

quarterly union farmer

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NATIONAL & REGIONAL CONVENTION UPDATE

see page 13 for details

Hugo and Aube Chiasson-Arsenau
welcome their new laying hens on
the farm.

- photo by Pierre-Olivier Brassard



Message from the Editorial Advisory Committee

— by Ann Slater, Chair,
Editorial Advisory Committee



Times of crisis can also bring opportunities for change. As you read through this issue of the *Union Farmer Quarterly* you will learn more about how the National Farmers Union is working through the current COVID-19 crisis to push for needed changes in our food systems. In particular, the NFU Livestock Committee and the NFU Migrant Worker Subcommittee have been busy over the last several months, as COVID-19 made clear how fragile our food system is in terms of workers in meat processing plants and on fruit, vegetable and flower farms and greenhouses. Both committees have reports in this issue and the Livestock Committee has a call-out for more members to join them.

As a farmer in Southwestern Ontario, I am aware of new developments since the reports were submitted which will be of

concern to both committees. First, is the decision of the Ontario government to allow migrant workers who test positive for COVID-19 but are asymptomatic to continue working. Second, at a time when many small abattoirs are booking into 2021 some NFU livestock producers in Huron and Bruce Counties are now faced with the loss of their local abattoir. Green's Meat Market and Abattoir has had to shut down for the time being following a fire in late June.

In her report, NFU Executive Director Mara Shaw highlights much of the work the NFU has undertaken in relation to COVID-19. One of the key pieces of work, is the commitment NFU leadership has made to attend the three times per week Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada industry calls related to the COVID-19 crisis. The participation in these calls has

provided a platform for the NFU to hear about and respond immediately to, governmental approaches to addressing the COVID crisis for farmers, including issues being discussed within the Livestock Committee and the Migrant Workers Subcommittee. In addition to AAFC staff, hundreds of agricultural leaders are on these calls, and the NFU is routinely the voice for family farms and for the people behind the farms – owners, workers, and eaters.

Although the COVID-19 challenges and changes to our way of life take up a good chunk of this issue, the NFU has not stepped away from other important work and analysis whether that be climate change, justice for all, or changes to the Canadian Grain Commission. ■

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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

Katie Ward, NFU National President

le français suit

My head is spinning to keep up with the number of issues facing society as I write to you during my early-morning coffee in a mid-June heatwave coming on the heels of a cold and dry spring growing season. I once read that getting information from the internet is like trying to drink from a firehose. That person must have been a prophet, talking about 2020.

I want to start by thanking our incredible staff and volunteer members who help to synthesize many of those complex issues facing society and agriculture into educational and incisive pieces for us as farmers and eaters, here in the *Union Farmer Quarterly*, in planning our upcoming virtual events, and on an ongoing basis. This year has certainly given us all a lot to learn about!

The wildfires in Australia have dropped out of everyday discussion, but the climate crisis is still knocking on our doors. Darrin Qualman has returned to the National Farmers Union in his new role as Director of Climate Crisis Policy and Action, and has been spearheading our work, writing some incredible pieces, and advancing our policy goals with allies and legislators.

Working together now, we can build the future of agriculture and its essential place in the more just and equal society we want to see.

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, our Executive Director Mara Shaw has been running point on pandemic-related issues for the NFU. The NFU has been able to speak up on behalf of farmers, farm workers and eaters with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada a number of times since the pandemic began. Martha Robbins has rejoined the NFU as International Programs Committee Co-ordinator, and her efforts on migrant worker issues in Canada as well as with our international allies has enabled the NFU to be a prominent voice with the government and in the media advocating for the real people obscured by the symbolic term “*Temporary Foreign Worker*”.

In a time of upheaval, and great inequality, we can make a space for systemic change. The NFU’s Director of Research and Policy, Cathy Holtslander, makes strong arguments for the positive contributions agriculture can make for a more just and

equal society, to paraphrase Benjamin Franklin, *if we can make it*. The Livestock and Seed Committees, along with your elected representatives in Regions across the country, have highlighted abattoir, sovereignty and trade issues both in light of the pandemic and to expose and debate instances of corporate duplicity and government malfeasance that have used the pandemic as cover for advancing structural inequality. I cannot remember a moment when the zeitgeist has felt more pivotal or more filled with possibility for the integral values of the NFU.

I am inspired by all of the foundational work the NFU has done for decades in building a progressive movement in agriculture. Working together now, we can build the future of agriculture and its essential place in the more just and equal society we want to see.

—In Solidarity, Katie Ward

Un message de Katie Ward, présidente nationale de l'UNF

J'ai la tête qui tourne pour suivre le nombre de problèmes auxquels la société est confrontée alors que je vous écris au petit matin, au moment de la canicule de la mi-juin qui suit une saison de croissance printanière froide et sèche. J'ai lu un jour qu'obtenir des informations sur Internet, c'est comme essayer de boire avec un tuyau d'incendie. Cette personne devait être un prophète, parlant de 2020.

Je tiens tout d'abord à remercier notre incroyable personnel et nos bénévoles qui nous aident à synthétiser un grand nombre de ces questions complexes auxquelles la société et l'agriculture sont confrontées en des éléments éducatifs et incisifs pour nous, agriculteurs et mangeurs, ici dans L'Union des Fermiers Trimestriel, dans la planification de nos prochains événements virtuels, et de façon continue. Cette année nous a certainement donné à tous beaucoup à apprendre!

Les incendies de forêt en Australie ont certes cessé de faire l'objet de discussions quotidiennes, mais la crise climatique frappe toujours à nos portes. Darrin Qualman est revenu à l'UNF dans son nouveau rôle de directeur de la politique et de l'action sur la crise climatique. Il a été le fer de lance de notre travail, en écrivant des articles incroyables et en faisant avancer nos objectifs politiques avec nos alliés et les législateurs.

***En travaillant ensemble maintenant,
nous pouvons construire l'avenir de l'agriculture et
sa place essentielle dans la société plus juste et
plus équitable que nous voulons voir.***

Tout au long de la crise COVID-19, notre directrice exécutive Mara Shaw a été à la pointe des questions liées à la pandémie pour l'UNF. L'UNF a pu s'exprimer au nom des agriculteurs, des travailleurs agricoles et des mangeurs auprès d'Agriculture et Agroalimentaire Canada à plusieurs reprises depuis le début de la pandémie. Martha Robbins a rejoint l'UNF en tant que coordinatrice du Comité des programmes internationaux, et ses efforts sur les questions relatives aux travailleurs migrants au Canada ainsi qu'avec nos alliés internationaux ont permis à l'UNF d'être une voix importante auprès du gouvernement et dans les médias pour défendre les personnes réelles obscurcies par le terme symbolique de <<travailleur étranger temporaire>>.

En cette période de bouleversements et de grandes inégalités, nous pouvons faire de l'espace pour un changement systémique. Cathy Holstlander, directrice de la recherche et des politiques de l'UNF, présente des arguments solides en faveur des contributions positives que l'agriculture peut apporter à une

société plus juste et plus équitable, pour paraphraser Benjamin Franklin, si nous y parvenons. Les comités du bétail et des semences, ainsi que vos représentants élus dans les régions de tout le pays, ont mis en lumière les questions d'abattage, de souveraineté et de commerce, à la fois à la lumière de la pandémie et pour exposer et débattre des cas de duplicité des entreprises et de malversations des gouvernements qui ont utilisé la pandémie comme couverture pour faire progresser l'inégalité structurelle.. Je ne me souviens pas d'un moment où l'esprit du temps se soit senti plus central ou plus rempli de possibilités pour les valeurs intégrales de la NFU.

Je suis inspiré par tout le travail fondamental que la NFU a accompli pendant des décennies pour construire un mouvement progressiste dans l'agriculture. En travaillant ensemble maintenant, nous pouvons construire l'avenir de l'agriculture et sa place essentielle dans la société plus juste et plus équitable que nous voulons voir.

— Katie Ward



A Message from Coral Sproule, NFU Women's President

As I began to ponder my report for this issue of the *Union Farmer Quarterly*, I found myself feeling overwhelmed by the impact on our food and social systems since mid-March and the relative fragility of the social fabric of our rural small towns. The degradation has been happening over time but somehow feels all too real now. Much of what has occurred in response to this pandemic highlights the inequities and struggles we in the NFU have seen looming in our food and social systems for decades now.

