



**National Farmers Union**  
**Union Nationale des Fermiers**



# **The National Farmers Union District 1, Region 1**

**Introductory Submission**

**to**

**The Honourable Robert Henderson,**

**Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries  
Province of Prince Edward Island**

**Charlottetown, PEI  
February 6, 2018**

## **Introduction**

The National Farmers Union (NFU) thanks you for this opportunity to have a preliminary, formal meeting with you. We congratulate you on being appointed as Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries in the current government. In this submission we aim to share with you some of the history, ideal and goals. We will also comment on the content of your mandate.

### **1.0 Origins and designs of the National Farmers Union**

The National Farmers Union was established as a national farm organization by Charter of the House of Commons in 1969, the only farm organization to have had such an honour. Its predominant mandate is to promote and protect the interests of farm families in Canada, not excluding or competing against those same interests in other countries

The NFU is made up of voluntary family memberships. It is a grassroots organization, which develops its policies through democratic processes on the local district, regional, and national level. It promotes in its members a concern for all commodities and rejects the separation of farmers into divisive commodity groups. The NFU has maintained an involved membership. We have found that farmers are hungry for a family-farm vision of agriculture. The faith which many farm families have in the NFU impels us to continue lobbying policy makers, protesting unjust policies, educating the public, and proposing viable alternatives.

We expect that in your new ministry you will honour the role of the NFU as a legitimate general farm organization in PEI as it is across the country. The NFU is committed to guarding its right and duty to speak out and to give voice to the interests of Island farm families.

### **2.0 Some National Farmers Union Philosophy**

The National Farmers Union is best known for its policies and actions based on the following principles.

- farmers (and people in general) are meant to “live with one another and not off one another”
- to be truly human, cooperation is preferable to competition as a way of life, as a behaviour pattern, and as business ethics
- land is a life source which we borrow from our children rather than a commodity to be bought and sold for profit in the market place or to be abused for the sake of the profit of the few
- water is a life source which belongs to all as a right, and not to be traded away to enrich the already rich and powerful people
- people have the right to: respect, effective voice, and full livelihood regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, or class
- as farmers, we are connected to the rural community and all its sectors and institutions: we believe that our civic responsibility requires that we will continue to work with our communities for people’s rights and dignity
- we are convinced that while any group in our community is suffering from social injustice, then nobody can enjoy true freedom and peace
- the family farm is the most appropriate unit for the production of food both in terms of food sovereignty, ecological protection, and a supply of safe food for consumers
- farm families have the right to receive full cost of production, which besides capital and inputs, includes full payment for the hours of work which women, men, and children put into the farming operation

- a system of equitable supply and market management for farm products is required to provide adequate prices to farm families
- every nation has the right and responsibility to create its own food sovereignty
- every person in the world has the right to adequate, healthful, and culturally appropriate food
- engagement in international food trade has a place only after each nation's own needs are met.

### **3.0 Possibilities of Building a Relationship of Trust with the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries**

The National Farmers Union hopes that we will be able to develop an open relationship with your Department. It has been made clear to us in many ways in the past that our views often clash with those of government and those of some in the farm sector. That is not a problem. We have a lot of diversity of interests in the farm community and in the wider community. However, if there is honest, open, and respectful dialogue we can, at least, make sure that there is space for opposing views. We have a very unhealthy community if the space for opposition is closed down or diminished. The NFU does not expect you to be able to bring about harmony of views, ideals and goals. We do, however, expect you to be suspicious of any comments or actions which aim at discrediting the NFU or any other group. And we do expect you to guard with your life the rights of diverse organizations of good faith to exist and to thrive.

### **4.0 Your Mandate as Minister of Agriculture and Forestry**

The NFU notes that the mandate letter of the Premier to the last Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries has been unchanged. We want to be up-front with you about the elements in that mandate which we can support and that there are others which we oppose on principle.

Here are some points for discussion from your mandate

#### **4.1 *As Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, your overarching goals will be to advance Prince Edward Island's primary industries and our approach to food development, innovation, production and sales while building on our reputation as Canada's Food Island.***

Of course the NFU is with you in your task of advancing agriculture in the areas of food development, innovation, production and sales. Where we have problem is with the intent that this would be done according to current government's (the Premier's) "approach". Our concern is that this government has been intent on an economic goal of profit (often enjoyed only by the few) and based in agriculture on an unsustainable (for land & water) export-driven industrial system.

We are not totally sure that PEI has sufficient reason to be regarded as having an assumed good "reputation as Canada's Food Island". The preoccupation with **public trust** may in fact indicate that there is a defect in our reputation. We need to ask why there is such a need to build in our own community a trust in our goals and methods of production.

- 4.2 ***In collaboration with the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, develop a Food Cluster in PEI that promotes food security and safety through a robust private sector and leading research organizations active in the province.***

The National Farmers Union welcomes the promotion of food security (though we prefer the concept of food sovereignty, with its wider implications). We certainly applaud the reference to “safety”. We are not sure of the intent and direction the “Food Cluster” nor who would control it. We support a “robust private sector” and promotion of leading research, which we hold should remain and /or be re-established as a public sector responsibility.

- 4.3 ***Develop and initiate a local food initiative that promotes better understanding and choice built on the strength and quality of PEI’s food sector, including school-based programs.***

The NFU supports school-based programs as long as they are based on children’s right to healthy food and not merely another level of charity endeavours.

- 4.4 ***Actively protect, through leading science and community engagement, the means of ensuring the ongoing strength of our resource sectors and the promotion of environmental stewardship.***

The National Farmers Union is delighted to see that you are mandated to promote environmental stewardship, knowing that the main goals for you must be the protection of land and water. We are in favour of leading science directing this environmental stewardship, especially when it is funded by public money rather than by the corporate sector which tends to serve its own interests. And finally you are entrusted with a sublime work of creating space for serious community engagement.

## **Conclusion**

The National Farmers Union hopes that as we can discuss today the points we have made here. We expect that we may discover many areas of agreement and we expect that we can still talk openly about the areas in which we disagree. We also hope that we will have many other opportunities to continue our communication. The NFU can learn from you as we carry on our work on behalf of PEI farm families. And we hope that you can learn from us as you proceed with fulfilling to the best of your ability your mandate as Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries. Thank you again for this opportunity today.

Respectfully submitted,  
The National Farmers Union  
District 1, Region1