by opening the door to unapproved GMOs, even at low levels. We cannot predict the future and we cannot remove escaped genetic material from the ecosystem.

This is why the NFU takes the strong stance that there should be no allowance in imported grain, food or feed for GM material that has not been approved for environmental, food and feed release in Canada. Instead, we will continue to advocate zero tolerance of contamination, and for the establishment of protocols that will ensure that non-GM crops do not become contaminated by undesired GM technology.

—nfu—

ⁱ *Ag Canada debates GM threshold*, Western Producer, December 4, 2012. <http://www.producer.com/2012/12/ag-canada-debates-gm-threshold%E2%80%A9/>

ⁱⁱ *Seed growers fear GM contamination*, by Brian Cross. Western Producer, Jun. 10, 2010. <http://www.producer.com/2010/06/seed-growers-fear-gm-contamination/>

ⁱⁱⁱ *2011-2012 Agriculture and Agri-Food Market Access Report*, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. <http://www4.agr.gc.ca/AAFC-AAC/display-afficher.do?id=1352240788033&lang=eng>

^{iv} Harper Government strengthens agricultural ties with Mexico. http://www.agr.gc.ca/cb/index_e.php?s1=n&s2=2013&page=n130411

^v Input prepared by Ann Slater, then NFU Region 3 Coordinator, submitted to the official online consultation process.



Food Sovereignty, Faith and Community:

Diverse Groups Look for Common Strategies

Imagine a serene Quaker retreat centre in Pendle Hill, Pennsylvania, March 8-10. There, on behalf of the NFU, I had the opportunity to join social justice, farming, farm worker, food security and faith organizations to strategize about how to work and support each other to strengthen grassroots-driven food and farm justice initiatives.

Something told me this meeting would be different – perhaps it was the request that we leave our computers and electronic devices at home. When I got to the centre, I realized that I would be learning more about the faith of people rooted in tradition, simplicity, an ethic of hard work and introspection. A perfect paradise for the meditation and reflection sometimes required to inspire change.

Representatives of forty groups participated in discussions on food sovereignty, including the United Church of Canada, GRAIN (CDA), Why Hunger (US), Foodshare (CDA), Food Chain Workers Alliance (US), Rural Coalition (US), Farm Start, LVC (North America), Pesticides Action Network North America, Food Secure Canada, KAIROS.

Our discussions were rich and diverse: equity; labour; democratic participation; indigenous knowledge; economic, social, ecological and spiritual interconnections; undocumented and migrant workers; land resources; sacred and spiritual dimensions of food and farming. We talked about the current focus of each organization and how we might work more effectively in solidarity. Early on, we decided to focus on and deepen the understanding of building just and sustainable local and regional food economies to reduce hunger, poverty and defend farmland and farmers.

During strategy sessions on the last day, I joined a group to talk about the sacredness of food – a lost belief that seems at the heart of many problems. Fast food, convenience and capital gain chip away at the tradition and culture of agriculture. I've started to practice 'thankfulness' as I've become more involved in producing food, which certainly reminds me that while some have abundance, others do not. I think that remembering thankfulness reminds us that we need to work for a more just and equitable food system.

We also talked about the strategies we are using to meet common goals. I talked about our seed campaign: the possible changes if UPOV '91 comes into force and our plans to campaign against it. Organizations working with farm workers talked about how to improve their quality of life, while also considering that most farmers face significant economic challenges. Groups working with women's

cooperatives talked about ecofeminism which is based on trusting women's knowledge. I felt particularly close to this discussion, because our NFU structure acknowledges women (and youth) as equal partners in farming and food production. When we talk about what is broken in our world and how to fix it, the roles and traditions of indigenous people and women are not given enough attention.

Since the March gathering, the Canadian delegation has had a conference call to discuss common priorities and a possible Canadian Farm and Food Justice meeting in November. The Food Secure Canada AGM in Montreal is just days before our NFU National Convention in Ottawa – great momentum leading into the NFU convention, "Growing Resistance".

