



National Farmers Union
Union Nationale des Fermiers



union farmer

Quarterly

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1965 Photo: Robert Roy Atkinson (l), Agriculture Minister Harry Hays (c), and Prime Minister Lester Pearson (r).

Roy Atkinson was President of the Saskatchewan Farmers Union from 1962 until 1969. He then became the first President of the National Farmers Union, a position he held until 1978. Roy Atkinson passed away on May 17, 2016 (see pages 2, 20 & 21).

Strong Communities. Sound Policies. Sustainable Farms.

Memories of...

Roy Atkinson

Roy Atkinson passed away on May 17, 2016. He was the NFU's first President and held the position from 1969 until 1978. His obituary is on page 21. Usually this space is reserved for a message from the Editorial Advisory Committee. For this issue, we are turning the space over to Butch Harder who worked with Roy on the first NFU board, and to Jan Slomp, current NFU President. Additional memories of Roy Atkinson and his activism on behalf of farmers can be found on pages 20 and 21. On behalf of all NFU members we would like to express our condolences to Roy's family.



Roy Atkinson at the Regina Legislature rally, 1976.

Remembering Roy:

— Wilfred "Butch" Harder,
former NFU Board Member, Region 5 (Manitoba)

There have been few farm leaders as captivating as Roy Atkinson. I served with Roy Atkinson as an NFU board member on the first NFU board in 1970, and for two terms on the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) Advisory Committee. When I mention Roy in this piece I could probably also say NFU, because let's face it, for many years the NFU was Roy Atkinson.

Roy was the first farm leader to advocate trade with China and for such radical ideas at that time he was sometimes labelled as "Red Roy" by his critics. It is a cruel joke that today farm leaders fall all over themselves to go on trade missions to China.

In the early 1970's, I was at a meeting in Morris, MB where Roy advocated for directional movement through the mountains and beyond. "CN and CP would travel on one set of tracks going west and on another going east". This would have tremendous efficiency gains. It makes the present day discussion about 150 kilometre interswitching look mediocre.



Roy Atkinson presenting award to young farmer (1960s).

The farm conscious public did not always see the business side of Roy, yet I saw it first-hand many times. At the CWB Advisory Committee, Roy would often point out the monetary advantages of pencil drying (ie adding damp wheat to dry wheat without the costly process of using grain drying). In the same manner, he emphasized the big advantage the wheat board had to blend low quality wheat with high quality wheat while still make the #1 grade. Both of these processes made millions for western farmers, whereas in the current non-CWB environment large companies have used those business concepts to their own advantage.

Probably one of the most respectful compliments I heard about Roy was when I made a wheat board presentation to a federal Standing Committee in Ottawa and had Roy with me. At the end of my presentation, I asked if there were any more questions and one of the politicians said, "Quite frankly, I came just to meet and hear from the man sitting beside you, who I have heard so much about".

Standing on the shoulders of giants:

— Jan Slomp, NFU President

It is often said that we can see as far as we do today because we stand upon the shoulders of giants. Roy Atkinson is certainly one of those giants. His legacy as our farm movement's leader is unmistakable. He was one of the visionaries who brought provincial farm unions together to create the foundation of our present national organization.

(continued on page 20...)





A message from the President

— by Jan Slomp, National President

Growing the NFU

Most adult Canadians participated in the census recently. I hope government policy makers derive appropriate direction from it. We can expect a continuing decline in the number of conventional farm operations in Canada as well as the increase in size of the average conventional farm. But, we can also expect an increase in “non-conventional farms” dotted across the county.

The continuing decline in the number of farmers creates challenges for farm organizations like the NFU. Retired and deceased members outnumber beginning farmers, thus membership in farm organizations is falling. At the same time, NFU membership fees are not keeping up with the increases in the cost of living. NFU membership is keeping up as a percentage of total farmer numbers but that does not translate into sustainability for the NFU. In order, to keep up with our important work other sources of funding are needed and we must grow our membership. We do not want to have NFU work filtered or held back by corporate sponsorship. So besides some small opportunities for modest advertising revenue, which will not affect NFU policy, and outsourced project funding, we need to grow NFU membership in order to do a meaningful amount of work.

Last fall, NFU Region 3 (Ontario) began a membership drive. Aric McBay was hired as a membership development coordinator. Other regions need to become familiar with the work being done in Ontario and be ready to implement similar initiatives in their areas. The Strategic Planning Committee is working to facilitate this membership work across the country.

Earlier this spring, the NFU National Board initiated a donor campaign. Along with regular member appeal initiatives, this donor campaign is a long-term campaign, reaching outside our membership base. Many Canadian citizens outside the farming community share our concerns about Canadian agriculture and are increasingly concerned about our ability to feed ourselves sustainably as a nation and/or as a local community. Many of these citizens recognize the NFU as the farm organization representing their concerns and values. Therefore, it makes sense to tap into these citizens for financial support to continue the important work that the National Farmers Union does.

Proceeds from this donor campaign will be allocated to fund membership development in all NFU regions. Besides signing up new members, the funding will be used to engage and educate new and existing NFU members so that we can become a more vibrant and active grassroots-based farm organization. An organization that socially and economically represents farmers from coast-to-coast and becomes a leading force in shaping regional, national and international government policy.

Many new members of the NFU become invested for life as active members once they have attended regional or national conventions. Thus, you are hereby invited to join this process of growing the NFU, by bringing that potential member with you to the next regional or national convention.

In Solidarity, Jan Slomp





A message from the Women's President

— by Coral Sproule, Women's President

“It’s raining here, and it’s glorious!”, no sweeter words have I heard uttered about rainfall, but those from the mouth of a fellow farmer in Alberta in mid-May. We seem to be surrounded by the notion in mainstream media that rain is a “bad” situation. A look at the weekly forecast describes hot (dry!) weather as ‘...sunny and delightful!’ As another fellow farmer described recently, “sometimes I want to scream at the weather forecaster on the radio, as they always favour the dry, hot weather”. I cringe each time I read the upcoming week’s forecast and it does not include rain. The opposing attitude comes from listeners and readers who are far removed from the water needs of the people in this country who are working the land and growing the food that feeds our rural economies and the mouths of the rest of the country.

For many of us who work the land, we began this spring in a water deficit. In most areas where farming is practiced in our country, we had record low winter precipitation heading into spring thaw. Rivers and water tables are down and this is not the way we wish to begin our planting season. Some of us, are operating with intense and well planned irrigation systems which can help in a pinch, but what happens when our wells run low and we need to conserve even further so that we have water to drink, bathe and live life? These systems are becoming a costly and time consuming necessity, rather than a choice. For others who may choose to operate without irrigation, the dry weather and above average temperatures are worthy of much worry, anxiety, and dread for what the weather will bring in the season to come.

Farmers, and others who live and work in nature and on the land are familiar with the issues associated with climate change. The downside is all

too apparent as the weather patterns become ever more extreme and unpredictable year after year. The rest of the world is becoming aware of the dangers of climate change as wildfires begin to burn and pose risks to rural and forested areas. One tragedy that has affected non-farmers and farmers alike are the wildfires in Alberta, and most notably those around Fort McMurray. Most media and average citizens remain blissfully unaware of the connection between our changing planet and these types of natural disasters.

Fortunate or not, farmers must continue to breach this subject of how we will all be affected by climate change. We will continue conversations with each other and with eaters about what we can all do to try and mitigate the effects of these environmental changes. We will do so while also doing our best to uphold and shift to best practices of conservation and sustainability on our farms. We will do our part, in a positive way, to preserve our environment and the land from which we live and breathe.

We hope that the rest of our population will start to perceive the weather from a different perspective, that they will not just consider a warmer than usual, sunny spring as not only an opportunity for outdoor recreation, but also an opportunity for reflection on what this implies for farmers and ranchers. We are facing what is just the beginning of a potentially stressful, hard going season; one that may lead to financial, emotional, and physical hardships. Here’s hoping for rain!

In Solidarity, Coral Sproule





A message from the Youth

— by Ayla Fenton, NFU Youth President



Photo: 2016 Youth Retreat.

