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NFU in Ontario Newsletter

SUMMER 2008

**The public wants you to prosper,
 but farmers have to meet them half way**

*A commentary for the
 National Farmers Union-Ontario
 by Grant Robertson*

Due to the nature of our farm business as retailers of our own farm-grown products and my position in the NFU, I often find myself in conversation with farmers who are, or are thinking of, direct marketing their own farm-raised meat or other products. Often in these conversations, I am asked for advice or have the opportunity to trade advice and observations with others in a similar type of business. I often feel foolish giving this advice because I know that there are so many farmers within the NFU who are much more experienced and much more knowledgeable than me.

Long before local food, product labelling, the rights to grow and save our own seeds and other such issues were even on the radar of many, it was NFU members quietly working away, without fanfare, to make things better. Scratch the surface of any real farmers' market or local food initiative in Ontario and chances are you will find an NFU member at the heart of it.

In a world where governments, academics and others treat the latest bio-tech manipulation of our basic food stuffs as some sort of divine innovation, NFU members have been out there creating real innovations that benefit local communities, families and farmers alike. A short list of products NFU members have created and offer for sale to eaters includes: wines (including a delicious fruit wine called Strawberry Delight), garlic products, pies, breads, cakes, flours, all kinds of food with soya beans and others, along with high quality eggs, chicken, beef, pork, berries, lamb, fruit and much more. The quality is extremely high and they contain authentic stories and a direct connection between the eaters and

these farmers. The NFU members I have met are always willing to share a recipe, an explanation of how they grow the food and the story of their family and farm. In many ways these farmers are acting as farmers always have, sharing what they grow with others in a generous and giving manner.

This leads me to the advice I have received and I now pass along. One thing I have noticed time and again is that a great many farmers are not charging enough for their products. In short my advice is "get your prices up to reflect the risk you take in producing food and allow a fair return for your labour". Don't be embarrassed to ask a decent price for your work. Work out your costs and add to it a return for labour and risk.

Here's the thing: most consumers will not mind paying a farmer a fair price that reflects his labour and risk. Over 85% of people polled, responded that the chief reason they buy local food is to support farmers. When I visit my local hardware store to buy a hammer, I know there is a profit included in the cost. I don't resent paying them for that, in fact I want them to get paid, that way I know the next time I need nails for my hammer they will be there running a business and able to sell me nails. The average eater buying a farmer's produce feels exactly the same way. They are glad to pay a good price for the quality product you are providing them. You should be able to make a living from your farm. The public wants you to make a living. Know your costs and charge accordingly. The public wants you to prosper, that is why they are buying your food; it is time for you to meet them halfway and ask a little more for your quality food and labour.

***if you would like to be added to the distribution list of this weekly commentary—please send an email to grant@bmts.com with "subscribe" in the subject line.*

The role that the National Farmers Union plays in La Via Campesina movement is something that makes me very proud to be an NFU member. La Via Campesina advocates many of the ideals that motivate me every morning that I wake up to the farm (if you wish to brush up on what LVC is about, take a look at the 'organization' section of their website – www.viacampesina.org).

When I was asked if I wanted to take a drive to attend the North American Regional Conference at a little retreat in western Quebec, I was very excited to get to know this group better – and to be part of this gathering.

It was great to meet these people from all over North America who were united by the common passion to defend and preserve food self sufficiency, food sovereignty and integrity. During the two nights and one day that I was able to attend the gathering, I was rejuvenated and inspired by the conversations going on. The purpose of the meeting was to organize the points of view as well as positions of responsibility within the North American region of LVC, in preparation for the upcoming international conference in Mozambique, Africa in October, 2008. It's an incredible task to find common ground when concerns vary with nationality, sex, culture, and personal reality. It is amazing that so many of the struggles are the same. I was impressed with the outcome of meetings among different working groups discussing issues such as agro fuels, social movements and political change, and the positive impact of small scale agriculture on the health of the planet (as opposed to corporate scale agriculture), to name a few. I couldn't imagine the fascination of discussing these topics on an international level!