My experience at this event has been an opportunity for growth, and will hopefully contribute to the NFU as yet another stepping stone in building resistance to the current paradigm of greed and corporate control of our food system.



Blain Snipstal and Coral Sproule outside of the Pendle Hill Retreat Centre in Pennsylvania. Both attended the Bi-National Farm and Food Justice Consultation Weekend, March 8 to 10, and both are youth representatives to La Via Campesina. Coral says, "We had someone take our picture as proof that North American LVC youth have finally had a meeting!"

Coral Sproule-Queen Bee Farm

Member of NFU-O Regional Council,
National Board & National Executive, Lanark Local 310



Planning to Grow the NFU



Good things are happening in the NFU! A new two-year project, Sharing Experience, Sharing Leadership: Growing the NFU, has been approved by Inter Pares, a Canadian organization dedicated to promoting international social justice in Canada and overseas.

The goal of the project is to strengthen the NFU's capacity to lead and/or participate in a people's movement to retake democratic control of the food and feed system, both in Canada and internationally.

The *Sharing Experience* project is designed to dovetail with an organizational strategy being developed by the National Board. The NFU's key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats come as no surprise, having changed little over time. Our national structure and policy development process remain our greatest strengths; lack of resources our weakness. The La Via Campesina continues to be vehicle through which we work internationally. Our greatest threat is the policies of our own government, as Harper's Conservatives continue to hand power over to corporations at our expense. Membership is declining as farmers age and retire, and farms are consolidated. The need for the NFU's voice in representing small and medium-sized family farms, however, has never been more critical. Our analysis and proposals for change in local, domestic and international agricultural policy areas are essential to ensure food sovereignty.

With twin objectives of re-animating local involvement and developing leadership, the NFU is preparing to grow. We will need to make changes to achieve these goals, as we consider questions like: What can or should we do differently to learn and act together, create energy and perhaps (God forbid) have fun? And how do we do this within our available resources?

Re-animating Ourselves as Locals

Kitchen table meetings are a tried and true staple in the NFU's bag of organizing tricks. They work because they are personal – face-to-face gatherings in an informal setting. Everyone can have their say and people learn from each other, whether it is a new skill or an in-depth analysis of an issue. Actions can be developed or customized to meet an area's specific needs. Whether two or ten people gather at the table, they build community, share and learn from each other's experiences, make action plans and re-build trust in an inclusive group process – all without driving more than a half-hour or so.

The meetings must also contain enough structure so there is both the sense and reality of accomplishment. There must be enough content to inform the process and enough discussion to learn and plan effectively. We plan to do this by using a 'core agenda' and 'content units' so that participants have an idea about what they can expect, and what they might learn (or teach) at the meeting. A core agenda would include four elements: learning, communication updates, action/planning and empowering local farmers. Local, regional and national elected officials and staff, along with expert or interested members, would collaborate to produce a variety of content units for each of the core elements, addressing topics such as changes to the Seed Act regulations, CETA and TPP, changes to the Canadian Grain Commission, an analysis of GF2 Business Risk Management programs, land grabbing in Canada, the effects of glyphosate, etc.

(continued on page 20...)



(Planning to Grow the NFU, from page 19)

Content could be offered in almost any formats: a short video about recruiting or retaining members or policy issues; recordings (either audio or video) of parents or grandparents telling stories about organizing and advocating for farm families over the years. Others might use a screencast – a combination of PowerPoint presentation and narration – that is posted to the internet. And many will write: an analysis, a story of success (or failure), solutions to problems. The only requirements would be that all content accurately and unambiguously reflect existing NFU policy, and that local, national and international issues are considered equally. Expect to hear more about this initiative in the coming months.

Growing Our Capacity as Members

The *Sharing Experience, Sharing Leadership* project will bring teams of three committed members from each region together to learn skills that can be taken back and shared with others as the NFU works to reanimate locals and increase membership. Part of the process will be to create a self-sustaining learning program to address the needs of elected officials and members, and that can be customized and implemented at local, regional and national levels. The project is partici-

patory and experiential, which means that a plan will be developed and enacted, and will be modified as needed to achieve the best outcomes over the term of the project. Like a plant, the project plan will grow, respond to and change according to environmental and relational interactions.