Although positive, the growing interest in Food Sovereignty leaves many of us struggling to seize this moment to affect lasting policy change to support a stronger food system. We are working harder than ever to try and meet the increased demand for direct marketed products, and simultaneously to address gaps in both policy and funding for agriculture and food processing. Farmers have shown resilience through this time, adapting to the many and unpredictable changes. I do not know about you, but I have also been spending much of my free time lending support to those who are growing food for themselves for the

first time. The physical isolation during this time has often exacerbated existing challenges around mental health and access to care, education, rural health care, child care funding and availability, long term care, housing, food access, and public and affordable transportation in rural communities.

Under distancing restrictions, we have seen a staggering rise in reports of domestic and other forms of Gender Based Violence (GBV), and child abuse. The Assaulted Women's Helpline says, "calls to the Helpline from women seeking emergency shelter have increased 400% from this time last year" as victims of abuse have no way to escape their abusers. Since Canada's shelter system was already at capacity before COVID-19, it has left advocates and counsellors scrambling to find safe places for women and children. Rural women often face even more challenges due to their relative isolation and the lack of accessible community and social supports. The Helpline also reports that due to this enormous increase they have also seen a 21% increase in the number of calls which simply cannot get through to their helpline. This is a time we need to show solidarity with organizations and services like the Assaulted Women's Helpline, women's shelters and interval houses and others addressing women and violence.

...we must join in unity, with local as well as international allies, over our shared struggles, and also our triumphs.

One of the most awful and atrocious violent crimes in recent months was the violent mass shooting in Nova Scotia. Both women and men were targeted, but many link the shooting, which began with an assault on a girlfriend to a pattern of male violence and GBV. One cannot begin to express the sadness and anger in reaction to this type of attack, and our condolences go out to the families and communities so negatively impacted by this violent crime. We must also support and act in solidarity with Black women, women of colour, Indigenous women, immigrant women and LGBTQ2S+ and their children who are more often victims of assault.

The 'heroes' in recent months - those in the care and front line professions are predominantly women whose work is undervalued as funding had been cut continuously amid bids to privatize care for our elderly and our children. Now more than ever we must join in unity, with local as well as international allies, over our shared struggles, and also our triumphs. ■

The Assaulted Women's Helpline offers a 24-hour telephone and TTY crisis line to all woman who have experienced abuse. More information on their services can be found at www.awhl.org

Some resources for farmer mental health support and information:

<http://www.mobilecrisis.ca/farm-stress-line-rural-sask>

Mental Health for farmers First Aid Kit-OMAFRA- <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/about/mental-health.htm>

Mental Health Helpline Call: 1-866-531-2600



Region 1: District 2

Provinces of New Brunswick
& Nova Scotia

—by Suzanne Fournier, Executive Director / Directrice exécutive

REGIONAL REPORTS

On April 28th, New Brunswick's Premier Higgs announced that temporary foreign workers (TFW's) would be banned from entering the province indefinitely. The decision, made without consulting the agricultural or fisheries sectors who employ the majority of TFW's in New Brunswick, was based on mitigating the spread of COVID-19 according to Higgs. This decision was made despite the Government of Canada initiatives to continue to assist both TFW's coming into Canada and the farms they work on, during the crisis.

The NFU-NB organized a joint press release with other provincial agricultural organizations - the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick (AANB) and Really Local Harvest (RLH). The press release detailed the importance of these workers to New Brunswick agriculture, how the decision directly contradicted Premier Higgs interest in increasing fruit and vegetable production, that banning one group of people from entering the province was discriminatory, and demanded that the decision be reversed.

With AANB and RLH, the NFU-NB reached out to commodity groups in the province to discuss how the ban would affect them, and to ask for their support. In bi-weekly meetings with the Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture, and Fisheries (DAAF)

the NFU-NB, AANB and RLH consistently brought the issue to the table, asking for immediate action by both the Minister and the Department.

A follow up joint press release highlighted the issues with Premier Higgs suggestions that the majority of unemployed persons in the province could easily take over farm jobs, addressed the perception of agriculture labour as being unskilled, and that the industry is significantly undervalued. Premier Higgs expressed his "disappointment" at the lack of New Brunswickers applying for agricultural jobs. The province amended the ban to allow temporary foreign workers who had been in Canada prior to April 28th into the province, though this did little to assist farms, as most TFW's in Canada already had other employment.

The NFU-NB heard directly from our members about how the decision was affecting their farms. Members told us how they were cutting production, how much time they would have to invest in training inexperienced labour, and how much loss they would suffer as a direct result of the ban.

With no movement from the government, the NFU-NB, AANB, and RLH decided to hold a virtual press conference, to speak directly to the media about the ban and the damage it was causing to New

Brunswick farms. A press release was sent May 21, inviting members of the press and discussing how much New Brunswick already relies on food brought into the province. The Presidents of the three organizations: Rébeka Frazer-Chiasson - National Farmers Union in New Brunswick; Kent Coates - Really Local Harvest; and Lisa Ashworth - Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick, as well as the Executive Directors of the three organizations hosted 18 members of the press through Zoom. The press conference was also live streamed on all three organizations' Facebook pages and received over 2000 views.

On May 22, Premier Higgs announced that TFW's would be allowed in the province as of May 29, as part of the COVID-19 recovery plan. While the three agricultural organizations are pleased that the ban was reversed, they recognize that irreparable damage has been done this growing season. Many farms have found that the TFW's they hire year after year had already found other employment or their Visas had been cancelled. Many farms are still in the process of re-applying for TFW's or waiting for government and embassy approval. The NFU-NB, AANB and RLH are continuing to pressure the government to support the farms affected by the ban. ▪



Region 3/NFU-O: Province of Ontario

— by Ayla Fenton, Board Member

Happy solstice to my NFU brothers and sisters!

I hope you are all keeping safe and healthy in these strange times. The COVID-19 crisis has affected us all, whether we have been affected by the disease directly or not. Markets are in turmoil – some farmers are facing massive uncertainty, whereas many direct marketers are experiencing an unprecedented boom in sales. The pandemic is bringing to light all of the inequities, tensions and societal unease that have been simmering below the surface for many years now. Civil unrest is erupting, but so is solidarity and mutual aid. When the shut downs began, new structures for feeding the hungry, housing the homeless and supporting local farmers and businesses were developed at lightning speed.

When farmers' markets were shut down, the NFU spearheaded the advocacy effort to have them recognized as essential services and won. Many markets are now operating online stores and contactless pickups, or drive-through shopping. At our market in Kingston, sales are considerably higher than average, and we have been seeing a lot of new customers at the market. Perhaps seeing images of empty grocery store shelves and predictions of shortages is what it

takes for people to start valuing and protecting the local food system.

When community gardens were shut down, communities were outraged and mobilized across political lines. All of a sudden, I was seeing conversations everywhere about how producing one's own food should be considered a human right; how "subsistence agriculture" should be considered just as essential as commercial agriculture. The pressure was so great that after the province declared them essential, many municipalities have expanded community garden programs. Brampton and Ottawa have even developed backyard garden programs, where the city provides free soil and seeds to any resident who wants to start a vegetable garden. We haven't seen this level of commitment to local food production since World War II.

I was really hoping, given everything else the world is throwing at us right now, that perhaps mother nature would be generous and give us a "normal" growing season. We haven't had one of those in a while. But here where I sit in eastern Ontario, it has been a spring full of weird and unpredictable weather. June started off with record low temperatures and a hail storm that decimated my backyard

garden. Thankfully it was highly localized and seems to have spared most of the farms around here, but I know a few that suffered significant losses. Within a few days, the temperatures skyrocketed and we have seen extreme heat and drought since then. Other than the hail, we haven't seen a proper rain here since mid-May.

We must take advantage of the radicalizing force that is COVID-19, and build a truly intersectional movement for food sovereignty in Canada.

I know that across the country, farmers are still dealing with the accelerating affects of climate change. We cannot allow the current public health crisis to distract us from the much larger imminent threat. We must recognize that the movements for racial justice erupting across the continent are tightly linked to our struggle. Capitalism is causing the climate crisis, and capitalism IS racism. We will not see progress on the climate file until we learn to dismantle white supremacy and patriarchy. We must take advantage of the radicalizing force that is COVID-19, and build a truly intersectional movement for food sovereignty in Canada. As farmers, we can't do it alone. As we say in *La Via Campesina*, we need to globalize the struggle and globalize hope!