In this busy time of year on the farm, I am grateful I had the opportunity to connect with young farmers from across the country earlier this spring. Our annual NFU Youth retreat is always an inspiring and re-energizing experience that keeps me going during the hectic months that follow.

Our retreat this year was the largest yet, with 27 participants, and our first in the prairies. We gathered at a secluded lodge outside of Edmonton for four days of learning and networking. Our group included some veteran youth and associate members, but for almost half of the participants, this was their first real introduction to the NFU! Many thanks to the National Farmers Foundation and the regions and locals that provided crucial financial support.

Our days were full of presentations, lively discussions and debates. I started the retreat, with a short presentation on the history of the NFU, which

generated a lot of admiration for the long-standing traditions of direct action, gender parity and youth engagement within the organization. I shared this photo (page 6) from the 1971 NFU Youth Exchange, which led to some amused discussion about how someday, future generations of NFU Youth will look back on *our* photos and admire our fashion sense.

Aric McBay, the Region 3 membership development coordinator, led us in a brainstorming session about how we as youth members can better engage other young farmers. Former NFU President Cory Ollikka spoke about strategies to engage farmers in policy issue discussions and presented the Kitchen Table Meeting as a model for doing so while also building community.

We also learned from each other about a wide range of topics, including the following:

(continued on page 6...)



- **Agroecology and Climate Change** – Bryan Dale (associate member, ON) on the links between ecological agriculture, the food movement and climate change mitigation
- **“Organic 3.0”** – Shannon Jones (NS) about a new vision for the future of organic agriculture
- **Agroecology in Cuba** – Pierre-Olivier Brassard (QC, La Union Paysanne) presented the political structure of the ANAP in Cuba as a model of agroecology for the world
- **Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST)** – Andrea Griffith (ON) shared what she learned during a 6-week political course run by the MST in Brazil
- **Trade Agreements** – Jordan MacPhee (PEI) outlined how CETA and TPP threaten family farmers and food sovereignty
- **Farm Succession Planning** – Lydia Carpenter (MB) spoke about land access options for new farmers and the need for a national farmland succession strategy
- **Strengthening Supply Management** – I presented the NFU’s new policy brief on the need for reform and protection of SM
- **National New Farmer Coalition** – Dana Penrice (Youth VP, AB) on the research and advocacy work being done by new farmers for new farmers
- **Reducing Barriers to Entry** – Adam Maclean (PEI) discussed programs and strategic partnerships that can help new farmers get started
- **Farm Labour** – Rebecca Pearce (ON) discussed issues with the internship model and strategies for creating a sustainable labour force
- **Local Food Organizing** – Jeanette Sivilay (MB) shared the experience of organizers of “The Real Manitoba Food Fight” and “Sharing The Table Manitoba”
- **Scale-Appropriate Regulation** – Lisa Lundgard (AB) on the regulatory challenges faced by small-scale producers and what needs to change
- **“Getting Things Done”** – Andrea Hilborn (ON) presented a popular time-management strategy that can help us be more effective farmers and advocates
- **Art and NFU Policy** – Carina Phillips (PEI) shared some of her art work and ideas for using art to engage the public with food and farm issues

As always, I left the retreat with many new friends, feeling excited about the growing momentum and capacity of the NFU. We all look forward to working with and helping to grow this powerful organization.

Ayla Fenton, Youth President



Photo: 1971 Youth Exchange.

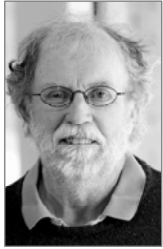


Regional Reports



Region One:

Provinces of PEI, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia



District 1 (PEI)

- by Reg Phelan, Coordinator

Water Act: The PEI Environment Advisory Council released its report to government about the hearings it held in the fall of 2015. The report is very supportive of the presentation the NFU made to them on water issues. We are waiting the further round of hearings on the proposed Water Act.

GMO Alfalfa: NFU members were alarmed to hear of the proposal to grow GM alfalfa in Eastern Canada. This poses great danger, when it is spread by pollution, to markets for conventional growers and for organic certification. The NFU brought the issue up with the provincial minister of agriculture and we are waiting for a meeting with the federal minister. Reports about the issue were carried in local newspapers, both dailies and the *Island Farmer*.

Lands: The NFU have a meeting scheduled with the Minister of Environment and Lands about concerns with land purchases over the limits and intent of Lands Protection Act.

Regional Youth Retreat: After the national Youth Retreat, Region 1 youth organized a meeting for regional youth which took place April 24, 2016 in Dieppe, New Brunswick. Forty-five youth attended who were very interested in helping more youth become involved in farming and the NFU.

Seed Workshop: A seed training workshop was held in Charlottetown on May 3rd and 4th, with members from PEI, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Kim Delaney from Ontario facilitated. She has done a lot of work on seed production and was a great motivator for local producers who are doing the same.

Regional Meeting: This will be on August 10th in Sackville, New Brunswick.

—nfu—



District 2 (New Brunswick)

- by Ted Wiggans, Board Member

Much of the work of the NFU in NB is not readily apparent to our membership or the general farm public. As one of two general farm organizations, we are called upon to participate on a variety of initiatives. Since March 1, 2015 our members or executive director have:

- participated in NBEN Sustainable Education Alliance's Conference on Food Security and Education;
- made a submission to the Research and Policy committee on the "provincial water policy";
- met with Greener Village (Fredericton Food Bank) regarding a Friday farmer's market for smaller farms;
- submitted commentary carried in several provincial papers regarding the social and economic development of rural NB;
- researched and followed-up on the implications for agriculture from Omnibus Bill 24;
- continued discussion with department staff on a local food initiative, the "52 Week challenge";
- submitted a letter of support to Rick Doucet, Minister of DAAF, supporting the Northeast Blueberry Growers Association's effort to create a regional library board;
- organized and hosted a one day youth retreat attended by fifty new Maritime farmers;
- participated in meetings regarding the farm business registry review;
- proposed the "Good Food and Farming Accelerator" idea to the Government of NB;
- toured both Carleton and Victoria Counties, to get a better understanding of farmers' concerns;
- worked on a farmers' market brochure information proposal.

The above is just a partial list of the initiatives of the NFU in NB. Routine administration and organizational activities include our AGM, newsletter and responses to farmer queries. It is difficult to draw a direct line between NFU activities and our impact upon agriculture; however, it is safe to say we are in conversation with the government and the residents of NB, and that our values and policies are becoming part of the public discussion of NB's future.

—nfu—



NFU-O/Region Three:



Province of Ontario

- by Emery Huszka, Coordinator

"We have a growing membership once again! Our focus on key NFU values, a

strong membership program, combined with a progressive financial business plan means that the future of the NFU in Region 3 is very bright indeed!"

The NFU-O Regional Council has made 2016 the year of membership development. To do this, we enlisted the help of Aric McBay, and then formally approached our grassroots members, former members and neighbours who should be members (but aren't) and asked them why? Sounds simple, but hey, we have already surpassed last year's total membership!

So what have we learned? Our members are very proud of our NFU values! We **ARE** the group that represents the family farm (whatever form that takes). We believe that farms need to be economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable, viable, and responsible. We do this with our evolving farmer friendly, democratically achieved policies, and we build each other up along with our rural communities. We challenge, ask solid, constructive questions, and work best when we, as volunteers, work together without being bullied, pressured or bought by outside agendas. Our policies guide our way, but our core values are what unite us as a strong force for positive change. Policies can at times divide, but our core values are the glue that holds us together.

Our grassroots have identified several key undertakings for the growth of Region 3, as well as the NFU nationally. We are developing a better benefits package in unison with our national organization, but somewhat Ontario specific where appropriate. Stay tuned for more.

As a matter of practice, Region 3 continues to reach out to all agricultural groups, on a case by case basis, where our values are reflected. For example, the Grain Farmers of Ontario recently adopted and embraced a 4R stewardship approach to fertilizer use, that is the right kind of fertilizer, right place, right time

in the right amount. We congratulated them for this step and applauded their effort as good progress toward our collective goals. The door is open to discuss with all of our neighbours our important points. Respect goes both ways! Starting in May, the NFU-O is working with the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO) to give students a summer skills development job opportunity while assisting both member organizations.