It became apparent to me that there is indeed a division within this region of North America. Mexico is a world away from the rest of North America. I have noticed the factories moving, and noticed the low price of food coming from the country. Before this meeting, however, I was really unaware of the food dumping that happens within Mexico, from other

nations. After attending this gathering, I feel as though I have had a glimpse of the political and personal strife caused by the position that Mexico holds in the world marketplace and of the effects of its national politics has on its common people. To have ended each day with celebration and conversation was an exhibition of the strength of spirit in these farmers.

After the meeting in Quebec, two of the visitors from Mexico remained to speak about the effects of NAFTA on small-scale agriculture in Mexico. They spoke in three locations across the province, including a community hall in Lanark County in Eastern Ontario. Colleen Ross was there to continue the discussion with the topic of food sovereignty and the realities faced by Canadian farmers. The hall was filled. The message from the speakers was a confirmation that small and medium-sized farms all over the continent are facing the same threats, the same challenges – and we are facing them *together*. The two speakers illustrated the effects that the dumping of commodities otherwise locally available is having on the small farmers of Mexico. After traveling the Ontario countryside and meeting farmers along the way, they were able to see that we are facing much of the same political and economic manipulation here in Canada. I was moved to feel part of the campesina resistance as opposed to being a part of a country that is guilty of its own imperialistic behavior towards other nations.

Farming is a tough business – short money and filled with uncertainty. Yet, try to cage a farmer in a secure paid job in a cubical! We farm for reasons that are beyond financial reason. We must! I believe that is where the richness lives. Family farms thread the earth. And on the toughest of days, I find solace in knowing that I am among thousands who face the same challenges, and grow on in spite of them.

In solidarity, Hilary Moore
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As the Education system recognizes the various learning patterns, interests and needs of their students, the Specialist High School Major (SHSM) was developed. Designed to allow students to focus their learning on a specific economic sector while meeting the requirements for the Ontario Secondary School Diploma, programs have focused on agriculture, transportation and manufacturing. The first agricultural programs began in 2006 and will graduate students in 2008. Interest is increasing and new projects are added annually.

Recently the NFU-O was pleased to sponsor a convention held at the University of Guelph. Aimed at the over 120 students currently enrolled in the Specialist High School Major in Agriculture, the two day event included campus tours, speakers from both industry and the farm and the opportunity to network with each other and various agricultural groups and agencies. The goal of providing first-hand career information from those in the field of agri-business and introducing new innovations in agriculture were well met. The kids themselves were a well balanced mix of farm and non-farm background and were led by teachers with interest and experience in agriculture.

Key note speaker, Mike Bachner, Partner in AgCall Resources, spoke of the demographic pressures on the future work force. As more Canadians retire, than enter the work force, the competition for skilled labor will increase. He identified the Agribusiness sector as a vast and important component of our economy and outlined the abundance of exciting and challenging career opportunities. He stated that jobseekers would be able to choose between many jobs and change jobs as needed. Speaking from his perspective as a recruiter for many top agricultural firms, Bachner did not focus on primary agriculture and it is hoped that the students will have gained the knowledge elsewhere that all industry has been built on the products produced on Canadian farms and on-farm opportunities are also important.

Presently the Specialist High School Major in Agriculture projects are supported by various school boards and in partnership with business and community to provide some well needed infrastructure. Following is a listing of programs now in existence:

- Bluewater District School Board—Chesley District High School (Chesley): 519-363-2014
- Conseil des ecoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario—Ecole Secondaire Publique Le Sommet (Hawkesbury): 613-632-6059
- Huron/Perth Catholic District School Board—St Anne's Catholic Secondary School (Clinton): 519-271-0890
- District School Board Ontario NE—Timiskaming District Secondary School (New Liskeard): 705-647-7336
- Conseil scolaire de district des ecoles catholiques du Sud-Ouest—Ecole Secondaire de Pain Court (Pain Court): 519-352-1614
- Thames Valley District School Board—West Elgin Secondary School (West Lorne): 519-769-1350
 —Norwich District High School (Norwich): 519-468-2014
- Windsor Essex Catholic District School Board—Cardinal Carter Catholic Secondary School (Windsor): 519-322-2804

The NFU has recognized the crisis of an aging farm population and we work constantly to improve the future of beginning framers and the legacy of family farms. The Specialist High School Major in Agriculture creates hope that the importance of agriculture in our communities and the Canadian economy is finally being recognized and that young people are being equipped to participate in the industry.