*In solidarity,
Ayla Fenton, NFU Ontario*



Region 5:

Province of Manitoba

— by Ian Robson, Coordinator

Spring brings renewal and the opportunity to carry out farm plans with the enthusiasm and anticipation of the harvest. It is why we farm. We have hope. We have skill to use our labour, and we have our land to grow crops for our communities living.

True, the margins of the farm plan are quite meager and were challenged by the fall 2019 rains, mud, and the dip in market prices. Harvest stretched into spring 2020, which has again been cold and somewhat dry, thus a concern for this year. A great deal of the 2019 crop was spring harvested and most of the new crop has been seeded. Hay and pasture need to improve. There continues to be flooding in some areas along with dry conditions in parts of Manitoba.

There has been very poor farm support systems for these severe conditions. There will be some emergency flood relief, but for the market dips there needs to be better thinking. Manitoba has reluctantly signed on to AgriRecovery, what this means remains to be seen as far as real help to the farmer.

The coronavirus (a new challenge brought to us from Mother Nature) has put a few services and people's plans on pause and hopefully this gives people time to rethink how our food system is structured. Humans are smarter about our pandemic control. We know we must look

after each others health first. Worker illness has challenged the idea of just in time food delivery. Market pricing structures have also challenged our food system structure for many years.

NFU has pointed to the need for a better food system in which all parts are valued properly. Large-scale, with its implied efficiency, has some problems and is less flexible in crisis. It has actually reduced the employment in the valuable and honorable work of farming and food processing and cooking. It is great to see that people are doing more home cooking and our stores are trying to serve this market. Of course, eating out is a very important service and experience.

NFU has many conversation points to bring to the discussion about our food system structure. More local livestock kill facilities should be much closer to the first market that matters - our Canadian market. The export market is important and will still be there, as long as it pays. But the need for proper pay to those on the primary farm is highlighted. Direct to consumer sales of meats, vegetables and fruits is increasing because consumers do care and so do the farmers.

What went wrong with our food system? Our beef system has concentrated the beef kill to three major kill facilities in Canada with many trucking miles before the beef is consumed. A beef restructure is possible - deliberate

policies have built the beef system we have now. It will take deliberate policy to restructure and build in more serviceability. In practice, the beef system has decreased the price to those who raise calves, set up a very costly feedlot system far away from where the calves are raised, increased the shelf price that consumers pay, and caused profits from all this to drain out of Canada to foreign owned companies. How is this efficient? On top of this these huge kill facilities are the frequent recipient of government dollars to help upgrade or to help with trade advertising the beef which no longer belongs to the farmer. The money is in the system, it just needs to be better distributed. There is no plan in beef.

In hogs, the plan is very well taken from the farmer and is held by huge integrated corporations, who make use of as few employees as needed. Yet, there are a lot of government dollars paid to corporate hog barn production by AgStability.

Western Livestock Price Insurance Program (WLPPI) is sold as help to beef farmers, but it is really just a gamble. Why not think that raising beef should be done with margin added into our price so we do not have to gamble on insurance to hope for meager income support? WLPPI is designed to be complex and to be a gamble. It is not help.

NFU Region 5 (Manitoba) Annual Convention will be held in 2020 and will involve the use of Zoom. Look for notice of the meeting in the mail. Please check the NFU web site for further information.

Stay healthy and we hope a vaccine will be found for this virus. •



Region 6:

Province of Saskatchewan

— by Glenn Tait, Coordinator

I feel so isolated. So, it is just like every other spring when I am in the tractor all day and yelling at the radio...normal.

Climate change is so much more appropriate than “global warming”. It is not particularly warm now, but because of our weird weather some prairie farmers have finished both 2020 seeding and 2019 harvest in the first week of June. Most have good moisture conditions from recent rains, but some in the south are in dust bowl conditions while some close to highway 16 have had 6 inches of rain. Some of what was seeded is now under water. Have you heard about the three statisticians that went deer hunting? One shot too high, one shot too low, and the third one shouted, “we hit it!” Well, statistically, the rain has been just right.

One good thing about COVID-19 is that it has slowed the most recent attacks on the institutions upon which we farmers rely. In this instance, it is the office that allowed Canada to sell grain internationally with nothing more than a paper guarantee for most of the last century - the Canadian Grain Commission (CGC). Those that find fair and accurate grade and dockage a hindrance to the export of grain have convinced others that a nickel might be

saved if the CGC is largely replaced by, and merely ‘oversees’ private inspectors. Enough industry groups have come on board to give the restructuring plan momentum. Originally recommendations for the review of the Canada Grain Act (CGA) were to be submitted by May 31 but things are stretching out. The review has been suspended for a while but I suspect there is a certain amount of strategising being done behind the scenes.

Among other things, the CGC regulates grain handling in Canada and establishes and maintains science-based standards of quality for Canadian grain and it is given power to regulate under the Act. It grades and gives certificates final to export grain, except for some shipments bound for the US and Mexico. You can see why it is prohibitive to apply official CGC rigor to every rail car loaded and destined for the States.

I often call the Canadian Grain Commission the “grain police”. They are the unbiased regulators applying the rules and upholding the stellar international reputation of Canadian grain producers.

The debate over the future role of the CGC raises more questions than it answers. It is understandable that grain companies might prefer a ‘dial-a-grade’ system, but if our customers would also prefer

private inspectors, why have we not heard from more of them? If the CGC oversees these inspectors with enough staff hours to be confident in a fair certificate final, will the new system actually be any cheaper? In a discussion about the CGC why have we not heard more from the CGC? Were they not asked? Not allowed? Why is the turn-around time for samples done at private labs so much faster than the CGC labs? Are the required methods applied?

On top of all this we have the global success record of self regulation. Remember when Ronald Reagan deregulated the airlines? By relying only on self discipline for maintenance checks, it was not long until airliners started to fall from the sky.

The National Farmers Union is not alone in the struggle to maintain our reputation for honest grading. The Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan (APAS) passed a resolution that it, “strongly support the retention of mandatory outward inspection requirements in the Canada Grain Act”. This is a little worrying because it is not demanding the retention of the full inspection role of the CGC, but a phone call to APAS staff in Regina assured me that that is specifically what they took the resolution to mean. SaskWheat has considerable weight here in Region 6 and appears to be heading in the right direction, however, it has much less weight within Cereals Canada, the lead voice in the petition to change the CGA.

The battle continues. •



Region 7:

Province of Alberta

— by Doug Scott, Coordinator

The summer of 2020 is proving to be another challenging one for Canadian farmers. COVID-19 has exposed many weaknesses in the Canadian food supply chain. Just in time delivery may make a lot of sense in the auto parts supply chain but does not seem like such a good business model when shelves in the local grocery store are empty.

I would imagine many Canadians were surprised to find that three-quarters of the beef on their grocery store shelves is processed in one of two Canadian plants, both located in southern Alberta and owned by two large foreign multi-national companies - Brazilian food giant JBS and the American giant Cargill. For many years the NFU has lobbied for a more diverse and thereby more safe food system. The COVID outbreak among the workers at both of these plants revealed how fragile our current model of food processing is. I have great respect for the workers at these plants who work under difficult conditions every day. Many of these workers are new to Canada and are reluctant to speak up when they find themselves in questionable situations.

In our neck of the woods we experienced a very wet May. This has presented seeding challenges. Many farmers still had unharvested 2019 crop and the fields proved to be just as wet as they were last fall. A large tractor and a long tow rope accompanied most combines to the

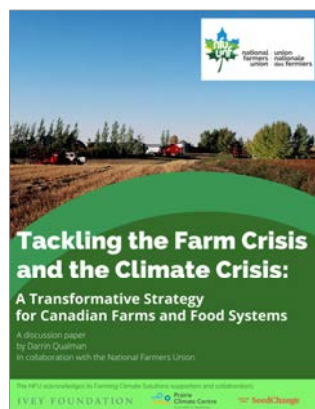
field and unloading was done on the road. One day of combining saw us stuck six times. The woes continue as some local areas received eight inches of rain in early June. That is half of our annual rainfall. Many seeded acres remain flooded. The wet conditions cover a large area and extend well into the Peace Country where many acres remain unharvested and unseeded. Cash flow and debt servicing are adding to the stresses experienced by many, many farm families. Over leveraged farm businesses become extremely vulnerable in these situations. One of our local, large farms has been put up for sale for 28 million with no land. The bank already has that. I would caution all of our young farmers to be very careful when securing farm financing as your best friend can often turn into your worst enemy.