We would like to challenge all NFU members to do some serious soul searching as to why you personally belong with the NFU; then share that passionate answer with a friend, neighbour or relative! Your belief in what we do and your personal invitation to join us is what our future is being built upon. The NFU Region 3 will continue our generational succession transition as we open ourselves to the very people we hope to represent.

We respect our past, have learned from our present, but our future will only be built by adding new wonderful people to our ranks. Every NFU member has a duty to make a difference by mentoring one new member to join and add their voice. —*nfu*—

The Canadian Young Farmers Forum (CYFF)

—by Ben Straathof

In February I attended the Canadian Young Farmers Forum (CYFF) in Vancouver. The conference involves presentations and discussion on current issues in farming today such as skilled worker shortages and how to grow your agriculture business responsibly and profitably. Attendees included producers from agriculture industries such as beef, grain and oilseeds, dairy, cranberries, blueberries, potatoes, maple syrup, chicken and eggs. Overall, CYFF chose speakers that provided conference attendees with insightful and timely information to apply in their own operations.

Speakers included Faith Matchett, from Farm Credit Canada, highlighting Canada's rising agriculture exports and recent farm business receipts, social media entrepreneur Andrew Campbell, and agri-food policy writer and consultant, Dr. Larry Martin. Ranchers from Wyoming and Utah gave a virtual farm tour of their own farms and discussed issues such improving the environmental aspects of their operations while facing increasing pressure from government and other groups to conserve water.

On the final day participants toured three Vancouver area operations: Ocean Spray Cranberry processing plant; Sea Breeze Dairy; and a cranberry farm. Thank you to the NFU-Ontario, Renfrew County NFU, Renfrew County Federation of Agriculture and Renfrew County Cattleman's Association for their support.



Region Five:



Province of Manitoba

- by Ian Robson, Coordinator



and Dean Harder, Board Member

Manitoba recently elected a new government with a Conservative majority. Will more rural representatives in the majority government mean more benefits for farmers? Ralph Eichler, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, has requested a meeting with NFU Region 5. Eichler is interested in the NFU as a general farm organization in Manitoba. We continue to seek stable funding and to bring members' concerns to the table.

Eichler is a member of State Ag and Rural Leaders (SARL) organization. At a SARL conference in Florida in 2015 he was presented with data showing the long term downward trend of farm prices. This should encourage him to work to hold or improve farm prices by helping farmers to organize. We need a re-balance of marketplace powers. Due to trade agreements, there is too much consolidated owned investment on both the input side and output side of the farmer, forcing down farm prices.

The theme for our Region 5 Convention is "Farming for the Public Good". The convention takes place Saturday, July 9, 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at the Riverbank Discovery Centre in Brandon, followed by a potluck barbecue. Speakers include NFU President Jan Slomp and Darrin Qualman on Climate Change & Agriculture in Manitoba. Visit nfu-mb.ca for an updated schedule.

The NFU values policy for the "public good". Farmers need their rightful share of market prices, and they have the right to organize for this and to seek legislation to re-balance the marketplace. Farmers need competent affordable support that looks at the long-term, not just the short-term investments. The provincial sales tax was a concern in the 2016 Manitoba election. A one percent PST

increase on \$30,000.00 of farm use goods purchased is \$300.00. Yet, each prairie cereal farmer is losing \$20 to \$50 per acre each year because farmers no longer have the Canadian Wheat Board as their selling agent. There are fewer farms raising hogs since the loss of the hog marketing board. Farmers' lost farm income needs to be a priority for the government, just as health care, education, fixing roads and bridges are.

The public good is best upheld by responsible government; one that does not let favours go toward large corporate tax cuts or letting public services be taken over by private interests. It is appropriate and responsible for government to be involved; this is not red tape. For example, the NFU and other farm organizations like the Dairy Farmers of Canada helped ensure that governments kept the use of rBGH milk growth hormone out of Canada. Pharmaceutical companies clamoured to try to make rBGH a farm necessity. If a drug can become a necessary product to a farm operation, then it becomes a steady stream of profit to the pharmaceutical company. This is always the corporate goal; to monopolize on a product in order to gain profit. The NFU continues to press various governments to prevent the sale of GM alfalfa in Canada. We are asking for reasonable rules in line with good husbandry and health of the people and land. Yet, corporations such as Forage Genetics International and Monsanto would like nothing more than to gain full ownership of alfalfa seed.

Darrin Qualman has been hired, with Manitoba Climate Change Action Funding, to help the NFU-MB write a report on programs and policy that farmers and government can use to reduce, mitigate, and adapt to the effects of global climate change. Farmers see increasing threats to crop production from a shifting climate caused by burning fossil fuels. Carbon dioxide (CO₂) has its own rules. Farmers need to respect those rules to raise good crops, but sometimes the economic rules conflict with the rules of nature. One part of our study will show how much extra pollution has been created from extra trucking in the prairies since the loss of the Crow Rate. It is substantial.

NFU Region 5 expresses sympathy to the family of Mr. Roy Atkinson and high regard for the work Mr. Atkinson has done for all Canadian farmers, indeed for farmers around the world. —nfu—

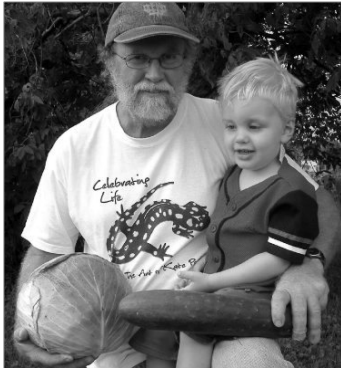
Visit nfu-mb.ca for more info on our activities.



Continuing with our new tradition of introducing you to fellow NFU members, let us hear from a few more of our elected representatives. Here is a bit about a board member, a women's advisor and a youth advisor, in their own words.

Board Member Region 1 (PEI)

— Reg Phelan



Reg Phelan of Prince Edward Island has been a certified organic farmer most of his working life and operates one of the longest producing organic farms on PEI. Growing

produce organically is a belief system that he shares with his wife, Stella, and their nine-year-old grandson. Their farmhouse, which Reg grew-up in, is about 150 years old and was built by his great-grandparents. Along with being a fourth-generation farmer, Reg is a founding member of Sea Spray Cooperative and has worked as a mentor for a number of young farmers. Reg and Stella take pride in their home, their farmland, and growing good food.

Having grown up on a farm, Reg kept up the family farm legacy after completing a Bachelor's degree at the University of PEI. While he was at university, he became interested in issues facing farmers on the Island, including a particularly hot topic at the time, that of land rights and of farmland protection in a landscape where farming was not seen as a beneficial or forward-thinking industry for the Island.

It was also while at university that Reg deepened his philosophy of avoiding chemicals and allowing his farm animals to eat pasture and be free range. Always an active experimenter, Reg worked hard at implementing organic improvement techniques to his farm, and continues to be innovative. Reg also has a Master's Degree from St. Mary's University. His thesis was titled, *Islanders and the Land*, and looked at the history of land issue on PEI from the perspective of rural Islanders and stories of the land struggle.

As early as the mid-1970's, Reg shipped organic grain to Halifax, at a time when there was no certification program, no third party or peer-

reviewed system for verifying organic food. He and the buyer drew up their own agreement and understanding of what organic meant, and proceeded on that basis to influence the future meaning of organic as we know it today.

Regarding land issues on the Island, Reg has been involved in it all—from the tractor demonstration/protest in the 1960's in protest of the government's then plan to modernize agriculture to the demise of the small family farm - to becoming involved as a founding member of the National Farmers Union on the Island in 1969.

Reg's interest in the rights of small-scale farmers also led naturally to his involvement in La Via Campesina. Reg's desire to ensure that organic farming continues to be a viable livelihood has reached all corners of agriculture, from land access and protecting farm land to local fair trade farming and the success of sustainable and organic farming. —nfu—

Women's Advisory Region 3 (Ontario)

— Katie Ward



I grew up on a beef farm, and when my husband and I decided to go back to our roots we were definitely predisposed to biodiversity as well as a diversification of enterprises. We started out with a small Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) market

garden and meat chickens under Ontario's Small Flock quota exemption. We have since added small fruit and nut trees and finishing weaner pigs on a small scale. In addition, we have spent the last five years building up our commercial sheep operation.

