



national farmers union

In Union is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MARCH 10, 2011

NFU CONVENTION EXPLORES “WHO HAS THE POWER IN AGRICULTURE?”

Guelph, Ontario – The National Farmers Union (NFU) Region 3 Spring Convention and Annual General Meeting was held on Saturday March 5th at the Canadian Italian Club in Guelph, Ontario. Built around the theme of 'Who Has the Power?', the convention speakers addressed both situations in which farmers and citizens are losing power, and situations when farmers can use their influence to protect natural power and family farms.

Environmental lawyer John Goudy spoke on a panel entitled “Farmers/Farmland and Development.” He argued that since the renewable energy projects being erected across Ontario have very little regulation to protect farmers and farmland in the case of decommissioning, disappearing developers or contamination, farmers need to use their power as 'Stewards of the Land' before signing contracts with energy developers.

On the same panel, Sarah Megans and Dr. Harry Cummings from the University of Guelph, showed that there has been an 8.5 percent decrease in farmland in Ontario's Greenbelt in the 2001-06 period, compared to a 1 percent decrease in farmland across Ontario. They argued that although development does pose challenges for farming, there may be an opportunity for fruit and vegetable farms in the Greenbelt.

The panel entitled “Who Has the Power When It Comes to Trade?”, saw NFU 1st Vice President Colleen Ross and NFU Executive Director Kevin Wipf draw attention the Canada-European Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), presently being negotiated, in secret, between the industry-influenced trade department of the European Commission and the Canadian Government. They argued that if CETA is implemented intellectual property rights will take precedence over all other rights, and the precautionary enforcement measures included in the agreement will give corporations unheard of power over family farms.

The final panel featured Melanie Kempers of the Ontario Beekeepers Association, who presented on the important role that bees play in farming. Kempers asserted that the loss of bees would result in serious negative consequences for food production, given the important role that they play in the pollination of many plants. She argued that the power of farmers can be realized by working together to direct research that is appropriate to their on-farm needs.

Joan Brady, NFU National Women's President and Convention co-chair, summarized the event in her closing remarks. She said, “Although the discussions at the convention drew attention to the lack of power we have as farmers and as citizens, it also provided us knowledge of where we can impact the process to protect natural power by providing habitat for bees on our farms, to protect our land from competing interests or to raise awareness of the impact of corporate driven trade agreements on farmers and our society as a whole. Truly, there is power in the united voice of farm families – “In Union is Strength.”

The convention also saw the election of three representatives to the NFU's national board. The successful candidates were Joe Dama (Essex County), Steve Dick (Prescott/Russel County), and Sean McGivern (Grey County). The national executive will appoint one of these three to serve as Region 3 Coordinator. Also, Coral Sproule (Lanark County) was elected to serve as Region 3 Youth Advisor.

The Annual General Meeting of the NFU-O took place in the latter part of the afternoon. It included the election of Regional Council members. The successful regional council members are Michael Tremblay (Essex County), Peter Dowling (Frontenac County), Alvaro Venturelli (Hamilton County), Michael Schmidt (Grey County), and Rae MacIntyre (Grey County).

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