As we recover from the devastation inflicted on our lives from COVID we recognize that the old ways may never return. For many of us the isolation associated with the outbreak has been the most difficult to deal with. Not

interacting with family and friends has been difficult but necessary. Something as simple as grocery shopping has become an ordeal rather than a pleasant outing. I do not get much farther than the local coop store. But there are many signs that people are adjusting to the new normal as best they can and the economy is reopening. COVID is something we will learn to live with. I think one of the positives to come out of all of this is the emergence of the Millennials as the new leaders of our changing world. The likes of Robert Murdoch, James Buchannan and the Koch brothers, to name a few of the winner take all movement, are finally being proven wrong.

Under Premier Jason Kenny, politics in Alberta continue as normal - cuts to healthcare, education and the public service and generous help for the fossil fuel industry. New charter schools are now directly approved by the minister. Kenny is a big fan of omnibus bills and is now pressing ahead with his previous agenda. He has recently given the final say on all energy projects to the un-elected Alberta Energy Regulator. Previously they required cabinet approval. Gone is anything supporting green energy.

Stay safe out there and kudos to our staff for all the great work they have been doing. •



The NFU's new report, *Tackling the Farm Crisis and the Climate Crisis: A Transformative Strategy for Canadian Farms and Food Systems*, by Darrin Qualman, is available to download from the NFU website at: www.nfu.ca/publications/tackling-the-farm-crisis-and-the-climate-crisis/

If you would like a printed copy, please contact the NFU national office.

AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH AND FRENCH

Catching up with...

MARTHA ROBBINS

NFU's new (returning) International Program Coordinator

I am happy to return to the role of International Program Coordinator for the NFU, a position that I previously held between 2007 and 2011. While I know many of you from my years as an elected official and then a staff person with the NFU, I am excited to see that we have many new members whom I have yet to meet!

In the nine years since I was last fully immersed in the work of the NFU I have been busy with continuing education and having babies. I completed a master's degree in agriculture and rural development from the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in the Hague, the Netherlands in 2012. After returning home to a job as the research coordinator at a University of Saskatchewan research institute, I took a maternity leave to welcome our son Sam and decided to begin a PhD when that leave ended. My PhD work, also at ISS, is focussed on the politics of food sovereignty and food system localization. My primary interest is in unpacking the tensions and contradictions in local food strategies and finding the spaces for transformative local food practices that further food sovereignty. The research is concentrated in Canada but within the context of international movements like La Via Campesina. In the midst of the PhD, our daughter Eva arrived.

I have remained connected to the work of the NFU politically

through my studies and practically through growing a large organic vegetable garden at my parents' farm during the summers we have been home in Saskatchewan. This is our fourth growing season and between gardening, looking after two children, and co-coordinating a land-based reconciliation initiative in Saskatchewan, it will be a busy summer!

As an NFU kid, I feel intimately connected to the NFU as my home movement and political family and I'm really thrilled to see the NFU pushing itself to grow and learn and then in turn, lead the way on progressive farm, food, climate and agriculture policy. The IPC subcommittees, Indigenous Solidarity Working Group and Migrant Workers Subcommittee, are both amazing spaces within our organization to un-learn our deeply held and often unexamined colonial attitudes and institutions and replace them with anti-racist, authentic solidarity. This is truly the only way in which we can build a just food system and realize food sovereignty. We in the NFU have been learning about and contributing to the evolution of food sovereignty as a political aim, a framework for policy and action, and a practice throughout our many years working internationally within La Via Campesina. It is heartening to



see that we are bringing these values home too and working to confront injustice not only in the neoliberal food system in Canada, as always, but also within our own movement and organization.

Recent global events from the COVID-19 pandemic to the brutal killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis have highlighted existing inequalities and systems of oppression and have perhaps given us moments of despair, anxiety and hopelessness. Yet, this moment holds possibility too. Revealing injustice in stark relief, these events have also exposed weaknesses in a new way in many of the dominant systems the NFU and others have been struggling against for decades. This is a moment to remember the power and necessity of working collectively to build a better food system: where diverse, local food systems can thrive and farmers are no longer beholden to the corporate industrial system, where migrant workers are treated with dignity and fairness, where the rights of Indigenous people are honored and systemic racism is uprooted for good, where farmers are leaders in tackling climate change and implementing agroecology and on many, many other fronts. I am eager to get to work and I encourage you to join us in the IPC! ■

Darrin Qualman joins NFU to work on climate change and ag

The NFU is pleased to welcome Darrin Qualman back on staff to lead our work on climate and agriculture. You'll recognize Darrin as the author of the recent *Tackling the Farm Crisis & the Climate Crisis: A Transformative Strategy for Canadian Farms and Food Systems* or from his previous work at the NFU, or perhaps both. Welcome back, Darrin! Here is to impactful collaborative work backed by exceptional research and writing.



I'm very pleased to be rejoining the NFU as the new Director of Climate Crisis Policy and Action. Over the coming months I will be working with NFU members and officials and with allied organizations to help advance a vision for Canadian agriculture that puts farm income, sustainability, emission reduction, and climate resilience at its centre. I'm looking forward to reconnecting with long-time colleagues and friends in the NFU, and to meeting other members and working closely to advance policies that improve the future for farm families and that avert climate chaos. I believe that climate change opens up an opportunity: though it creates peril and uncertainty, it also means that the status quo—a high-input, high-emission, low-net-income, corporate-controlled, farmer-expelling model of agriculture—is no longer tenable. Climate change provides a lever we can use to move Canadian agriculture policies toward outcomes that enhance farmer livelihoods and protect the environment and the future.

Some of you may know that I was fortunate to work with the NFU in a volunteer role in 2019, culminating in the publication of the report *Tackling the Farm Crisis and the Climate Crisis: A*

Transformative Strategy for Canadian Farms and Food Systems. That report was truly an organization-wide effort—drawing on the insights of dozens of NFU members and leaders—deep thinking, deeply concerned men, women, and youth. No other farm organization in North America could have produced such a report—none would have the courage and clarity of analysis to do so.

The NFU's work on climate change and emissions reduction is strengthened by our participation in the Farmers for Climate Solutions (FCS) coalition. I'm looking forward to working with FCS partners to amplify the NFU's message and build a broad, diverse network of organizations to help advance positive federal and provincial policies.

As Director of Climate Crisis Policy and Action, my work over the next year will include researching and writing reports focusing on the intersection of climate change and farm income; supporting this long-form work with shorter pieces such as climate-related op-eds; engaging with governments to advance farmer-led and farm-supportive climate and emissions solutions; and working in the countryside to spread ideas via presentations, meetings, webinars, etc. I'm very

pleased to be joining the incredibly strong team at the NFU—with many years of experience in research and policy advocacy.

A bit about my background. I farmed in Saskatchewan until the mid-1990s. In 1996, then-President Nettie Wiebe and the NFU Board of Directors hired me to be the NFU's Executive Secretary (Executive Director). Some years later I took on the role of Director of Research. In 2010, I left the NFU to work on a book. That book, released a year ago, is entitled *Civilization Critical: Energy, Food, Nature, and the Future*. It takes a big-picture, long-term look at agriculture, industrial production, economic growth, and the possible fates of "petro-industrial consumerist civilization." Several NFU members assisted in the editing process—reading drafts and sending comments. Also in the 2010-to-2020 period, I went back to university, obtaining undergraduate degrees in biology and history, in addition to an earlier degree in political studies. Most recently, I worked with the City of Saskatoon developing a long-term water conservation plan.

I'm very pleased to be back at the NFU. No other organization in North America can match the NFU's mix of analysis, vision, and integrity. I look forward to working with you and on your behalf. ■

NFU National and Regional Conventions amid COVID-19

le français suit

COVID-19 is changing conventions all around the world this year. The NFU has your health as a top priority, so will be hosting the National Convention virtually. We recognize that this decision risks diminishing the joy of seeing old friends and colleagues and building solidarity by exchanging ideas. The Convention Committee is doing all it can to ensure these aspects of the convention are retained even as we congregate differently.