Some say that thinking strategically about what we want our future to look like is mere naval-gazing and a waste of time. Planning, however, is the first step in doing anything – especially in doing it well. Together, the organizational strategy and the *Sharing Experience* project will help the NFU build on our strong national structure, policy process and existing membership to strengthen the grassroots of this unique and invaluable organization. Ongoing distribution of learning, analysis and action will widen the base of committed members who in turn will be available to help us expand the circle of NFU membership. The results? We will be able to conduct more effective national campaigns; we will have greater political power; and we will have a stronger national presence. We will strengthen our commitment and our actions to achieve a food and farming system grounded in the principles of food sovereignty: food for people; valuing food providers; localizing food systems; putting control locally; building knowledge and skills; working with nature; and acknowledging food as sacred. —nfu—

(President's Message, from page 3)

variety through cancellation before farmers wish or need to stop growing it would breach the social contract. While seed companies obtain benefits from public endorsement of registration, the public would not receive equal benefit in the exchange.

Intellectual property like Plant Breeders' Rights and patents are also a social contract, and again, an exchange takes place. The public gives exclusive marketing rights (e.g. a patent) for a fixed time period. In exchange, the company makes the product available and provides information about the patent so that it may be duplicated at the end of the exclusivity period. If a company can cancel and remove a variety from use at their will, exchange and public benefit will be unfairly limited – another breach of social

contract. Moreover, seed companies claim that the variety is their private property to control as they see fit – that even after the privilege of registration and the advantages gleaned (granted by we the public), the public should not be able to access it freely at a later point. This ignores totally the fact that all plant material is derived from the work and efforts of nature, farmers and earlier breeders.

Our system of variety registration has protected public and farmer interests for decades. We must not allow it to be usurped by the private interests of increasingly fewer seed companies. No one will be well-served should that occur, but as always, if we work together we can make changes.

In Solidarity, Terry Boehm



Letter to the Editor

Carla Roppel, Editor
The Union Farmer
 2717 Wentz Ave., Saskatoon, SK, S7K 4B6

Dear Ms. Roppel,

Re: Farmer's Privilege and UPOV'91, *The Union Farmer Quarterly/Spring 2013*

As an Associate Member of the NFU now for many years, I wish to comment on Terry Boehm's excellent revelatory article on "Farmer's Privilege and UPOV '91" that appeared in the Spring 2013, *The Union Farmer Quarterly*. It is bad enough already that the farming community has been saddled with UPOV (Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants) by international convention since 1978 without being further sucked into a more insidious extension for the sole benefit of the multi-national, controlling seed industry under the seemingly innocuous attractant of "Farmer's Privilege".

In the mid-1970s when I served as Secretary of the Carleton County Soil & Crop Improvement Association, the major seed companies quietly began a concerted drive to gain endorsement by the farming community for the concept of "plant breeder's rights" that resulted in the UPOV legislation of 1978. The corporations were too coy to make such solicitation directly; rather they engaged their area seed sales representatives, for the most part local farmers who knew their territories and fellow agriculturalists, to speak to local farm organizations and convince them of the apparent benefits of the new corporate thrust into development of new seed varieties that could lead to higher yields against disease and insect loss, etc. Naturally, the camaraderie of such stealthy approach by persons trusted within the local community was effective and bolstered by the free distribution of corporate caps, jackets, etc., at fall fairs and plowing matches. Local farm groups were urged to pass resolutions in support of this new undertaking, the ultimate nature of which was not at all appreciated let alone the concept of genetic modification of organisms (GMOs) by physical insertion of non-plant genes (e.g., Bt, etc.) into plant genes of choice. The corporate spin in support of the need for "plant breeders' rights" was that such new end products needed to be protected by patents if any development were to occur at all!