I got involved in the National Farmers Union in 2011, after our first year on the farm, and jumped

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right in as secretary of my Local. I have been lucky enough to attend several regional and national conventions, in addition to our monthly Local meetings. The opportunities for learning and networking with like-minded people have made a difference in my life. In the last few years, I have had the privilege to be elected as the Region 3 Women's Advisory representative and to serve on Region 3 Council, which meets every two weeks throughout the year. I have participated as a member of the resolutions committee at both regional and national levels, and for anyone interested in getting more involved in the policy side of the NFU I would

recommend that as a good way to dip your toes in. There are many more committees advancing the good work of the Union, and they are always looking for more active members.

One thing that has really caught my imagination in the last year is the effort underway in Region 3 to increase our membership numbers. The more members we have, the louder our voice will sound to the public when we speak out on behalf of farmers and eaters. So please, strike up a conversation with your friends and neighbours. Tell them what you think about the work that the NFU is doing, and most importantly – ask them to join us!

—nfu—

Youth Advisory Region 5 (Manitoba)



— Lydia Carpenter

Lydia Carpenter, originally from Winnipeg is co-owner and farmer/grazier at Luna Field Farm in southwestern Manitoba. Lydia studied Environmental Science and Geography at the University of Winnipeg where she took an interest in systems ecology and soil sciences (nutrient cycling!). Later she earned her Master's degree in Natural Resources Management from the University of Manitoba where she looked at gender and rural livelihoods in southeastern Brazil. Lydia's studies took her to Mexico, rural Brazil and rural Manitoba. Through her institutional learning and practical farming experience she realized that there is a future in regenerative land management and pasture-based farming/food production.

These days, Lydia along with her partner Wian, work full-time at Luna Field Farm. They manage several hundred acres of pasturelands. The farm is home to pastured poultry, a herd of cows, a few hundred ewes, and a drove of pasture raised hogs. They market the meats they produce on the farm to eaters in Winnipeg, Brandon and surrounding communities.

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NFU 47th Annual Convention

Thurs., November 24 to Sat., November 26, 2016

Hilton Garden Inn Downtown
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan



Room Rates: \$169.00 plus tax (includes parking)
Single or double occupancy / Either king bed or 2 queen beds

Book by: October 22, 2016 to receive the convention rate
When booking, use the group code: **NFU087**

To make your room reservation, please call the hotel directly at **306-244-2311** or email your requests to **reservations@hgisaskatoon.com**.



Creating Opportunities for Alternative Production and Marketing within Supply Management

This January the NFU published a discussion paper titled, Strengthening Supply Management: Defending Canadian control of our market space and advancing food sovereignty. This significant NFU work was summarized in the spring issue of the March 2016, Union Farmer Newsletter. Following are a few excerpts from the report. The full report is available on the NFU website at www.nfu.ca/policy/2016 or by contacting the National NFU Office.

The supply management system governs production of dairy, broiler chickens, laying hens, turkeys and hatching eggs across Canada. Each commodity is governed by its own elected provincial marketing board according to provincial legislation and regulations. Thus, the diversity among the boards and their autonomy allows for variations in how supply management is implemented within the national framework.

Supply management stands upon three pillars:

1. Production Discipline

- whereby the supply of the product is controlled in order to not produce more than the market needs;

2. Cost-of-Production Pricing

- which ensures that farmers receive a fair income; and

3. Import Controls

- which limit farmers' exposure to competition from unfairly priced foreign products.

There is a growing movement of small-scale farmers in Canada seeking to avoid the market power imbalance in commodity production by developing niche markets and focusing on direct sales to local consumers. Differentiating their products and building a loyal customer base provides a degree of economic stability. The NFU believes that the supply management system is capable of responding to these farmers' aspirations in a constructive manner that will enhance Canada's food system.

Some people promote increasing quota-exempt production thresholds so that more small-scale, direct market, mixed farmers can participate in the dairy, poultry and egg markets. The NFU recommends changing the way supply management's production discipline pillar is implemented as a better solution than imposing standardized quota exemptions.

Some provincial marketing boards are developing tools to promote the orderly expansion of alternative

production systems that increase opportunities for smaller scale producers while avoiding the risk of over-production. ***For example:***

- ➔ BC Egg has established a new class of quota and set up a *Small Lot Program* to licence small-scale production over the quota exemption threshold (99 laying hens). Certified organic farmers with up to 399 layers can apply for registration. They do not have to purchase quota; instead they pay an administration fee. Between 2007 and 2014, specialty eggs increased from just under 10% to just over 15% of BC's egg production. Specialty eggs obtain a price premium, allowing their contribution to total BC egg farm receipts to reach nearly 21% in 2014.
- ➔ The Chicken Farmers of Ontario's new *Artisinal Chicken Program* offers a small-scale commercial opportunity for sales of meat chickens. Five percent of the annual growth of quota is allocated to licensed farmers to raise 300-6,000 meat birds per year for sale into their local markets. A further 5% of annual growth will be allocated to the *Local Niche Markets Program* to support farms that seek to serve larger, well-defined niche local and regional markets. Successful applicants to this program will obtain 1,000 to 10,000 quota units to raise 6,000 to 60,000 chickens per year.
- ➔ Dairy Farmers of Ontario's *Project Farmgate* pilot project created a framework for on-farm processing for several dairy farms, allowing them to sell milk and/or cheese from their own herds to local consumers. The farmers' investment was backed by DFO's commitment to purchase surplus milk while the farms were ramping up processing and developing a customer base. DFO also helped these farmers navigate the regulatory requirements for their processing plants, apply for economic development funding and do media outreach to build their markets. This type of project could be replicated in other parts of Canada to encourage diversity of production systems and consumer access to local, niche-market and artisanal products.

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GM Alfalfa – Advertised Benefit vs Economic Loss

Genetically modified (GM) alfalfa was sold commercially in Canada for the first time this year. In March 2016, Forage Genetics International (FGI) announced that it would offer enough HarvXtra™ alfalfa seed to plant 5000 acres during the spring 2016 planting season in Eastern Canada. FGI global traits lead, Mike Peterson, confirmed to *Better Farming* on April 1, 2016 that “initial seed quantities for the spring in Eastern Canada have already been sold out”ⁱ, although it is not clear if those sales were sales to farmers or to seed distributors.

HarvXtra™ alfalfa is stacked with two GM traits: glyphosate-tolerance and reduced-lignin. The reduced lignin trait allows HarvXtra™ alfalfa to maintain palatability when harvested at a later stage of maturity, while the glyphosate-tolerance allows it to be sprayed with the herbicide Round-up without killing the alfalfa. FGI says that with the combination of the two traits, HarvXtra™ “offers growers unsurpassed weed control with excellent crop safety and maximizes grower flexibility to ease the yield versus quality trade-off currently faced by alfalfa producers to produce quality alfalfa for dairy and beef cows”ⁱⁱ.

Many farm organizations and farmers believe that the advertised benefit for purchasers is more than off-set by significant economic loss to others who are non-users of the product. Fifteen farm organizations, including the NFU, Forage Seed Canada, the Canadian Organic Trade Association, Les Producteurs de lait du Quebec and L'Union des producteurs agricoles (UPA), sent a letter to the federal Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Hon. Lawrence MacAulay, on April 20, 2016, asking him, “to take immediate action to stop any further commercial release of GM alfalfa seed by removing variety registration for all GM alfalfa varieties, until a full economic impact assessment is conducted.”ⁱⁱⁱ GM alfalfa has been grown in the United States from 2005 to 2007 and again since 2011, therefore, the letter asks the Minister “to urgently establish a protocol for testing all imports of alfalfa seed grown in the US.”^{iv} A December 2015 US Department of Agriculture study confirmed that GM alfalfa has

dispersed into the environment in three US states, but did not identify the cause of the contamination - both seed spillage and cross-pollination are possibilities.^v

FGI notes that the “Canadian Seed Trade Association (CSTA) has facilitated the development of hay-to-hay coexistence plans and best management practices for both Eastern Canada and Western Canada”^{vi} and that while HarvXtra™ “will not be sold in Western Canada at this time, the completion of an updated plan was in response to requests for additional stewardship guidelines to address the possibility of product moving from Eastern Canada to Western Canada.”^{vii} FGI goes on to claim that “similar stewardship plans in the U.S. have allowed organic, conventional and genetically modified (GM) alfalfa farmers to coexist, regardless of the production method they choose.”^{viii}

“It's imperative that the government take urgent action to stop the commercial introduction of GM alfalfa, to prevent irreversible contamination.”

