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May 17, 2010

Mr. James Bezan, M.P.
Selkirk-Interlake
500 Justice
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear M.P. Bezan:

Thank you for your letter dated April 7, 2010 regarding the pending closure of six prison farms. The letter was read and discussed at an executive meeting of the Renfrew County National Farmers Union on May 3, 2010. The executive requested that I address some of the comments outlined in the letter.

- Have staff members of CORCAN (on whose recommendations you act) had grassroots farm experiences which would allow them to discuss the real effectiveness of those prison farms.
- According to your letter, employment statistics for the released inmates appear to be a measuring stick to substantiate the closure of those farms. We suggest a check should be done on how many other segments of society have difficulty finding employment in our present recession. Do we shut down teacher training when so many teachers can't find a job? **What about tomorrow?** In the same token, do we shut down training in food production and disban good agricultural lands? **What about tomorrow?**
- The letter mentioned the lack of practical employment skills. We note from the (attached) article an inmate quotes the skills he is acquiring at one of the institutions. There is a real window of opportunity here to expand on those skills and at very little cost. The facility is already there. Many trade skills can be practiced on the prison farms.
- The letter outlines that inmates will be cooking their own meals, buying groceries, etc. New costly activities such as this cannot replace producing one's own food. What greater benefit for the Canadian economy than inmates continuing to use locally grown food instead of purchasing from grocery shelves (approximately 80% of food on grocery shelves is off-shore).
- The letter mentions successful rehabilitation. Please see comments by Bryan Bower (an aboriginal justice advocate), "The prison farms have been instrumental in the rehabilitation of aboriginal offenders. The relational training learned on the farm is at the root of the aboriginal healing paradigm." (article attached).

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In closing, the Renfrew County National Farmers Union Executive believes the many arguments given by supporters of the prison farm have merit. We respectfully ask that our M.P.'s and the Hon. Vic Toews be much more open to listening to what these people are saying.

Again we thank you for your attention to our comments.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Mackay". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dave Mackay, President
Renfrew County National Farmers Union

cc: Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper
Hon. Vic Toews
Hon. Gerry Ritz
Wayne Easter, M.P.
Cheryl Gallant, M.P.
André Belavance
Alex Atamanenko
Hon. Dalton McGuinty
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Elizabeth May, Green Party Leader