When it came time for the Carleton Soil & Crop Association to formulate a resolution in support of the plant breeding aims of their corporate schemers, I counseled the CSCA Executive to resist such an endorsement because granting patent protection to an end product in itself was not, and had not previously been, a basis for any patent protection. As a research chemist, I was conversant with patent legislation pertaining to the protection of new chemicals and pharmaceuticals – the patent applied only to the process by which the end product was achieved, i.e., the synthetic route and conditions by which the end-product was achieved, not the end-product itself! This is one reason why herbals or natural products cannot be patented because they exist naturally by virtue of evolution and not by dint of human manipulation. An herbal formulation is a different category because the recipe for the creative blend is something that can be patented, but not its constituent natural products. Contrast these situations now with the current UPOV 'plant breeders' rights' where the end-product, be it Bt-corn, glyphosate-resistant soybeans or corn, etc., the actual artificially modified seed, the end-product, itself is protected by patent instead of the processes by which the end product was obtained! Such a manipulation and innovation of international patent law has now laid the basis whereby a corporation can seize and persecute a grower for having the misfortune of even minor contamination of Reg. GMO seed in a sown non-GMO crop by virtue of cross-pollination, or chance contamination through storage or seed-cleaning operations. Farming groups that endorsed these measures were innocently beguiled and taken down the proverbial garden path. The farming community, together with the general public, must rise up against corporate-complicit governments to have the "plant breeders' rights" revoked before more untold GMO damage is done and conventional agriculture driven to its knees. Lobby for No to UPOV'91, and have UPOV (78) rescinded.

Yours truly,
 George Neville (Ottawa, Ontario)



(Message from the Editor, from page 2)

... enhance Canada's competitive position in the growing world market [and] more efficiently use chemical fertilizers to help improve environmental sustainability." The first and only mention of other stakeholders comes in a sentence at the end of the third paragraph of the media release: a "total of \$5 million [will be] dedicated to support the CWA activities and leverage contributions from other stakeholders."

Our public institutions are being turned into patent-and-profit-picking arms for corporations as born out by information from the ETC Group. Six companies "(Syngenta, Bayer, BASF, Dow, Monsanto, DuPont) control 59.8% of seeds and 76.1% of agrochemicals... [and] have 76% of all private sector R&D in these two sectors. They spent nine times more on crop R&D than did the (USDA) Agricultural Research Service, at least 23 times more than international crop breeding institutes under CGIAR. The global market share of the proprietary seed market controlled by Monsanto, DuPont and Syngenta rose from 22% to 53.4% between 1996 and 2011. Syngenta, Bayer and BASF control 52.5% of the agrochemical market, up from 33% in 1996."

Two traits. These companies have taken control of the seed value chain with just two traits. And who is paying the real price for public abdication and private appropriation? It's no mystery: farmers and by extension, consumers through higher seed prices, increased dependence and lost control of a public good. The question is – how have we gotten here?

Recently, Harper's government has been consulting with industry stakeholders about value

chains – about delivering maximum value for the least possible cost. Value chains have always existed, but until 1985, were not clearly and systematically defined – about the same time as NAFTA came into force, and agriculture became agribusiness and then agri-food. The change in wording parallels the construction of a supply chain that seamlessly feeds itself through vertical integration at every step along the way. Extract every fraction of a cent along the way. Exclude, or better yet, consume competitors. Use your financial power to subvert elected governments, and redefine the use of public spaces and public money to favour your corporate interests.

"The State of Power 2013" is an annual report from the Transnational Institute describing changes in global corporate control. Here are some highlights: 7 of the 10 largest companies in the world are oil and gas companies; less than 1% of companies, mostly banks, control 40% of global business; 60 of the top 200 hundred global corporations are located in the USA, 26 in Japan; 0.001% of the world's population – mostly male – control 14.6% of the \$42 trillion global GDP; 82% of the world's income is controlled by 20% of the population.

This is neither just nor equitable. Our systems must change. La Via Campesina captured the need for change and proposed a way forward in an April 29 statement: "*We require a new [economic] system that addresses the needs of the majority and not of the few. We need a redistribution of the wealth that is now controlled by the 1%. And we also need a new definition of wellbeing and prosperity for all life on the planet...*" Change is needed, and we are the only ones who can make it happen. —nfu—

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We Remember ...