NFU members have a lot to offer these students, a great deal of knowledge, a vision for a sustainable agricultural industry and the ability to engage these young people in our youth programs. Acquaint yourself with a local project, become a community partner or just spread the word, a positive future in farming is something we can all work toward.

Sustainable Farms for a Sustainable Local Food System

The National Farmers Union, Local 316 is excited to announce the beginning of another farmer-initiated project aimed at building a sustainable local food system in Kingston and its countryside. This four-year project, named *Food Down the Road: Sustainable Farms for a Sustainable Local Food System*, is funded by Heifer International, a non-profit organization whose goal is to help end world hunger and poverty through self-reliance & sustainability. The project will begin in September 2008 with the hiring of a project coordinator and run through to June 2012.

Our project is a farmer education, training, and support program aimed at strengthening the region's farm community and local food system. By engaging new and established farmers in the opportunities and benefits that come from raising farm products for local markets, the project aims to increase the viability of family farms and build the supply of local farm products for local eaters.

The centrepiece of the project will be the establishment of an eastern Ontario chapter of the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training in Ontario (CRAFT Ontario), an organization made up of more than a dozen Ontario farms, each offering full-season farming internships and training many farmers of tomorrow. This *Food Down the Road* project will

help to set-up the first eight "host farms" or "mentors" for 2009, gradually reaching a total of 14 farms. By fall 2012, at least 44 interns will have passed through the program and many will be exploring a future in farming.

Along with the CRAFT segment, the project will offer training and support to new and established farmers through workshops, focus groups and on-farm learning. These activities will focus on building the capacity of farmers to plan and manage their farms to benefit from the growing demand for local food from local markets. Livestock, seed, and equipment will also be available to those who participate in the project as interns, mentors, new farmers, or established farmers seeking new local opportunities.

In all, *Food Down the Road: Sustainable Farms for a Sustainable Local Food System* will build farm capacity as well as farm community in Kingston and neighbouring counties. At a time of record lows in net farm income in Canada and record profits in corporate agribusiness, there is need for new approaches that make family farms viable and farmers feel a sense of hope and pride in their work. As more farmers and eaters turn toward the vision of a sustainable local food system for answers, we continue these small steps towards building it.

—nfu—

Renfrew Report

Renfrew County responded to the recently released changes to the On-Farm Slaughter Regulations (<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/infosheet-meatplants.htm>). These regulations enable farmers to slaughter animals on-farm, then take the carcass to an abattoir or meat plant for processing - provided the meat is for the farmer's own consumption. NFU-Renfrew requested the following amendments:

- that the time frame for taking the examiner's course be extended to include the winter of 2009.
- that the new amendments not limit the window for on-farm slaughter and off-farm processing to 4 weeks in the spring and 12 weeks in the fall, but be open to 52 weeks as it can't be predicted when farmers find it necessary to slaughter such animals for their own use.

In regards to Supply Management, Renfrew County NFU sent a message to all government officials - a reminder for those officials to continue their unwavering support for supply management with no tariff reduction and zero increase in market access during this current round of W.T.O talks.

Renfrew County NFU continues to promote buying of local food sold at vegetable, fruit farms, farmers' markets and local vegetable stores. Buying and selling local food is the pillar of Food Sovereignty. —nfu—

youth weekend - July 11th to 13th, 2008 Laird, Saskatchewan

Featuring...

- camping on Hestia Farm
- local food
- workshops designed to build the capacity of young NFU members: Media Relations, NFU History, Food Sovereignty and our current position as young farmers will be discussed.
- a chance for locals to encourage more active youth roles in the NFU and establish connections with youth across Canada.

