



national farmers union
in Union is Strength

NATIONAL FARMERS UNION

DISTRICT 1, REGION 1

SUBMISSION TO THE COMMISSION ON THE LAND AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Farm Centre, Charlottetown, P. E. I.
Wednesday, June 24, 2009

NATIONAL FARMERS UNION

Submission to the Commission on the Land and Local Governance
June 24, 2009 - Farm Centre, Charlottetown, P. E. I.

The National Farmers Union welcomes this opportunity to meet the Commission on Land Use and Governance to outline our concerns regarding this topic.

At the outset, it should not be necessary to advise you of the tremendous decline in the farming industry in this province and the subsequent erosion of our rural communities. Farmers have not been paid for their cost of production for many years, and we have reached the end of the rope, so to speak. Our hog industry is almost non-existent, our beef industry is on very shaky ground, and a good number of our potato producers have experienced the most disastrous year in memory. Efforts are being made to increase the organic farming sector - how can this flourish without a livestock industry to provide the needed nutrients for our soil? How much longer can our farmers and our fisher people be expected to bleed to death? Yet we see money being spent on infrastructure projects with almost total neglect for our primary industries. A province or nation that neglects its primary industries certainly does so at its peril.

We are concerned with an apparent plan to have every community in this province belong to a municipality. Our question to you is this - will communities be forced to join a municipality? Farm people see tremendous amounts of money being spent in our larger municipalities. We all know that the taxpayers will pay for this. As farmers, we cannot afford to pay increased taxation for facilities we seldom, if ever, get a chance to use which we fear will be the case if we are all herded into municipalities. If we want to use the facilities in the larger centers, we will gladly pay the admission fee to do so. Without respect and understanding of farming practices, farmers will find it increasingly difficult to continue in their profession as no doubt there will be increased restrictions placed on farming operations within municipalities. We view the scheme to turn the towns and cities against rural P. E. I. as nothing short of a tax grab. A previous government blunder to reduce the pay of civil servants by 7.5% should serve as a warning to the current government not to commit political suicide with this issue. If the government succeeds with this, the younger generations will lose trust with any government.

Then there is the matter of buffer zones and the new regulations concerning this - many of which are ridiculous. Farmers want to be good stewards of the soil. If farmers were paid for their work, the same as any other profession, then they would not have to mine the soil in order to make a living. We request to see the background research on buffer zone regulations. In other words, where has this been proven previously and what were the ramifications for the farmers involved? The National Farmers Union has repeatedly asked for a meeting with the officials involved and the Minister of Environment to try to better understand the new buffer zone regulations, only to be told that the Department officials will no longer meet with groups, only with individual farmers. This is a farce - this is one of the reasons we have farm organizations. Government has a responsibility to meet with us. On some farms, the buffer zones will amount to a large number of acres. Farmers have to be adequately compensated on an annual basis with a rental type agreement for the land they have to take out of production to meet the buffer zone requirements. Then we heard of a government plan to eliminate the property taxes on the buffer zone land. The

National Farmers Union strongly opposes this scheme. Farmers want to pay the land tax on their land, including buffer zone land, and maintain ownership of it.

The matter of the corporate control of land is of great concern to the National Farmers Union. Current regulations state that corporations can own or control up to 3,000 acres and individuals are limited to 1,000 acres. However we are finding out that a family member of one of the large corporations in this province is buying up farmland. Without doubt, this will be used to grow potatoes for the processing operation. With this kind of activity going on, how long will it be before our potato processing growers are not needed? As it currently stands, although the growers presently have a contract price set with Cavendish Farms, there will be no delivery amounts set until after the crop is in the ground. This will undoubtedly result in more potatoes being sold on the open market and will not bode well for growers who do not contract with the large corporations. It is not good even for those who do have contracts. The position of the National Farmers Union is that the farmers should do the farming and the processors do the processing. We strongly oppose any tampering with the Lands Protection Act.

In order to preserve farmland in this province, it will be necessary to cut down on urban sprawl. A system of land zoning/land banking is needed to ensure that our farmland will be kept as farmland. We need to be self-sufficient in food. Keeping our farmland is the first step. Subdivisions need to be planned for and put in areas not suitable for farming purposes. Besides preserving the farmland, this will lead to less conflicts over farming practices. One farm surrounded by homes will not survive. It will eventually be squeezed to the point that the farmer will have no choice but to cease operations.

The preservation of our farmland and the survival of our farm families has to be taken seriously. Given the increasing cost of transportation, we cannot rely on getting our food from other countries, many of which do not have the safety regulations in place as does Canada.

We are living in a serious time in this province with respect to our agricultural industry. There is more emphasis being placed on “recreation” rather than on the “creation” of new wealth which is what our farmers do. Instead of being over-regulated on many fronts, including the land, farmers need to be assisted in every way possible to once again have a vibrant agricultural industry in this province, where farmers are paid for their cost of production, and the resulting spin-offs will improve the economy of our entire Island province.

All of Which is Respectfully Submitted by

National Farmers Union,
District 1, Region 1