—Marcel Groleau, President of the Union des Producteurs Agricoles (UPA)

“In fact,” Kate Storey, president of the Manitoba Organic Alliance and Grandview area farmer, says “US crops have been contaminated and US forage seed growers have been shut out of export markets to countries where GM contamination is not tolerated. Canadian forage seed producers picked up those sales but those Canadian seed exports are now threatened by the introduction of GM alfalfa. Co-existence does not work.” The Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN) has detailed various avenues for contamination in its 2013 report, *The Inevitability of Contamination from GM Alfalfa Release in Ontario*, available at www.cban.ca/alfalfaONreport.

(continued on page 14...)



In 2013, CSTA released a coexistence plan for Eastern Canada and, on April 29, 2016, released a similar *Coexistence Plan for Alfalfa Hay in Western Canada*. Neither plan addresses additional risks due to the addition of the low-lignin trait, which allows alfalfa to be harvested at a later bloom stage, thereby increasing the risk of GM pollen being transported to non-GM alfalfa plants by bees. Both plans open with a full page disclaimer from CSTA, noting that they “shall not be held liable for any loss or damage ... arising from, in whole or in part, any use or misuse of this document ...”^{ix} Kate Storey participated in the development of the western coexistence plan and says, “During the writing of the plans, CSTA was clearly and directly told by farmers, farm organizations and scientists that their coexistence plan was ineffective and incapable of preventing the spread and contamination of GM pollen and seed into neighbouring crops.”

The existence of coexistence plans has done little to quell the concerns from many farmers, alfalfa seed growers and their supporters, such as the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMDC), regarding the potential costs to farmers and rural communities from GM alfalfa contamination in Canada.

“The introduction of GM alfalfa could mean we lose some valuable export markets. The risks and costs are just too high for our industry.”

—Heather Kerschbaumer, forage seed grower and President, Forage Seed Canada

In early March, prior to the commercial release of GM alfalfa, a resolution was passed at the AAMDC convention requesting that “Alberta Agriculture and Forestry and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency work with Alberta’s agricultural service boards, marketing groups, Forage Genetics Canada and other relevant stakeholders to prevent the introduction of genetically modified/engineered alfalfa to the province of Alberta until there is a marketplace and consumer acceptance in Alberta’s export markets including China, Japan, the European Union and the Middle East.”^x

Alberta is vulnerable to significant economic loss from GM alfalfa contamination. It produces thirty percent of Canada’s total alfalfa, with annual exports of about half a billion dollars of hay and seed to markets all over the world including Europe and Asia.^{xi} AAMDC also reports that “according to the census completed on May 16, 2006 there were 2,629 farms with organic production in Alberta, 5.3% of all farms in the province. The predominant group of organic products grown in Alberta was hay or field crops (60.5% of the province’s organic farms).”^{xii}

Heather Kerschbaumer, President of Forage Seed Canada and an alfalfa and forage seed grower from the Fairview area in Alberta’s Peace Country, states, “Alfalfa grows everywhere – not only in hay and seed fields, but as feral, or wild, alfalfa, it has spread to our ditches, along fencelines, roadsides, around culverts, along cutlines, pipelines, yardsites, down the middle of laneways, even in the cracks of sidewalks. It grows in wet and dry conditions, from spring through to fall, and it blooms throughout the season.”

According to Toby Malloy, NFU Women’s Vice President and a farmer from the Nanton area of Alberta, “concerns about GM alfalfa among Alberta farmers include the potential loss of export markets for conventional and organic growers, difficulties with proposed co-existence strategies, increased resistance to glyphosate herbicides, a lack of scientific research regarding the effects of GMOs on humans, as well as a lack of dialogue regarding legal and economic ramifications not only for growers and producers.”

Manitoba Organic Alliance president, Kate Storey says, “Canola used to be an economically viable crop for organics until GM canola was introduced. Within a few years the GM trait had cross-contaminated the entire canola seed stock and organic growers lost their market. The loss of alfalfa from organic agriculture will be economically devastating.”

Farmers in Eastern Canada are also concerned about how GM alfalfa may affect their livelihoods. Murray Bunnnett, a farmer from Petitcodiac, New Brunswick grows alfalfa to feed his chickens, pigs and cows. In an interview this May with CBC, he said that his family hears from customers that “they don’t want any genetically modified products in the food they are eating.”^{xiii}

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(*GM Alfalfa*, from page 14...)

For southwestern Ontario's Lambton County corn and soybean farmer, Emery Huszka, the commercial release of GM alfalfa seed will increase the problem of herbicide resistant weeds. GM alfalfa with glyphosate-tolerance is "providing another breeding ground in an already glyphosate-resistant weed environment". This is at a time when "we're struggling with (glyphosate) resistant fleabane here

in southern Ontario ... so thick you could walk across it." ^{xiv}

NFU members across the country are taking action to stop the further release of GM alfalfa in Canada. More information and copies of NFU letters to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food can be found at <http://www.nfu.ca/issues/stop-genetically-modified-alfalfa> .

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ⁱ <http://www.betterfarming.com/online-news/glyphosate-tolerant-alfalfa-debuts-eastern-canada-61379>

ⁱⁱ http://genonmealberta.ca/files/PDF/news/FGI_Stakeholder_Update_-_March_2016HarvXtra_Alfalfa_with_Roundup_Ready_technology_Final.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.nfu.ca/story/farm-groups-call-ag-minister-stop-genetically-modified-alfalfa-seed-release>

^{iv} <http://www.nfu.ca/story/farm-groups-call-ag-minister-stop-genetically-modified-alfalfa-seed-release>

^v Greene SL, Kesoju, SR, Martin RC, Kramer M (2015) Occurrence of Transgenic Feral Alfalfa in Alfalfa Seed (*Medicago sativa subsp. sativa*L.) Production Areas in the United States. PLoS ONE 10(12):e0143296.doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0143296

^{vi} http://genonmealberta.ca/files/PDF/news/FGI_Stakeholder_Update_-_March_2016HarvXtra_Alfalfa_with_Roundup_Ready_technology_Final.pdf

^{vii} http://genonmealberta.ca/files/PDF/news/FGI_Stakeholder_Update_-_March_2016HarvXtra_Alfalfa_with_Roundup_Ready_technology_Final.pdf

^{viii} http://genonmealberta.ca/files/PDF/news/FGI_Stakeholder_Update_-_March_2016HarvXtra_Alfalfa_with_Roundup_Ready_technology_Final.pdf

^{ix} <http://cdnseed.org/>

^x <http://www.aamdc.com/advocacy/resolutions-resources/resolutions/details/1/801>

^{xi} Canadian Biotechnology Action Network, *The Case for Preventing the Introduction of Roundup Ready Alfalfa*, April 2013. www.cban.ca

^{xii} <http://www.aamdc.com/advocacy/resolutions-resources/resolutions/details/1/801>

^{xiii} <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/farmers-genetically-modified-alfalfa-1.3583864>

^{xiv} <http://www.betterfarming.com/online-news/glyphosate-tolerant-alfalfa-debuts-eastern-canada-61379>

Climate change as a priority for the National Farmers Union, and an opportunity for farm families

—by Darrin Qualman, Coordinator of the NFU's Manitoba Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Project

The NFU is drafting a detailed, science-based, farmer-centred plan on how to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from agriculture. The goal is to come up with a blueprint to cut emissions by as much as half by mid-century. The work is currently focused on Manitoba, but the NFU is exploring avenues to expand its research, analysis, and advocacy to all NFU Regions.