If you are a youth member with an interest in attending—contact your Local President (list on page 8) for more information on representing your local and possible travel support. Monies have already been set aside by Local 1 and Huron County to support the attendance of their youth.

For more information, contact **Kalissa Regier, Youth Vice President at 306-232-7591 or kjregier@saktel.net OR Caitlin Hall, Ontario Youth Advisor (as listed in directory)**

Upcoming Events -Summer 2008

Essex County: Annual General Meeting to be held at St. John's Evangelist Hall, 1688 Cty. Rd. 46, Woodslee on June 26 at 8pm. Speaker will be National Board Member, Joe Dama on current NFU activity and elections will be held. For more information, contact Corey Versnel at 519-733-2593 or JP Renaud at 519-818-6705.

Huron County: Huron NFU members are invited to join in the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario Western Regional Potluck Picnic, gathering and Farm Tour on Sunday afternoon July 6, 2008 at Meeting Place Organic Farm, the home of Tony and Fran McQuail (86016 Creek Line, South East of Lucknow). We hope to gather from 12 - 1, Lunch 1 - 3 with food and fellowship and then a farm tour from 3:00—4:30. For more information Contact Tony McQuail at 519-528-2493.

Local 1- Prescott/Russell, Stormont/Dundas/Glengarry, Ottawa: The next meeting will be on July 7th, 7:30 pm at the Country Kitchen Restaurant, Winchester, all members are welcome. A potluck corn roast is planned for Sunday August 10, 1 pm at Bernard Foley's farm. For more information on either of these events contact Christine Estermann at 613-538-2331.

Hastings/Northumberland/Prince Edward: Once again the Local will be sponsoring a booth at the Hastings Plowing Match. The 20th anniversary show will be held at Lysle Farms at the corner of Hoards and Lake Roads near the town of Stirling, on August 20 & 21. Call Mark and Sherry Richardson at 519-613-397-1261 for more information or to volunteer for the booth.

Middlesex County: Contact Karen Eatwell at 519-232-4105 if you require a gate sign.

LAND FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF FARMERS

- by Nigel Smith, NFU Youth President

The NFU was pleased to have been invited to participate in the conference "Land for the Next Generation of Farmers." I, as well as Caitlin Hall, the Ontario region Youth Advisor, represented the youth of our National organization. It was an excellent opportunity to network and discuss issues important to conserving farmland, and getting new farmers out on the land.

The first strength of this conference was the various groups who were represented. Farmers, academics, government and liaison groups gave a good base and a good range of perspectives to draw from. Hearing presentations from representatives of these groups, and then by engaging with one another in small groups gave all participants, a good understanding of the issues and a lot of consensus was reached.

The barriers that are before small farmers were very apparent. Price of land, access to resources (both financial and otherwise), and limiting infrastructure for small producers are certainly concerns of the NFU and attendees of this conference. Other challenges included the fact that some of the best farmland is being lost to urban sprawl and the fact that that same land would ideally be a source of food for surrounding populations. Also, a lack of political voice for farmers and the instability of farm income have caused many current farmers to dissuade the next generation.

To give a balanced perspective, the strengths contained in the current agricultural system were also discussed. Key strengths included the excellent agroecological conditions, the policy momentum focusing on the economic and environmental benefits of local food, the proximity to markets in Ontario, consumer interest and many others. The positive example of a Quebec program to protect agricultural land and beginning farmer grants was shared as well. And of course, the greatest resource is the enthusiasm, energy and creativity offered by beginning farmers from both farm and non-farm backgrounds.

Five key initiatives were identified by the conference participants to address the issue of providing "Land for the Next Generation of Ontario's Farmers".