EDITH MARLENE GEHL (1921 – 2013)

With great sadness we announce the passing of Edith Gehl on March 7, at the age of 91. She was predeceased by her husband Pete Gehl in 2001. Edie is lovingly remembered by her children: Peter, David (Roberta), Robert (Bernadette) and William (Joanne); grandchildren: Ryan, Angela, Richard, Matthew, John, Adrienne and Ian and great grandchildren: Zachary, Lyndon, Grace, Olivia, Ethan and Joel.

Edith was born on October 12, 1921 in Vanguard, Saskatchewan to Peter and Stella Anderson, the fifth of eight children. Edie grew up on the Anderson family farm near Glenbain where she developed a sense of community and family, work ethic and social consciousness. She excelled at school and went on to become a teacher at the age of eighteen. Edie taught at one-room country schools in southern Saskatchewan for more than a decade.

Edie married a farmer, Pete Gehl, in 1951 and moved to the Gehl farm at Bethune. Pete, Edie and their four boys moved to a farm at Brora, Saskatchewan in 1964 where they remained until retiring to a home in Regina in 1984.

Edie was a progressive prairie woman. She was a devoted wife, loving mother and kind friend. She was active in the Regina Peace Council, the National Farmers Union and other progressive movements. She enjoyed many hobbies, socializing and especially, time with her family. For many years International Children's Day picnics, Friday night cards and New Year's Eve parties were anticipated events at the Gehl farm.



GEORGE STEPHEN DANYCHUK

The family is saddened to announce the passing of George on March 12, 2013 at Maidstone Hospital. George was born March 1, 1924, in Biggar, Saskatchewan to Steve and Emily (Hack). He is survived by his loving wife Rose, children Stephen (Andrea) and Nancy (Jack); His grandchildren Stephanie (Joe), Lindsay (Neal), Brett (Kelly), Haley, Alishia, Chris and Megan; and great-grandchildren Paris, Alara, Dyson, Hayden and Gavin. Also survived by brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law and many nieces and nephews.



HARRY E. EBBETT (1919 – 2013)

The family of Harry Edwin Ebbett, husband of Annetta "Ann" (Nee Dykeman) Ebbett announces his passing which occurred on February 21, 2013 in Perth Andover. Born on May 4, 1919 at Middle Simonds, NB, he was the oldest son of Earle and Gladys (Underhill) Ebbett. Harry lived in Bristol and graduated from high school in 1935. He worked with his father in farming and lumbering until enlisting in the Royal Canadian Navy in 1940. He spent five years on convoy duty on the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean. He then purchased a farm at Upper Kent and spent over 40 years farming.

Harry has been a member of the Board of Directors of Carleton Co-op Ltd since 1949, a member of Carleton County Council for four years, Past President of the Florenceville Royal Canadian Legion Branch #37 and a founding member of the National Farmers Union.

Harry married Annetta Dykeman of Juniper, NB in 1953. They have three children: Emerson Ebbett of Calgary AB, Stephanie Ebbett- McCarthy (David) of Upper Kent, NB and Rita Ebbett- McIntosh (Dale) of Glassville, NB; three grandchildren, Laura McIntosh of Glassville, NB, Martha McIntosh of Vancouver, BC and Cedric McIntosh of Fredericton, NB; one brother, Claude Ebbett (Els) of Sackville, NB; two sisters, Letha Gaunce of Upper Kent, NB and Alice Cogswell (Fred) of Perth Andover, NB; and several nieces, nephews and cousins.



FAY SCHOFIELD

It is with sadness that the family announces the passing of mother at the Gull Lake Special Care Centre. She is survived by three children, Les of Gull Lake, Sk; Denise of Swift Current and Russell of Swift Current; one son-in-law, one daughter-in-law, six grandchildren, nine great grandchildren and one great great grandchild; one sister in Cranbrook, B.C.; and numerous nieces and nephews. She was predeceased by her parents, husband Fred and one brother.

Fay was a long time member of the Beverley Community Club, National Farmers Union, Co-op Guild and Swift Current Farmers Market.



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