Region 3 (Ontario) hosted their regional convention in February. All other regions will be hosting their regional conventions this summer. In light of COVID, these may either be entirely on-line or hosted in small group gatherings with physical distancing and an on-line component that allows people who can't travel to participate.

Internet connectivity is a top concern, since it is particularly limited in rural areas. Remote access and **full participation in a convention are possible through both internet and telephone**, so those members without internet coverage can still participate fully.

We recently showcased a Zoom Mock-Convention that showed how all aspects of a Regional Convention are conducted on-line: reports, resolutions, nominations, voting, meeting, chats, and – never to be missed – vigorous debate. Depending on the pandemic status within a region,

some small groups may gather for the national convention as well as the regional conventions.

We intend to host speakers and opportunities to connect in the lead up to the Convention.

The primary National Convention dates will remain November 26 and 27, 2020 but the on-line structure will allow NFU activities both before and after these dates.

The Convention committee is working to ensure these are all irresistible to members of all types and a variety of interests.



The NFU has found a stellar young man to help us with the technical hosting. Tim Lapp, a student at Dalhousie, will be working throughout the summer and fall to make this process seamless. Tim has reached out to all of the Regional Coordinators to start their regional convention planning process.

If you have questions or feedback, please feel free to contact the National Office. We recognize that this is, truly, unprecedented, and hope that it fulfills all of the needs of the NFU community while keeping every one of our members and guests safe. ■

2020 Conventions de l'UNF

Cette année, COVID change de convention partout dans le monde. L'UNF a fait de votre santé une priorité absolue, c'est pourquoi elle accueillera virtuellement la convention nationale. Nous sommes conscients que cette décision risque de diminuer la joie de revoir de vieux amis et collègues et de renforcer la solidarité en échangeant des idées. Le comité de la convention fait tout son possible pour que ces aspects de la convention soient conservés même si nous nous réunissons différemment.

La connectivité à l'internet est une préoccupation majeure, car elle est particulièrement limitée dans les zones rurales. L'accès à distance et la pleine participation à une convention sont possibles à la fois par internet et par téléphone, de sorte que les membres qui ne disposent pas d'une couverture internet peuvent toujours participer pleinement.

Watch your mailbox for more information, and check our website at www.nfu.ca for regular updates.

The NFU's work during COVID-19 *[le français suit]*

—by Mara Shaw, NFU Executive Director



The NFU has been in high gear throughout the COVID-19 crisis, fighting for members' interests and larger picture issues in somewhat equal measure. In addition, NFU leadership has attended almost every one of the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) industry calls held three times per week (recently reduced to twice per week) to learn, to pose questions and to raise the issues that matter most to you.

The following are issues we have advocated for:

- Lowering of the thresholds for participation in the Canada Emergency Business Account program to include owner-operators
- Streamlining access to labour through Canada Summer Jobs and additional labour support
- Addressing the impact of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit on farm labour
- Declaration of Farmers Markets as Essential Services & support of direct sales
- The impact of COVID -19 on Canada's livestock producers – pushing for support of regional abattoirs, regionalization of the abattoir system, and financial supports for losses caused by delayed slaughter
- Support for PEI's potato farmers in light of the Provincial roll-out of emergency Federal funding
- Implications of the Canada US Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) (aka the new NAFTA), which launches July 3, 2020
- Financial supports for farmers and migrant workers during COVID-19 including physical distancing measures needed
- Requests that COVID -19 emergency relief to farmers be made outside of the AgriStability structure
- Renewed call for restoration of AgriStability to pre-Harper levels
- Call for immediate reopening of New Brunswick to the arrival of foreign farm workers
- Decrying the deaths of two migrant farm workers due to COVID -19 in southwestern Ontario
- The need for on-going plant breeding research at AAFC, which was paused during the initial COVID-19 response

Members and staff also wrote opinion pieces that addressed the broader state of our agricultural system and what might be learned from the COVID -19 crisis.

All of these resources and articles are available on the NFU website. If you do not have access to the website, call the office about any of these topics and we will send you the articles of interest. ■

AAFC & COVID-19 -related Programs for Agriculture

The Canadian Government has the following programs that we believe may be worth highlighting. This list is not comprehensive, but based on our assessment of what may be of most value to you, our members. There are other Provincial programs, so please contact your Regional Coordinators for their insights about their availability. **A continuously renewed posting of updates is at the AAFC website.** [It includes:](#)

Workplace guidance for sector employers and employees, **guidance for reopening** if you have a business aspect that shuttered during COVID-19, and guidance for the housing of foreign workers. Guidance & tools to prevent and reduce the spread of COVID-19 is available at Canada.ca/coronavirus.

Expanded Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) program: provides interest-free loans of up to \$40,000 to small businesses and not-for-profits, to help cover their operating costs during COVID-19. Owner-operator businesses may now be eligible (must have a CRA number and eligible non-deferrable expenses over \$40,000.) Repaying the balance of the loan on or before December 31, 2022 will result in loan forgiveness of 25 percent (up to \$10,000).

Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF): interest free loans up to \$40,000 for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that are unable to access other federal COVID-19 relief measures.

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AAFC & COVID-19 -related Programs for Agriculture cont'd..

Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS): CEWS has been extended to August 29, 2020. As a Canadian employer whose business has been affected by COVID-19, you may be eligible for a subsidy of 75% of employee wages for up to 24 weeks, retroactive from March 15, 2020, to August 29, 2020.

Extension of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB): CERB was extended to a total of 24 weeks of support. The CERB is a taxable benefit of \$2,000 over a four-week period for eligible workers who have stopped working or whose work hours have been reduced, due to COVID-19.

Labour: AAFC's Youth Employment & Skills Program (YESP) pays 50% of wages up to \$14,000; 80% funding for Indigenous Youth, including wages retroactive to April 1, 2020.

Agri-Stability program: The deadline to enrol in or renew participation in AgriStability, and to pay the associated fees has been extended to July 3, 2020 without penalty. Interim payments have been

increased from 50% to 75%. The deadline to apply for an interim payment is December 31, 2020.

Agri-Recovery program for beef & pork producers: Up to \$125 million for set-aside programs for beef and pork sectors to manage processing backlog and surplus animals.

Income Tax: Until August 31, 2020, all businesses can defer the payment of any income tax that becomes owing on or after March 18, 2020 and before September 2020.

Other Financial Supports: [Innovation.Canada.ca](https://www.innovation.canada.ca) has an on-line tool to help you sort through financial supports for you and for your business. Other sources that are responding to COVID-19 include Farm Credit Canada (FCC), your local Community Futures Development Corporation, BDC and EDC.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has dedicated materials to help deal with the stress associated with the pandemic. Mental health supports are listed there as well as on the NFU website.

Le travail de l'UNF pendant COVID-19

L'UNF a été très active tout au long de la crise COVID-19, se battant pour les intérêts de ses membres et les questions plus générales dans une mesure plus ou moins égale. En outre, les dirigeants de la l'UNF ont assisté à presque toutes les réunions du secteur d'Agriculture et Agroalimentaire Canada (AAC) qui se tiennent trois fois par semaine (récemment réduites à deux fois par semaine) pour apprendre, poser des questions, et soulever les problèmes qui vous tiennent le plus à cœur. Voici les questions que nous avons défendues :

- Abaissement des limites de participation au programme de compte d'urgence pour les entreprises du Canada afin d'inclure les propriétaires-exploitants
- Rationalisation de l'accès à la main-d'œuvre grâce à Emplois d'été Canada et à une aide supplémentaire à la main-d'œuvre
- Aborder l'impact de la prestation d'urgence du Canada sur la main-d'œuvre agricole
- Déclaration des marchés agricoles comme services essentiels et soutien aux ventes directes
- L'impact de COVID-19 sur les éleveurs de bétail du Canada - en faisant pression pour le soutien des abattoirs régionaux, la régionalisation du système d'abattage, et des aides financières pour les pertes causées par les retards d'abattage
- Soutien aux fermiers de pommes de terre de l'Î.-P.-É.
- Implications de l'Accord Canada-États-Unis-Mexique (ACEUM) ou du nouvel ALENA, qui sera lancé le 3 juillet 2020
- Le soutien financier aux agriculteurs et aux travailleurs migrants pendant COVID-19, y compris les mesures d'éloignement physique nécessaires
- Demande que l'aide d'urgence COVID -19 aux agriculteurs soit apportée en dehors de la structure Agri-stabilité

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- Appel renouvelé en faveur du rétablissement d'Agri-stabilité aux niveaux antérieurs à la crise
- Appel à la réouverture immédiate du Nouveau-Brunswick à l'arrivée de travailleurs agricoles étrangers
- L'UNF a dénoncé la mort de deux ouvriers agricoles migrants à la suite de la COVID -19 dans le sud-ouest de l'Ontario
- La nécessité de poursuivre les recherches en matière de sélection végétale à AAC, qui ont été interrompues lors de la réponse initiale au COVID-19

Les membres et le personnel ont également rédigé des articles d'opinion qui traitaient de l'état général de notre système agricole et de ce qui pouvait être appris de la crise COVID -19.