- Finances, tools and legal issues: including "new farmer" loans with subsidized interest rates or special amortization periods, modernized zoning to allow for smaller land holdings, and a reformed land valuation process to cut down on speculation.
- Research: including an inventory of land available to new farmers (lease, purchase, incubator farms), an inventory of new farmer needs, and the development of a criteria for assessing agricultural potential for different agricultural uses.
- Policies and Regulations: to facilitate long term leases, support on-farm processing, permit second dwelling on a farm, incentives and easements, and provide support for cooperatives and other marketing initiatives.
- Networking and Strategic Alliances: bring together all possible stakeholders on land access issues in Ontario; form a land-link program to facilitate land to farmer connection.
- Relationships and linkages: building a regional network of organizations who understand issues, land types and farmer requirements, designing a media campaign to promote understanding of issue, personal consultation and mentoring for beginning farmers and farmers transitioning out of farming.

We were very pleased with the initiatives discussed in terms of building alliances as we move forward. Linking interested people and facilitating greater communication between stakeholders will be of utmost importance in the future. The NFU is committed to helping build these linkages and we look forward to working with the Ontario farmland Trust in the future.

—nfu—

PEAK OIL: CLARIFICATION AND PREPAREDNESS

The first in a series by NFU-O Energy Researcher Rick Munroe

Clarification:

Peak oil is usually described as occurring when we hit the max-point of global petroleum production, when a lack of in-ground supplies finally constrains the oil production curve which has increased steadily for 150 years, and when we have pumped out about half of the world's "ultimate recoverable reserves" (URR), the easy half. Once the world has peaked, oil production may plateau for a few years before entering terminal decline. Those who oppose the peak oil theory usually claim that the peak oil analysts are overly focused on reserve depletion and on the timing of peak.

I believe that both are unfounded criticisms. Many peak oil analysts have increasingly focused on above-ground factors. Matthew Simmons, in particular, highlights what he calls

- "the rust factor" (aging infrastructure: refineries, pipelines, drilling rigs, tankers, etc),
- "the grey factor" (aging workforce: industry is losing its experienced veterans just as things are getting tricky),
- the need for timely investment, etc.... all of which may limit what can be done with whatever is below ground.

From my perspective, I have focused more on the above-ground & human factors: potential for terrorist attack, the risk to Ontario and Quebec of export decline, effects on agri-food, nationalization/access restrictions, affordability/fuel poverty issues & potential for domestic unrest, emergency preparedness & role of military & first responders, etc.

Many people have been side-tracked by an unhelpful debate over *timing of peak* (which really matters only insofar as it buys us some mitigation/prep time) and *below vs above ground* causes of peak (it matters little who "wins"... the result will be the same: increasing unaffordability & unavailability, economic distress, resulting social stresses, issues of safety & security, etc.).

Meanwhile, the central point of the peak oil analysts has always been this: *difficulties will arise not when we "run out" but much earlier, as we approach/reach the production peak*, no matter what the cause of that peak/plateau. I believe that this central thesis is correct and that we may already be entering this phase (but that will only become clear in historical hindsight). It would be prudent to assume that there will be increasing difficulties as we approach the apparent peak, whether real or imagined, and no matter what the cause.... the result will be the same, a profound unsettling of the "cheap energy" status quo.

Preparedness

What matters most at this point is the vulnerability of our population to the energy pinch which appears to be months, not years away. A quick check of the websites of Public Safety Canada and of FEMA and Dept. of Energy in the USA will confirm that a fuel emergency is not on anyone's list of likely emergencies. Meanwhile, our entire economy, our food system and the effectiveness of first responders all depend on a continuous flow of affordable petroleum products.

Britain experienced two weeks of chaos in Sept. 2000 when truckers went on strike to protest fuel prices. Within days, there were serious problems in many sectors, but in two areas the problems were acute: liquid fuels (petrol & diesel) and food. Despite the UK-2000 experience, our cold winters, long distances and our increasing dependence on imported food, our nation and our province seem oblivious to the hazards of a sudden petroleum supply problem.

Furthermore, our politicians and our media seem very reluctant to acknowledge such a possibility, thus leaving the public in a state of serious vulnerability. NFU-O is in ongoing contact with the media, politicians and emergency planners at all three levels (municipal, provincial and federal) as well as military and energy security analysts, actively working to see these issues addressed.

—nfu—

The agri-food aspects of Peak Oil will be included in the next newsletter.