It is hard to overstate the importance of climate change and greenhouse gases and their connection to agriculture and family farms. Climate change is an important issue for farmers for at least three reasons:

First, though the Canadian government and many others have not acted yet, the growing menace of climate change will eventually force them to act. And when they do, because they have waited too long, their actions may be rushed and their

instruments blunt: taxes, regulations, restrictions. Farmers need to understand climate change and be ready with effective, farmer-led policy solutions. If we are not, others, unacquainted with on-farm realities, will craft policies and impose them upon us.

Governments are indicating that they are readying for action. They are making commitments and setting targets. In Paris, in December 2015, Canada joined the world's nations in pledging that GHG emissions would peak "as soon as possible" and that nations' emissions would undergo "rapid reductions" thereafter. Canada and the other nations further pledged to make their economies carbon free (no net emissions) in the decades following 2050. More specifically, Canada committed to reduce its GHG emissions by 30 percent below 2005 levels by 2030—just fourteen

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years from now. Many provinces have made similar commitments. Ontario has committed to reduce its emissions by 37 percent below 1990 levels by 2030. And Manitoba committed to cut emissions by 33 percent by the same year. That province further committed to cut emissions by half by 2050; and to make the province carbon neutral by 2080. *These and similar commitments imply huge changes for our farms and food systems.*

Second, climate change is important in that there is going to be a lot of it. Though governments may be readying to act, though they have set ambitious targets, and though they have pledged to control climate change, like a raging fire, it is far from under control. In the lead-up to the December 2015 Paris climate talks, nearly all the nations of the world made emission reduction commitments, including Canada. These nations submitted targets to the UN for 2020, 2030, and beyond. It should alarm us to learn that if we examine all of those commitments, and if we give every national government the benefit of the doubt and assume that all will reach their emission reduction targets, we find that even if all of these promised reductions are achieved, the global temperature increase will be on track to reach 2.7°–3.5° Celsius above pre-industrial levels by the end of the century. That is worth repeating: even if all nations meet their ambitious goals, predicted global average temperatures will be, not 2° C higher, but 2.7°–3.5° higher. This is the path we are on. Though such news is bad for the world, it is even worse for Canada's farmers because the Earth does not warm uniformly. Continental interiors at higher latitudes, places such as western and central Canada, are warming nearly twice as fast as the global average. Therefore, a 2.7°–3.5° C rise in the global average temperatures this century might mean a 5.4°–7.0° rise for much of Canada. And it is farmers, our land, and livelihoods that are most vulnerable.

The third reason climate change is important to farmers is more positive than the previous two. Climate impacts on the one hand, and a drive to reduce GHG emissions, on the other, mean that our farms and food systems must be transformed. And though this transformation will be hard at times, and

though it will bring costs, it also brings certain opportunities—opportunities to exit the path that governments and agribusiness corporations have set for agriculture and to embark in a new direction. Beginning in the middle of the 20th century, Canadian governments and global agribusiness corporations have urged (and pushed) farmers down a path toward maximum-production, maximum-inputs, and maximum-costs. If the pluses have been increased production and exports, the minuses have included the loss of two-thirds our family farms, decimated communities, low prices for farm products, and small or negative margins. We have built the agricultural system that John Deere and Monsanto wanted, but not the one that farm families and Canadian citizens wanted. But

all that must now change. Our high-input, high-energy use, high-emission food production and distribution systems must be transformed and many parts of it replaced. The changes needed to reduce GHG emissions bring with them the opportunity for other changes; the opportunity to build the agricultural system that citizens and farm families want, one that includes more farmers on the land, more young farmers, a rich diversity of delicious regional food, sustainable incomes for all who help produce our food, and diverse and environmentally sustainable approaches to stewarding the land and raising safe, nutritious food. Climate change makes it necessary to cut agricultural GHG emissions; but climate change also creates the opportunity to transform our farms, communities, tables, and landscapes.

National Farmers Union members and officials are taking a leadership role in developing policies that will cut emissions from our farms and food systems. And those policies that make our farms more environmentally sustainable can also make our farms more economically and socially sustainable. For more than half a century, we have pushed more and more fuel and energy into our food system, and we have pushed farm families out. We have also pushed out more and more climate-destabilizing emissions. The future must proceed along a different path. And that can benefit all Canadian citizens, urban and rural.

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The Grain Sector: Open Market or Open Season?

Convention Address: *Bill Gehl* Chair of the Saskatchewan Wheat Development Commission & farmer, NFU Region 6 (Saskatchewan).

Bill Gehl is a third generation Saskatchewan grain farmer whose parents were founding members of the NFU. Their farm is near Regina. Bill is past chair of the Canadian Wheat Board Alliance, a member of Friends of the Canadian Wheat Board, and current chairman of the Saskatchewan Wheat Development Commission. During the NFU 46th Annual Convention last November he gave a presentation titled *The Grain Sector: Open Market or Open Season?*



(AAFC) set up a massive plant breeding program with research farms and centres all across Canada. It established the Dominion Rust Lab (now the Cereals Research Centre) in Winnipeg in 1925. Breeding took place at multiple sites to ensure adaptation to diverse conditions. In contrast, the newer private breeding programs are very geographically concentrated. Sixty percent of our hard red spring wheat varieties and over eighty

percent of durum varieties come from AAFC research facilities. Bill also spoke about the Canadian International Grains Institute (CIGI), established in the 1970's to promote and provide technical expertise on Canadian grains. It can test grain and pulse varieties' performance in pasta, flour, bakery, noodles and steamed bread products.

In 2012, the Harper government brought in the "Deficit Reduction Action Plan". Within the year, it cut forty percent of AAFC's budget, affecting 1,816 employees, including 702 who lost their jobs. By the end of 2015 over 1,000 jobs had been eliminated. Research facilities across the country, including the Cereals Research Center, were closed along with sixteen federal research libraries.

Bill began with a history of western grain marketing. Wheat exports were the foundation of settlement in Western Canada. The private grain trade was established and transportation then, as now, was dominated by the two railroads. To solve marketing problems during World War I, the government set up the Board of Grain Supervisors. It controlled the purchase, sale and pricing of all wheat for export, but was ended after the 1918 harvest. Farmers successfully lobbied for a single desk and the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) was established to market the 1919 crop. It was disbanded in 1920, despite the excellent wheat price – \$2.83/bushel. By 1923, it was less than \$1.00/bushel. During this time, farmers developed the co-operative grain handling system known as the "Wheat Pools". In the Great Depression, the pools went bankrupt and a mass exodus of prairie farmers occurred. Yet, as Bill pointed out; the markets caused more farm foreclosures during the 1920's than drought caused in the 1930's. Farmers pushed for and got the government to reinstate the CWB in 1935. Mackenzie King made it permanent in 1943, and it stood until August 1, 2012. After surviving fourteen trade challenges by the USA, the CWB was felled by our own government.

Bill then discussed grain revenues after the single desk CWB ended. With the CWB, farmers got over ninety percent of the revenue from the sale of their grain. In the last two years, they received only 41 to 58 percent. Western farmers have lost \$5 to \$6.7 billion due to "basis" discounts charged by the elevator companies. Without the CWB coordinating the loading of ships, delays result in demurrage charges that further reduce the farmer's price.

Bill then asked "How did Canada carve out this market while competing with countries that don't have the challenges of a land-locked production area and winters?"

After losing the CWB, Bill said remaining institutions like CIGI and the Canadian Grain Commission (CGC) are more important than ever. The Harper government has likely caused irreparable harm, but he is encouraged by the new government. "Whereas the last government would not even talk to us, opportunities to work with the new government now exist."

The importance of Agriculture Canada's wheat research cannot be overstated. Agriculture Canada

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Restoring balance, profits and fulfillment

Convention Keynote Address: *Jeff Rasawehr, farmer and seed producer, Ohio, USA..*

Jeff Rasawehr provided the keynote speech, *Managing Your Soil: Restoring balance, profits and fulfillment*, at the 46th Annual NFU Convention held in London, Ontario last fall.