Toutes ces ressources et tous ces articles sont disponibles sur le site web de l'UNF. Si vous n'avez pas accès au site web, appelez le bureau pour l'un de ces sujets et nous vous enverrons les articles qui vous intéressent. ■

AAC et COVID-19 - Programmes liés à l'agriculture

Le gouvernement canadien a mis en place les programmes suivants qui, à notre avis, méritent d'être soulignés. Les mises à jour sont continuellement renouvelées sur le site web d'AAC. Il comprend :

Des conseils sur le lieu de travail pour les employeurs et les employés du secteur, des conseils pour la réouverture si vous avez un aspect commercial qui a fermé pendant cette temps de crise, et des conseils pour le logement des travailleurs étrangers. Des conseils et des outils pour prévenir et réduire la propagation du COVID-19 sont disponibles sur le site Canada.ca/coronavirus

Compte d'urgence pour les entreprises canadiennes (CUEC)

Fonds d'aide et de relance régionale (FARR)

Subvention salariale d'urgence du Canada (SSUC) : La SSUC a été prolongée jusqu'au 29 août 2020. En tant qu'employeur canadien dont l'entreprise a été touchée par COVID-19, vous pouvez être éligible à une subvention de 75 % du salaire des employés pour une période maximale de 24 semaines, rétroactive du 15 mars 2020 au 29 août 2020.

Prolongation de la Prestation canadienne d'urgence (PCU) La PCU a été prolongée à un total de 24 semaines de soutien. Le CERB est un avantage imposable de 2 000 \$ sur une période de quatre semaines pour les travailleurs admissibles qui ont cessé de travailler ou dont les heures de travail ont été réduites, en raison de la COVID-19.

Travail : Le Programme d'emploi et de compétences des jeunes offre une subvention salariale aux organismes qui engagent des jeunes pour des emplois en agriculture. Le programme offre un remboursement de 50 % des coûts admissibles, jusqu'à concurrence de 14 000 \$. Le programme offre également 100 % des coûts de relocalisation jusqu'à concurrence de 5 000 \$ si un employé doit être relocalisé pour le poste.

La date limite pour s'inscrire ou renouveler sa participation au **programme Agri-stabilité**, et pour payer les frais associés, a été reportée au 3 juillet 2020 sans pénalité. Les paiements intermédiaires ont été augmentés de 50 % à 75 %. La date limite pour demander un paiement provisoire est le 31 décembre 2020.

Programme Agri-relance pour les producteurs de viande bovine et porcine : Jusqu'à 125 millions de dollars pour les programmes de mise en jachère pour les secteurs du bœuf et du porc afin de gérer les arriérés de transformation et les animaux excédentaires.

Impôt sur le revenu : Jusqu'au 31 août 2020, toutes les entreprises peuvent reporter le paiement de tout impôt sur le revenu qui devient exigible à partir du 18 mars 2020 et avant le 1er janvier 2011.

Advocating for meat processing decentralization

The COVID-19 outbreak in Cargill's High River, AB plant took the lives of two workers and shut down almost half of Canada's beef supply for two weeks. Nearly all beef produced in Canada is processed by Cargill's High River facility, the JBS plant in Brooks, Alberta and the smaller Cargill plant in Guelph, Ontario. While this choke point gives US-based Cargill and Brazilian JBS tremendous power over both cattle prices paid to farmers and the grocery store beef prices paid by consumers, the pandemic showed it is also one of the weakest links in Canada's food system. For more detail, please see [Concentration of meat packing makes Canada's food system vulnerable](#) on the NFU website.

The Livestock Committee has been supporting the NFU's work at the AAFC COVID Emergency Roundtable where farm groups provide input to the Minister.

After the federal announcement of a \$77 million fund for food processors, the NFU urged it to be used to increase capacity in smaller plants across the country. We recommended support for transition to new operators when facilities are sold, expedited re-licensing to re-open closed facilities, an emergency licensing regime for low-risk operations serving small local markets, increased training and hiring of inspectors to maximize capacity of smaller plants, assistance for compliance with costly regulatory requirements and support for training and hiring of butchers.

On June 10, the government published the details. We understand half of the money is

reserved for Small and Medium Enterprises, including for-profit organizations, cooperatives and indigenous groups. It has two streams: grants for adapting operations to COVID and repayable funds for strategic investment in processing capacity. It is not limited to meat processing – other types of food processing and greenhouse vegetable production are also eligible. It is retroactive to March 15 and activities must be done by September 30, 2020.

If you know of any local facility that could use these funds, please encourage them to apply.

For details see:

<https://www.agr.gc.ca/eng/agricultural-programs-and-services/emergency-processing-fund/?id=1591291974693>
or call: 1-877-246-4682.

On-farm slaughter licences

NFU Livestock Committee member Julia Smith is also president of the BC Small-Scale Meat Producers Association, which is working to expand access to on-farm slaughter licenses, a model that interests NFU members in other provinces. In April, BC announced on-farm slaughter licences will be allowed in three

additional regional districts. These permit trained operators to kill up to 25 animal units for direct sales to consumers or local restaurants and retailers.

Julia also helped raise awareness about abattoir capacity when she was featured when CBC's **The Current** broadcast a segment on May 22 about the future of meatpacking, and how the pandemic is causing people to rethink its centralization.

Emergency beef and hog producer support

In May the federal government also announced \$125 million to support beef and pork producers affected by the outbreaks at major meat packing plants in Canada and the USA. It will be administered through AgriRecovery without requiring enrollment in AgriStability. The NFU asked the AAFC Roundtable about how this funding will be structured, saying:

We've heard that the government may be considering setting up a fund to assist cattle producers dealing with dramatic price drops. If so, are you considering a model based on the

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NFU's 2008 Cattle Study

The NFU's comprehensive 2008 study of Canada's cattle industry, analysing packing company concentration, the impacts on farmers, and offering solutions to reorient the system towards a resilient beef sector is more valid than ever today. You can find [The Farm Crisis and the Cattle Sector: Toward a New Analysis and New Solutions](#) on the website.

BSE-era set-aside framework? I would like to be clear that in any COVID emergency fund for the cattle, the cow-calf producers MUST be included or we will see bankruptcies again in that sector. If a cattle sector emergency fund is

being contemplated, could you please share the details about it: eligibility; allocation, etc.

AAFC had not yet finalized the program, but in June, the Agri-Recovery programs began to roll out. The beef money will mostly

support feedlots to hold cattle on maintenance rations. If COVID hurts fall calf prices, the NFU will be advocating for an effective response to help family farmers. ■

Time to rebuild our meat processing system

—Vicki Burns, Winnipeg, MB and Fred Tait, Rossendale, MB

The recent closures of meat packing plants in Alberta, Quebec and several American states due to the Covid-19 pandemic are shedding light on the tremendous expense of this style of massive meat processing operation. The expense borne by the workers at the plants is the greatest of all, their health threatened so severely, even causing death to two Cargill workers in Alberta. However the expense doesn't stop there, as consumers are expected to see meat prices jump, farmers have seen the prices paid for their animals drop by more than 30% and tax payers will ultimately pay the price to help bail out this sector.

Several decades ago when the move to close smaller slaughterhouses in favour of building huge single entity plants was happening, the rationale was that there were going to be tremendous efficiencies in doing this. National Farmers Union studies showed that the promised efficiencies of consumers seeing cheaper meat and farmers making a decent living simply did not materialize. The spread between what farmers are paid for their animals and what consumers pay for meat has grown. The working conditions at the plants with thousands of animals being slaughtered each day are stressful at the best of times and downright dangerous now. Farmers suddenly have nowhere to sell their animals and consumers are starting to see less meat on the shelves.

