

National Farmers Union

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**Meeting with Hon. Ted McKeekin, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
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The National Farmers Union welcomes this opportunity to introduce you to our organization and to briefly highlight a few issues of concern to our members. We look forward to further discussing these issues, and our views on food sovereignty and advocating for family farms in Ontario at a future date.

The National Farmers Union (NFU) is a direct-membership, non-partisan national farm organization. It was founded in 1969, and incorporated through an Act of Parliament on June 11, 1970. From the beginning, the NFU created leadership positions for women and youth, to ensure a balanced representation. In 2000, NFU members in Ontario made the decision to become an accredited general farm organization (GFO) in Ontario. On September 20, 2002 the National Farmers Union Ontario became accredited as an Ontario GFO. In 2011, we had over 2500 members in Ontario.

The NFU works toward the development of economic and social policies that will maintain family farms as the primary food-producers in Ontario and in Canada. We believe agriculture should be economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable and that food production should lead to enriched soils, jobs for non-farmers, thriving rural communities and biodiverse natural ecosystems. The NFU is a leader in articulating the interests of Ontario's family farms, in analyzing the farm income crisis, and in proposing affordable, balanced, and innovative solutions that benefit all citizens.

Food Sovereignty is at the heart of the work of the NFU – focusing on a food and farm system that values farmers and eaters, supports a local food system, works with nature and acknowledges that food is sacred.

Since the early 1990's, agri-food exports from Ontario have risen dramatically. We would like to see OMAFRA continue to develop and implement policies and programs to support a re-localization of our food system. As farmers, we believe we can supply much more of the food eaten by the people of Ontario. We would welcome an opportunity to further discuss our recommendations to re-orient Ontario's food and farm policies towards domestic food first.

Local Food Infrastructure: One of the priorities for our members, in relation to support for local food, is to maintain and rebuild small and medium scale processing, including small abattoirs. Small and medium-scale processors are not only an important link between farmers and eaters, but can be an important part of rural economies. The continued loss of processing capacity in Ontario, decreases the opportunities for Ontarians to eat Ontario food and creates challenges for farmers choosing to sell meat and produce direct from their farm to local citizens. Along with promoting local food, OMAFRA must support the rebuilding of the middle of the food chain and must support the remaining small and medium-sized abattoirs and processors, including those who want to maintain their present small size.

Canada-Europe Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA):

The NFU is deeply concerned about the implications of this trade deal on family farmers and on our rural communities. The drafts we have seen expand intellectual property rights enforcement tools to the precautionary seizure of provisions for alleged infringement, severely restricting farmers' ability to save, reuse and exchange seed. There is growing support for local food in Ontario, and the Ontario Government has made investments to create opportunities for Ontario farmers to provide food to public institutions. As presently written, CETA would forbid all government entities including schools, hospitals, universities and municipalities from favouring local providers, over a certain threshold. We also have concerns around the discussion on geographic indicators for various dairy and meat products.

Provincial governments have to sign off on this trade deal. What is the position of OMAFRA and the Government of Ontario on CETA? What information do you have on what is still on the table and what has been agreed to in this trade agreement? Who is involved in the negotiations of CETA on behalf of the people of Ontario?

Business Risk Management: The NFU believes all levels of government need to put in place policies that will allow farmers to earn a fair return from the market place and eliminate the need for BRM programs. For this reason, the NFU is a strong supporter of supply management and of the Canadian Wheat Board. Over the short term, we recognize a need for BRM programs. However, these programs must be geared to helping family farms survive, not to supporting the growth of industrial scale agribusiness. What data do you have on which farms have enrolled in the new BRM program? Have farms of all sizes enrolled or is there a difference in uptake between differently sized farms?

"Farms, Farmers, and Agriculture in Ontario, an NFU report released in May, shows that in Ontario the largest farms receive more than their fair share of government program payments and the proportion they receive is increasing. The largest farms received 26% of program payments in 2008. In 1995, they only received 6% of program payments. The same report shows that supply managed sectors receive much larger proportions of their incomes from the market, than other sectors. We also believe all government programs, including BRM programs, must be capped.

Supply Management: The NFU continues to be a strong supporter of supply management. We also continue to advocate for changes within supply management which will make it easier for new farmers to enter those sectors and for interested farmers to develop niche and local markets for their own farm products. We are concerned that supply management is on the table in present trade negotiations. Will the Ontario Government continue to advocate for supply management because of the benefits it brings to family farms and rural communities?

Agriculture-Wildlife Conflict Strategy: Some of our members, especially those farming adjacent to natural areas, experience damage to livestock and to high-value crops, like strawberries, on an ongoing basis. We submitted a number of recommendations on this issue to the EBR Registry and we know work is moving ahead on this file. A couple of concerns we would still like to see addressed are funding for protection measures, like fencing and guard animals, and better insurance coverage for winter damage of perennial and biennial crops.

Green Energy Act: This continues to be a controversial issue within rural communities. We welcome further opportunities to discuss our perspectives and positions on the GEA with you, your staff and other government departments. The NFU is a strong supporter of the production of energy from renewable sources but we do have concerns with some parts of the GEA, including the community consultation process.