Rasawehr is a farmer and seed producer who lives in Ohio and also has farm land in Michigan. After farming 3,000 acres for many years using an industrial, chemical approach he switched fourteen years ago to a biological system that depends on diverse cover crops. Jeff described his area of Ohio as a “social disaster” and a “mecca of chemical, industrial farming where a few farmers make money and a lot of people are on welfare and heroin”. He reported that cancer rates are very high and intensive agriculture has had a negative affect on the water quality of Lake Erie. Disillusioned with large scale farming, and seeking a system that would be more rewarding and profitable, he made the transition to biological farming and has decreased his land base from 3,000 to 900 acres and plans to reduce his farm size further in the future.

Rasawehr has achieved success in maximizing soil biology by using strategic planting of diverse cover crops, including daikon radishes, oats, legumes and grasses, in order to increase the availability of sulphur and potassium, stimulate protozoa and improve moisture retention. He referred to his “six-step system” that includes “always keeping it green” by planting cover crops in the fall that can overwinter and then provide spring forage, and mitigating toxicity by avoiding the use of anhydrous ammonia. He tries to use appropriate soil amendments by paying attention to what the soil may be deficient

in and responding to the need. He also uses a no-till approach and believes there are nutritional benefits to seeding directly into the cover crop. Rasawehr explained how he uses viable enhancements and pays attention to an array of possible biologicals. Finally, he described how he is always learning new things about how to build healthy soil and grow healthy plants.

The presentation was followed by some excellent questions from the floor, many pertaining to the challenges of year round cover crops and being able to follow with a cash crop given the harsh climate and short growing season in some areas of Canada, including Alberta and Saskatchewan. Rasawehr concurred that the full approach may not be viable for some but there is still a great value in the use of cover crops to improve soil health and increase yield using a smaller land base.

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Learning from the Landless Rural Workers Movement in Brazil

—by Dan Kretschmar, NFU Region 3 Board Member

The struggles of the working class from around the world became very real to me last fall at the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) school I attended in Brazil, on behalf of the NFU's International Program Committee. I met peasant farmers from India, South Africa, Sri Lanka, East Timor and Brazil, to name a few. Politicians, lawyers and people who worked for non-governmental organizations dealing with social justice issues also took part in the seven week course. In all sixty-five people from twenty-one countries attended the school.

The farmers all faced similar issues: industrial agriculture is destroying their way of life and they are being exploited in order for elites to continue their dominance of every aspect of human life.

The school was located in a small town about one hour outside of Sao Paulo and was surrounded by banana trees with a beautiful vegetable and fruit garden – in many ways a paradise. We followed a very regimented schedule with twelve hour classes, six days a week. The first four weeks were spent learning theories of alternate thinkers, some history of the class struggle in Latin America and capitalist society as a whole. There were also cultural evenings, where people cooked food from their respective countries, dressed in traditional clothing and shared music and dances.

There is hope for a renewal of society, culture and a brave new world with the potential for all humans to thrive and reach their full potential. This became very clear to me after a one week, one thousand kilometre field trip through the Brazilian countryside. The journey took us through some large industrial agriculture operations where soybeans were planted as far as the eye could see. I cannot remember seeing anything but soy, sugar cane and some small patches of jungle for a large portion of the trip. It is sad how much jungle has been cut down to make room for intensive monocrops.

The most impressive experience came on the final day of our field trip. We visited a co-op settlement where everyone lives and works in harmony. Everyone who is part of the co-op has a house to live in, land to grow food on and a

guaranteed income. Land is collectively owned, as are tractors and other equipment and any public spaces. They are essentially self-sufficient. People have the option to work in the sector that they feel best suited. Individuals who do harder work, such as harvesting sugar cane or growing food, get paid more than people who work in an office. There is no unemployment in the co-op. Women can retire at fifty-five and men at sixty. They get a retirement fund and they also get assistance from the co-op. After seventy, they get a pension as well and can continue to work if they choose. The only bills people have individually are for electricity and other personal needs. The rest is provided by the co-op. If someone does not have a car, the co-op has one to use. They also distribute the extra profit from co-op sales to each member at the end of the year depending on hours worked. Retired people also get a portion.

Organizing a society in such a way is hard work and takes complete cooperation and commitment from everyone involved. There is an incredible organizational structure within MST. Training starts at a young age, and children are taught the value of agriculture in schools. It may be a dream to think that this type of structure could work on farms and in communities in Canada. If we can make it work in some form or another, it could turn out to be one of the best ways to re-localize our economy, combat the climate crisis and take a huge step towards self-sufficiency.

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Memories of Roy Atkinson from some NFU Members who worked with him

A force in farm politics:

— by Terry Boehm, former NFU President

Roy Atkinson was at the center of prairie and Canadian politics for more than three-quarters of a century. He had a very clear analysis of power and how it was being used to the detriment of family farmers. He often talked about finance capital, understanding its fluidity and how it would constantly find new ways to extract wealth from farmers, the land and ordinary workers. He believed in democracy, organizing, unions, political action, protest, and education. These were all the tools to better the lot of family farmers and all citizens.

He was never afraid to speak out and became a lightning rod in farm politics. Everyone knew what Roy Atkinson thought. I had the privilege of working with him for many years from the mid-seventies onwards, in the ongoing battles with the railways, grain companies, and political policies. The battles to retain the Crow Rate and to keep the Prairie Pools operating as co-operatives, the early fight against plant breeder's rights and the struggle to keep the CWB, are just a tiny swath of the engagements that Roy was passionate about.

He had a comprehensive view of history and was prescient about the future. He was a mentor to many, including me. He was also an occasional tormentor, but he always wanted what was best for common people. He had a great sense of humour and when I occasionally caught his ire he referred to me as a god damn technocrat. He will be profoundly missed. Solidarity forever.



James Dionne (l), Roy Atkinson (m) & Urban Laughlin (r), 1989.

Fighting for and with farm families:

— by Nettie Wiebe, former NFU President

Roy Atkinson dedicated his life to confronting the powers that are intent on unravelling farmers' livelihoods. Older NFU members recall the massive tractor rallies and blockades that farmers organized with Roy at the helm. His sharp analysis of economic and political forces informed his very practical and uncompromising positions in defence of family farmers' interests.

Roy was a courageous leader. He fought for and with farm families to protect their economic interests and their way of life. He was a clear-eyed strategist who understood the political dynamics of his times. Time and again, he made sure that politicians had to face the farmers on their own terms and see the people whose lives were affected by their policies. Farmers of our generation continue to benefit from Roy's legacy.

Farm leader, social activist, teacher:

— by Wayne Easter, former NFU President and MP, Malpeque, PEI

Roy Atkinson was more than anything else a teacher - oh yes, he was a farm leader, a social activist and much more - but foremost he was a teacher, teaching generations to believe in their cause and, without fear, to challenge the system for the benefit of all. Through his experience and intellect he taught others how to strategize, organize and build the information base to promote and implement policies that would benefit the farm community and humankind.

Roy believed in public debate on the issues and, if necessary, to draw attention to either an injustice, or better policy approaches, to not be afraid to use public demonstrations. He organized many. I'm proud to have stood with him in those fights.

Making the right decision:

— by Stewart Wells, former NFU President

Roy was a man of tremendous intellect and discipline. He believed if you gave people all the information they would make the right decision, and that people should be able to control their own means of production and marketing.

(continued on page 21...)



Doing my part:

— by Ed Molzan, NFU Member, Region 3

The last time I spoke to Roy was at convention about five years ago. Roy once told me that I could swear better than he could. I knew he was a worker for the Farmers Union out there [in Saskatchewan]. I tried to do my part here in Ontario.

Striving for justice:

— by Ruth Veiner, former Region 7 Kraft boycott coordinator, Region 8 Women's Advisory and Board member

Roy dedicated his life to activism and was determined to seek what was just and due for farmers. He understood the political system, and indeed, the system we work in, and he continued to strive for justice. My condolences to Roy's family.