Now is the time to look at how we can build a meat processing system that will not cause these massive problems. A move to build smaller, safer slaughter plants in each province would help to disperse the threats to food security. We could assure meat supply from local farms to meet local demands. If one plant was forced to close it would not disrupt the food chain across the entire country. Providing safe secure food from local farms to local consumers is entirely possible without putting meat packing workers at risk. Surely we've learned that bigger is not always better. ■

Attention Livestock Producers!

The new Livestock Committee got together by Zoom and phone in April, and has been very active since then. So far, this lively group includes members from the Maritimes to BC, farmers who direct-market and who sell into the commodity market, and producers who raise cattle, horses and hogs. The committee welcomes all interested NFU livestock producers.

The committee's purpose is to provide a forum for discussion and analysis of public policy matters pertaining to livestock institutions, regulations, programs, policy and laws; promote NFU positions on livestock to other organizations and governments; and develop and carry out actions and campaigns to educate, organize and mobilize other farmers on livestock, including NFU members and non-members.

For more information or to join, please contact:

**Livestock Committee Chairperson
Tim Dowling at
doublejayfarms@gmail.com**

**or the National Office at
nfu@nfu.ca or 306-652-9465**

Food Justice, Migrant Worker Rights and the COVID-19 Pandemic

—by the NFU Migrant Worker Subcommittee

The COVID-19 pandemic makes it obvious: Canada's migrant worker programs are unsustainable and unjust.

In 2017, 60,000 temporary migrant workers accounted for over 17% of the labour force in Canada's agricultural sector. Since then the demand for migrant workers has only increased. It is not sustainable, especially during a global pandemic, for a society to be incapable of doing the work necessary to secure its own survival and meet its own basic needs.

Without these skilled workers our entire food system is at risk of collapse. In March and April, employers, and farm organizations including the NFU, urged the Canadian government to provide logistical and funding support to enable migrant workers to come to work on Canadian farms. These farmers made the case that these workers were essential, because their skill set and experience are rare among Canadians. In New Brunswick, a month-long ban on the arrival of migrant workers threatened food security and endangered the livelihoods of small producers and the migrant workers until NFU-NB and allies successfully lobbied for the border to reopen. There is a high probability of a pandemic occurring in the foreseeable future which does shut down the migrant worker system for an entire growing season or even longer. As Canadian farmers, it is our responsibility to be ready for this. If we are not, a shutdown of the migrant worker system will be cata-

strophic for Canadian farmers, our families and communities, and even more catastrophic for migrant workers, their families and communities.

It is absolutely unsustainable and unjust to be dependent on a global workforce that has too often been denied basic rights and humane living conditions. We must hold Canada to its commitment to article 141 of the United Nations declaration on the rights of peasants (UNDROP), to guarantee that all *temporary, seasonal or migrant workers* have the right:

1. To work in safe and healthy working conditions;
2. To participate in the application of all health and safety measures;
3. To have access to adequate and appropriate protective clothing and equipment;
4. To work free from violence and harassment; and
5. To refuse unsafe and unhealthy work conditions without fear of reprisal.

It is incumbent on us as members of the National Farmers Union to stand in solidarity and work to address these systemic issues. We have a lot of work to do to ensure these rights are consistently upheld.

As of June 21 2020, three Mexican migrant farm workers have died of COVID-19, several migrant farm workers are in critical condition, and over 600 have tested positive for the virus, following outbreaks at numerous agricultural

operations in Southwestern Ontario. Temporary foreign workers and recent immigrants were among the hundreds infected by the spread of COVID-19 in Canada's two largest meat-packing plants in Alberta, resulting in at least two deaths, as well as in outbreaks at other meat-packing plants across the country. Outbreaks among migrant farm workers have occurred in BC and Quebec. From coast to coast we must join those who insist that migrant workers' lives matter.

These tragic deaths and outbreaks highlight the vulnerability of migrant farm workers during the COVID-19 pandemic and the magnitude of the gap between health care as we believe it to exist, and the reality of what migrant workers experience.

In its report *Unheeded Warnings: COVID-19 & Migrant Workers in Canada*, the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change (MWAC) documents how the vulnerability of migrant workers has increased during the COVID-19 crisis. Some of the worst COVID-19 outbreaks have occurred on farms and in greenhouses which are massive multi-million-dollar agri-food corporations. MWAC documents migrant worker accounts of increased surveillance, intimidation, and racism. They also document the failure of these agri-food corporations to provide safe housing, PPE and sanitation supplies, decent food, wages during quarantine, and health information.

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*"In Union there is strength.
We must use our strength in solidarity
with our sisters and brothers from
around the globe to demand a more
equitable system..."*

Globally, the demand for ever cheaper food, coupled with urbanisation has led to a decrease in perceived value of the types of skills and physical labour required to farm food. Our society expresses value through monetary compensation. As government policies and societal norms have driven farm incomes lower, it has become increasingly difficult to view farming as an economically viable occupation. This leads to a demeaning of the very work that sustains life.

In a global economy, farmers compete on a global stage. If a crop fails or the season is less than bountiful, prices are not reflected in the regions impacted. Instead the shortfall in supply is imported from a region with cheaper labour costs and/or whose weather conditions were more favourable. The consumer never sees the difference except perhaps if they notice the country of origin.

We must ask why we are not able to pay a living wage to Canadian workers? Why are migrant farmers not able to make an adequate living by farming in their country of origin? It is not morally or ethically acceptable for one group of people to treat another group of people as a resource. We cannot allow ourselves to continue to be dependent on the maintenance of the global injustices which create large numbers of people whose only option is to forsake home for work that is not compensated commensurate with the skill and physical demands of the job.

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Desmond Daley, working on Pfenning's Organic Farm since 2006, is one of their valuable Team Leads. He supervises and coaches the bunching team, field-packing various greens and herbs. As all of them do, he works in any area that needs it when his own key area is not busy.

The Migrant Workers Alliance recommends that Canada:

- extend income supports (Canada Emergency Response Benefit, etc.) to all workers impacted by COVID-19 outbreaks, including those who were not able to travel to Canada;
- ensure all workers have dignified living conditions and decent work;
- make public health, not policing, a top priority;
- design and monitor quarantine measures in consultation with migrant workers;
- suspend all work where employers cannot immediately adapt to protect worker safety; and
- provide workers with permanent resident status on arrival to Canada. Without status, migrant farm workers do not dare speak up about unjust working and housing situations.

NFU members can take action to support these recommendations by speaking out publicly, writing to your MPs and posting supporting messages in your social media feeds.

“In Union there is strength. We must use our strength in solidarity with our sisters and brothers from around the globe to demand a more equitable system. By supporting the demands presented by MWAC, we

can make changes here that can support their freedoms and farmers here and the world over. As a founding member of La Via Campesina, we have been standing shoulder to shoulder with peasant farmers in spirit. It is time to demand meaningful changes in the Canadian Immigration policies to end this injustice now”, according to Jenn Pfenning, Migrant Worker Subcommittee Chair. ■

[Additional resources related to the NFU International Program Committee's work:](#)

For more information on the current situation for migrant workers, including a list of recommendations, find the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change June 2020 **Report: Unheeded Warnings – COVID-19 & Migrant Workers in Canada** here: <https://migrantworkersalliance.org/unheededwarnings/>

For the recent press releases on the global situation for migrant farmworkers, go to the **Dignity for Migrants and Waged Workers** section of La Via Campesina's website here: <https://viacampesina.org/en/what-are-we-fighting-for/migrations-and-rural-workers/>

To learn about the People's Agroecology Process, find the newly released report, **The People's Agroecology Process: Unlocking Our Power through Agroecology** here: <https://whyhunger.org/category/publications/the-peoples-agroecology-process-unlocking-our-power-through-agroecology/>

To read La Via Campesina's full **2019 Annual Report**, go to: <https://viacampesina.org/en/la-via-campesina-2019-annual-report/>

Beingessner Award for Excellence in Writing

Working with the family of Paul Beingessner, the NFU 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.**
- **Deadline for entries is November 1, 2020.**

This year's THEME: *What does an anti-racist and socially just food system look like to you, and how can we as youth help to build it?*

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

The winners will be announced at the NFU Convention in November 2020. All or some entries may be published by the NFU. 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.

