

# National Farmers Union

**Our policies and positions, built on the principles of food sovereignty, are created through resolutions brought to regional and national conventions by members and locals.**



**Food Sovereignty** empowers farmers and local communities to create food systems that serve them best. It gives citizens a say in how their food is produced and where it comes from. Food sovereignty rebuilds the relationship between people and the land, and between those who grow and harvest food and those who eat it. The first priorities are the economic, social and environmental sustainability of farmers and rural communities. Powerful forces act against the development of sustainable farming systems – short-term political and economic goals, international trade liberalization, and the agendas of chemical, fertilizer, processing, distribution and retail corporations.

In Canada, our food system has been increasingly industrialized and integrated into the global food system. Government policy has facilitated the shift of power from communities to corporations. Our work on food sovereignty involves exposing and opposing these policies while we create, promote and build alternatives.

**With food sovereignty, trade is secondary and does not sacrifice farmers.** The success of free trade agreements in winning market access and in finding foreign customers has failed farmers. Since 1988, when the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement was signed:

- agricultural exports have tripled;
- farm debt has tripled;
- farm input costs have risen and
- realized net farm incomes have dropped.

For farmers, so-called free trade agreements do two things. By removing trade barriers, trade agreements erase borders and force the world's one billion farmers into a single, hyper-competitive market. At the same time, trade agreements facilitate waves of agribusiness mergers that dramatically reduce competition for these corporations. By increasing competition among farmers, trade deals decrease or eliminate farmers' profits. By fostering a decrease in competition among agribusiness corporations, trade deals increase profits for these companies.

Canadian farmers must be given the priority to supply food to Canadians. The NFU advocates for farm and food policies which focus on domestic production as a way for farm families and local communities to regain control of food sectors that have been and are being taken over by non-farmer corporations. Accurate country-of-origin labelling can help citizens and farmers work together to build and support diversified domestic markets

## **CRITICAL ELEMENTS – FARMLAND, SEED, MARKET CONTROL, ENERGY RESOURCES:**

### **Farmland must be preserved and must be in the hands of those who work the land.**

As land ownership becomes more concentrated, and as corporations and wealthy investors take control of our farmland, our food and farms are threatened by industrial and urban developments. Developers and investors push the price of farmland higher, making it more difficult for new and young farmers to enter farming and for families to transfer land from generation to generation.

To preserve farmland we can:

- restrict the transfer of prime farmland to non-agricultural uses, industrial and urban development;

- restrict foreign, non-resident and corporate ownership of farmland;
- only allow farmers and individuals, who live in Ontario or incorporated farming operations owned by individuals who live in Ontario, to own farmland;
- create and implement mechanisms to allow land transfers within farm families that do not rely on loans or interest payments;
- explore options like community-owned land trusts and land banks, community-based financing options and support for seller-finance options and
- work to ensure farming is economically viable.

**Whoever controls seeds controls our farm and food system.** Fewer and fewer transnational seed and chemical companies are gaining more and more control of our seeds through:

- plant breeders rights, intellectual property rights, gene patenting, genetic modification;
- government regulations and trade agreements which place restrictions on farmers' abilities to save seeds and
- funding cuts to public breeding programs.

Citizens, not corporations, must control our seeds. Seeds were developed and improved by farmers for farmers. They were not created by corporations. Genetic engineering has the potential to threaten the environment and the economic well-being of farmers, therefore, citizens must control the development of GM foods and crops.

#### **Supply management:**

- provides stability and predictability for farmers;
- treats farmers equitably with regard to price and
- provides Canadians with a guaranteed supply of high-quality, locally produced milk and poultry products.

NFU members were instrumental in the development of our orderly marketing systems, including supply management. The three basic elements of supply management are production management, import controls and cost-of-production pricing.

While the NFU continues to strongly support supply management, we also advocate for changes:

- to give beginning and small farmers the first priority in allocation of quota;
- to put in place new entrant programs;
- to provide small but meaningful quota exemptions for family farms which market their produce locally and direct-to-eaters and
- to accommodate on-farm processing and marketing ventures.

**Producing energy from renewable, sustainable sources**, including solar, wind and low-impact hydro, will help conserve our remaining fossil fuel supply and minimize the environmental impacts of energy extraction and energy production. Renewable energy production and feed-in tariffs:

- must be under the control and ownership of farmers, rural communities and the broader public, not multinational energy corporations;
- must come second to decreasing the demand for energy through conservation;
- must be more focused on community-owned and controlled projects including renewable energy cooperatives and farmer-owned microFITs and
- must allow rural citizens to negotiate changes and compensation to benefit the full community, and ultimately to refuse industrial-scale projects in their communities.