Leaving footprints:

— by J.P. Hendricken, first NFU member in PEI

It is with sadness that many of us say good-bye to a great friend and farmer, Roy Atkinson. Roy left his footprints in many fields across Canada and elsewhere. Those footprints are still there in the soil. He brought encouragement and love of the land to our farms and communities and showed us what we as farm families could and should do to keep our farming communities alive and transparent. The encouragement and advice he gave us will always be there.

Putting himself on the line:

— by Urban Laughlin, former NFU Board member, Region 1

Roy put himself on the line on behalf of farmers.

He had a great love for Prince Edward Island. In 1971, he was in the province for a nine-day tractor demonstration and was found not-guilty of conspiring to block the highway because NFU members had made the decision to do that.

Social issues farm policy?

— by Jean Leahy, former Region 8 Executive member, Region 8 Women's Advisory, Women's Vice President, Women's President, Regional Coordinator, Vice President

Roy, having been very active in the Saskatchewan Farmers Union, and in conversation with provincial farmers unions, could see that the federal government needed to hear from Rural Canada. It was time to have a NATIONAL FARMERS UNION! Policies that would keep farmers on the land were developed. At times there was a need to be more vocal. Demonstrations took place in various locations across Canada. Much was learned.

Were social issues farm policy? Well, yes, farmers lived in our society. Roy talked about women's rights, an issue not always appreciated, however, women make up half the population. —nfu—

ROBERT ROY ATKINSON (CM) passed away on May 17, 2016. Roy was a character who loved his family and all things Irish. He was the oldest of ten born on Feb. 17, 1924, to Bob and Elsie Atkinson on the farm his grandparents homesteaded in 1906 located north of Springwater, SK. Roy married Bette Aylward (from Duperow, SK) on Nov. 17, 1951 and they began their 52-year life farming, raising kids and working for social and economic change. Together they raised five children, and in his view there wasn't a dud amongst them. His wife Bette; parents Bob and Elsie Atkinson; sisters Margaret, Louise and Doris; and brothers Blair and David, predeceased Roy. He leaves a legacy of activism, love, determination (as in you never give up, ever!), integrity, ethics and hard work for his children: Pat (Alfons J.P.), Leta, Bob (Bev), Wendy (Todd), Mike (Kristin) and his grandchildren Gavin (Natalka) Tyne (Nicole) Bailen (Roxanne) Shane (Michelle) Jamieson (Krystalyn) Ryan (Morgan) Colton (Liz), Kate (Mike) and Danny along with his great-grandchildren Bentley, Stella, Brooklyn, Allie, Callie Anne, Boston and Max. Whether the 8th Street Co-op cafeteria, where he would hold court, a town hall meeting or the family living room, Roy was an outstanding orator and has many high school medals to prove it. As an activist farmer, he devoted his life to lobbying governments and providing leadership to Canadian farmers. He was President of the Saskatchewan Farm Union from 1962 until 1969 when he became the President of the National Farmers Union, a position he held until 1978. He served on the Economic Council of Canada and was a member of the Canadian Council for Rural Development. He was a board member of Federated Cooperatives Limited and was a "grassroots general" in Saskatchewan's fight for universal medicare serving on the Community Health Services Association formed in opposition to the 1962 doctors strike. From 1965 to 1994 Roy was a member of the CWB Advisory Committee and served as chair from 1980 until 1985. He was an elected delegate to the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. From 1998 he was co-chair of the Prairie Alliance for the Future, a western Canadian organization dedicated to creating a regional grain collection and transportation system. Roy was active in forming the Landis Producer Coop after the elevator system in Saskatchewan was decimated. Roy was an activist spokesperson on behalf of farmers and wasn't afraid to use public demonstrations for the causes and public policy he was advancing. His only objective was to improve farmer economics and ensure the survival of the family farm. In recognition of his life's work, he was inducted into the Sask. Agricultural Hall of Fame and invested with Canada's highest honour, the Order of Canada. His family, comrades and protégés were inspired by Roy's unwavering sense of compassion, fairness, conviction and curiosity.



STAFF CHANGES:

Welcome to Bev and Josie. Thank You to Diane.

BEV MAGILL, OFFICE ASSISTANT:

Bev Magill recently joined the NFU as Office Assistant in the National Office. Bev holds a two-year diploma from Saskatchewan Polytechnic (Kelsey) in Food and Nutrition Management and a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture. After graduation, Bev worked at the University of Saskatchewan, College of Agriculture Soil Science department as a research technician and then moved to the Agriculture Council of Saskatchewan for thirteen years. Initially, she was program coordinator with the Agriculture Institute of Management in Saskatchewan program, but the majority of her time was spent as a project officer with the Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Saskatchewan (ACAAFS) and Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program (CAAP) funding programs. In the fall of 2014, she was hired by the Saskatchewan Cattlemen's Association as Project Manager. Her career there was a short but exciting nine months as they decided to move their office to Regina! Bev is looking forward to working with everyone at the National Farmers Union.



JOSIE BAKER, INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM COMMITTEE COORDINATOR:

Josie Baker has recently been hired as the part-time coordinator of the NFU International Program Committee (IPC). This position involves coordinating the work of the IPC as it builds the NFU's involvement in the global issues that shape the daily reality for farmers in Canada and the world over. The IPC has identified that migrant agricultural workers and climate change will be the main focus of their work this year.

An important part of the IPC work is to take advantage of opportunities for NFU members to participate in events and campaigns with La Via Campesina, a global movement of peasant farmers who seek to promote justice through defending the viability and dignity of small-scale agriculture.

Josie's career has focused on building community, particularly through grassroots projects. Her educational background is in ecofeminism, community development, and critical adult education. She has strong connections with small farmers and with the land in Prince Edward Island. When she is not working with the IPC, she works with Cooper Institute, a popular education and community development centre in Charlottetown PEI. In this work, her main focus is on migrant worker rights and seed sovereignty projects.

GOOD BYE (AGAIN) TO DIANE NEUFELD:

If you have ever called the NFU national office, there is a good chance you have spoken with Diane. Diane retired as the NFU's Office Assistant earlier this year. She initially retired from the NFU several years ago, but after a couple of years she returned to the NFU's front desk. With her decades of experience with the NFU, her knowledge of the NFU will be missed. She really did know the organization and our members inside out. If you notice some obvious typos or incorrect spelling in this issue of the UFQ, it may be because Diane is no longer in the office to do her stellar job as a proof reader.

Enjoy your retirement Diane and thank you for your decades of service on behalf of Canada's farmers.



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 to 21 years old, and 22 to 30 years old. One award in the amount of \$500 will be awarded each age category for a **NON-FICTION OPEN LETTER** 500-1000 words in length. **APPLICANTS CAN ONLY WIN ONCE PER AGE CATEGORY.**
- **This year's theme is: My Future Vision for Canada's Farming and Food System.**
- Deadline for entries is November 1, 2016.
- The winners will be announced at the NFU Convention in November 2016.
- 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 to:
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.

We Remember ...

JOHN VILCU

John Vilcu of Griffin, Saskatchewan, passed away peacefully May 18, 2015.

John was a member of the Saskatchewan Farmers Union, and he and his wife Mary, were Life Members of the National Farmers Union.

He was a strong believer in the principals and goals of the farm movement.

He will be missed by his family and friends.



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Youth Advisory Committee: *Martin Boettcher*, Brussels, ON; *Lydia Carpenter*, Dunrea, MB; *Rachelle Ternier*, Humboldt, SK; *Ted Chastko*, Lacombe, AB; *Lisa Lundgard*, Grimshaw, AB.



NFU 47th Annual Convention



Agriculture in a Changing Climate

Thurs., November 24 to Sat., November 26, 2016

**Hilton Garden Inn Downtown
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan**

Room Rates: \$169.00 plus tax (includes parking)
Single or double occupancy/King bed or 2 queen beds

Book by: October 22, 2016 to receive the convention rate
When booking, use the group code: NFU087



To make room reservations, please call the hotel directly at **306-244-2311** or email your requests to **reservations@hgisaskatoon.com**.