Action needed at all levels to end systemic racism

The National Farmers Union (NFU) joins with all who call for an end to systemic racism, including police violence against Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour, in the wake of the murder of George Floyd by Minnesota police officers on May 25, 2020. His death has, once again, highlighted the racism and white supremacy entrenched in systems across the continent. Along with millions across the USA, Canada and elsewhere, we are committed to dismantling the structures, values, and practices that carry out, tolerate or benefit from racist policies and actions, whether by governments or non-government actors.

The NFU's founding Statement of Purpose, written in 1969 in the wake of the Civil Rights movement, says: "The common hope and aspiration of us all is that the creative power farmers possess may be a blessing to humanity and not a curse. It is our hope and aspiration that our families may live in dignity and prosperity – that we may, as farmers, live in harmony with one another and that all the world's people may live in peace."

The peace we seek must have a foundation of justice.

We are horrified by police cruelty and violence against demonstrators south of the border, and the spectre of further militarization and repression there. We also recognize that the violence of racism is not limited to the USA. It is found in cities, towns and rural areas across our country too, and is not limited to police brutality. Systemic racism affects how our society is structured, who has power, and what kinds of opportunities people have access to.

We know that Canada will be better without systemic racism, and that change is possible.

"We understand that despite the fact that white farmers may not experience economic privilege, and that farming is a hard life, our lives and careers are not made more difficult or dangerous because of the colour of our skin," said Katie Ward, NFU President.

"Race-based conflicts are often promoted and provoked by the powerful who benefit from keeping people divided, fighting each other instead of working together in solidarity. As a majority white organization, we as the National Farmers Union acknowledge our past failures in acting as

allies to Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour in food-producing communities. We are committed to building processes to unpack racism in our leadership and wider membership to better work in solidarity with communities of colour to build food sovereignty for all. This will not be easy, but is long overdue," said Jessie MacInnis, NFU Youth Vice-President.

"Here in Canada, in our homes, on our farms, in our rural

communities and in the food system, we can work to challenge and dismantle systemic racism," said Ayla Fenton, NFU Board Member. "We can start by listening to and learning from Black people."

"We know that Canada will be better without systemic racism, and that change is possible," said Ward. "We will hold ourselves accountable in the NFU to ensure that this statement is not stagnant in this moment of time, but a launch pad for renewed effort to take anti-racism actions in our organization." ■

If you want to join us in learning more about the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour in Canada (BIPOC), and additionally what BIPOC farmers of colour face, check out:

- *Dismantling Racism in the Food System: A Primer* from *Food First* <https://foodfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/DR1Final.pdf>
- *Brief Introduction to Legalized Racism in Canada* -- Canadian Race Relations Foundation <https://www.crrf-fcrr.ca/images/stories/pdf/ePubFaShLegRac.pdf>
- *Uprooting Racism: Seeding Sovereignty*, by Leah Penniman (Soul Fire Farm): <https://foodsolutionsne.org/uprooting-racism-seeding-sovereignty/?fbclid=IwAR2Memf-vVsnq0F1-gcXQsZgZt9RyXQFBTGJhYvuD1JQ-4yVPhmM7Q9H2V4>
- *Black Food Insecurity in Canada*, blog post by Melana Roberts (Chair of FSC Board) on The Broadbent Blog: https://www.broadbentinstitute.ca/black_food_insecurity_in_canada
- *The Skin I'm In* by Canadian author Desmond Cole: <https://torontolife.com/city/life/skin-im-ive-interrogated-police-50-times-im-black/>

Writing an Op-Ed in a time of distance activism

—by Tim Lapp

Whether you are a veteran contributor to publications or you want to begin your involvement in the work of public discourse, now is the time to get your words into the news cycle. Readership of rural and local printed papers is especially high, yet there is often a shortage of articles to print (Waddell, 2020). Readers would benefit from hearing the voices of their local farming community. Here is a short guide making it easy to write and publish an op ed.

Why write? Op-ed stands for “opposite the editorial page”. Publications give anyone the opportunity to get their work into the news. An op-ed, in contrast to a letter to the editor, doesn’t need to respond directly to another article. An op-ed is usually slightly longer than a letter to the editor and expresses an informed and rooted opinion.

Every audience needs an author: The rapid and seemingly infinite flow of articles can obscure the fact that each article has been crafted by someone like you. Your writing will be seen and generate feedback. National cross-platform readership is at an all time high (News Media Canada, 2020). You might see a response in the same paper or in the online comments. Sometimes it takes a few tries to get published, but it’s a rewarding experience. If you are reading and thinking, other people are too.

It does not need to be a masterwork thesis: Your claim doesn’t need to be developed after years of study. It can come straight from experience. The way a policy affects you, a need that isn’t being addressed, the reason you do what you do—all of these are ample grounds to write in. In fact, they are often the pieces that contain the most honesty. An op-ed can be as short as 400 words or greater than 1000. The average

length is around 700 words. It is easier for publishers to find room for shorter articles, so ask a friend to edit to tighten up your draft.

Give it clarity and punch:

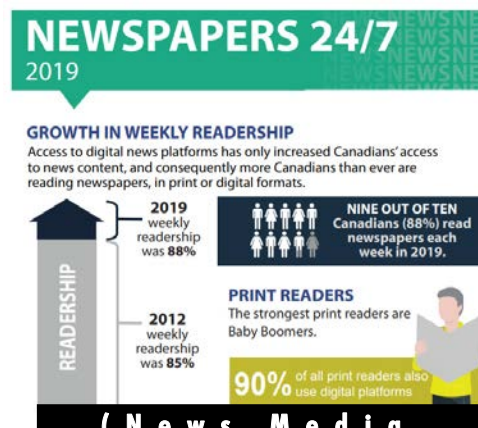
Use your wit, draw on your muse. The title and first few sentences are critical to grab your reader’s attention. You could ask a question or make a bold claim. Make your point focused and don’t wander too far from your main point. It’s helpful to provide your reader with a sense of where you’re coming from, geographically and experientially. Keep yourself grounded in your own experience and draw from fact to support your writing.

Use a powerful visual:

We humans are connected to sights in a different way than words. Choose an image that hits the reader in the heart. Sometimes it needs to be a sad depiction, sometimes to inspire hope and joy.

Send to a variety of places:

There’s no need to aim for a page in the *New York Times*, so send to your local papers as well as larger publications. Send simultaneously to multiple places to increase the likelihood you’ll be published. Please share it with the NFU so we can post to the website, in the newsletter and on social media. ■



Articles Cited

News Media Canada. (2020, May 7). *Newspapers 24/7*. Retrieved from <https://nmc-mic.ca/ad-resources/newspapers-24/7/>

Waddell, K. (2020, 05 29). *Right in the centre - Rural is different and maybe better*. Retrieved from <http://www.mywestman.ca/opinion/8831-right-in-the-centre-rural-is-different-and-maybe-better>

NFU BOARD / ADVISORY MEMBERS and OFFICES

National / Regional Offices:

National: 2717 Wentz Avenue, Saskatoon, SK S7K 4B6 Ph: (306) 652-9465 Email: nfu@nfu.ca

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Ph: (506) 260-0087 Email: info@nfunb.org

NB Member Tax Service: Judy Barr, 559 Route 390, Rowena, NB E7H 4N2 Ph: (506) 273-4328

Region 3: Sarah Bakker, NFU-O General Manager, 5420 Hwy 6 N, RR 5, Guelph, ON N1H 6J2

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YES



I would like to:

Join the National Farmers Union

- Farming Unit \$225.00 / year
- Farm Family \$225.00 / year
- Associate \$ 75.00 / year
- Youth (14-25) \$113.00 / year

Donate to the National Farmers Union

- \$25 \$50 \$100
- \$500 Other _____

For automatic monthly membership or donation payments, visit us at www.nfu.ca .

PAYMENT INFORMATION: Cash Cheque Mastercard Visa

Card Number: _____ Expiry (MM/YYYY): _____ CVV: _____
(3 digits on back of card)

Name on card: (please print) _____

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION:

NAME(S): _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ PROVINCE: _____ POSTAL CODE: _____

PHONE: _____ EMAIL: _____

Please mail your payment along with this form to:

National Farmers Union, 2717 Wentz Avenue, Saskatoon, SK S7K 4B6