

Cuban roots, Canadian soul.

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Just stand up and say “WE SUPPORT CANADA’S FARMERS” I told the Toronto Convention Centre audience attending the *Canadian Conference on Unity, Sovereignty and Prosperity* in early December. I had just spoken on the Farmers’ Resolution to Exempt Water from the NAFTA. The question from the floor mic had been “how can the public get behind this?”

Following the question and answer period, I was swarmed. One woman pressed a \$100 cheque in my hand and said “thank the farmers for me”. A representative of a council of churches said her group would support us. One woman said: “Do you realize what you have by the tail here? Groups across Canada are going to jump forward to support the farmers in this; we certainly will.”

Whether you think the NAFTA is the greatest thing since duct tape or the worst mistake since the GST is not the point. Whether you think water exports should be pursued or prohibited is not the point. Who you voted for last (or next) federal election is CERTAINLY not the point.

The point is sovereignty. The Farmers’ Resolution to Exempt Water from the NAFTA upholds the sovereign right of communities, local water boards, municipalities, regional districts, provinces and the federal government to continue to make decisions that serve – first and foremost - the sustainable interests of Canada and her communities. Without reference to the FTA, the NAFTA and the (soon to be concluded) GATS and FTAA. Without reference to international tribunals, Chapter Eleven proceedings and the national treatment rights of foreign investors in Canada’s energy (water flooding in the oil patch, hydro-power generation), resource extraction (mining, milling), tourism (e.g. snowmaking by ski hills) and other water-dependent sectors that would argue away the legitimate rights of Canada’s farmers to apply water to the land to grow food for Canada’s communities. With reference to the needs of Canada’s communities, Canada’s food security and Canada’s farmers.

Speaking in one voice, farmers are in a good position to succeed. Had the Federal Government, when asked repeatedly and publicly in the months leading up to the signing of the FTA and the NAFTA, said “yes, we’ve included water in the deal because...” it would be one thing. But the Prime Ministers of the day and countless federal politicians (and their bureaucrats) were adamant: “water is DEFINITELY not on the trade table “they assured Canadians.

It doesn’t get much simpler. Much like selling a bull to your neighbour then finding he’s loaded a few bred heifers in the van when he’s come to collect the next day, no rancher would think twice of saying: “Unload those heifers, they weren’t part of the deal!” Neither was water. And Canada’s farmers are standing up and saying: “Let’s just get ‘er fixed.”

This coming Valentines Day (February 14th), I will travel to Parliament Hill to present the Farmers’ Resolutions to Jean Chrétien and other political leaders. This will be the launch of a one-year campaign to collect resolutions from farm groups in every province. (To learn more, go to the website www.farmertofarmer.ca and click on Our First Outcome: Water.)

As regular readers of this column know, the idea for the Farmers’ Resolution was born from a meeting of 22 Canadian farmers in Havana’s romantic Hotel Nacional back last March. “We’ve seen how farmers in Cuba make more than doctors,” they said. “How Cuban farmers are treated with respect as valued members of society. And how farm policy actually supports farmers. How can we take some of this back home and apply it to the problems facing Canada’s farmers?”

After much discussion and *some* rum, it came down to “voice”. In Cuba, when ANAP (Cuba’s 42 year old farmer organization) speaks, government listens. In Canada, farmers are fragmented into commodity groups and regions and provinces, fragmentation which facilitates “issue management” by the

bureaucrats. From this discussion, a decision was made to launch a non-partisan, non-political “whether you love NAFTA or hate NAFTA water should not be part of the NAFTA” campaign to get farm groups across Canada to speak in one voice. A process (the gathering of resolutions) that could be evoked for other issues which find common support within the farm community.

The rest is quickly becoming history. Be a part of it. Bring the Resolution (see page ___ of this paper) to your farm group for endorsement and send it back to me in time for Valentines Day 2003 presentation. The more voices in this first “sweetheart chorus” the better.

And if you really want to know where all this excitement is coming from, join me and farmers from across Canada in Cuba this winter! I promise you a remarkable and empowering experience. ANAP (the Cuban farmers’ organization) is our host and they have arranged a great itinerary. We have seats available on the tours departing January 27th and March 10th. Hurry and be part of this amazing experience!

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RESOLUTIONS RECEIVED FROM FARM GROUPS
AS OF DEC 21TH (7 WKS FROM MAIL-OUT)

1. Alberni Farmers’ Institute
2. Armstrong, Vernon, Lumby Dist. 4-H Council
3. Ayrshire Breeders Club of British Columbia
4. Associated Ginseng Growers of BC
5. B.C. Fruit Growers’ Association
6. B.C. Ayrshire Club
7. Baldonnel Women’s Institute
8. BC Farm Women’s Organization
9. Bon-Accord Women’s Institute
10. Brackendale Farmers Institute
11. Bridge Lake Fair Association
12. Bridge Lake Livestock Association
13. Canadian Maine Anjou Association
14. Cariboo Sheep breeders’ Association
15. Chilcotin Stockmans Association
16. Coldstream Women’s Institute
17. Delta Farmers’ Institute
18. District “A” Farmers’ Institute
19. District “C” Farmers’ Institute
20. Durham Region Milk Committee, Ontario
21. F.A.R.M. Community Council
22. Forest Grove Women’s Institute
23. Fort St Johns Seed Cleaning Cooperative
24. Gardom Lake Women’s Institute
25. Groundbirch Women’s Institute
26. Heritage Dairy Farmers’ Association
27. Islands Organic Producers Association
28. Kersley Farmers’ Institute
29. Kiwi Fruit Association of BC
30. Langley 4-H Council
31. Lone Butte Farmers Inst. & Livestock Assoc.

32. Lynn Creek Women’s Institute
33. Mainland Dairymen’s Association
34. Nanaimo-Cedar Farmers’ Institute
35. Nor’ Pioneers Womens Institute
36. North Okanagan Organic Association
37. North Pine Farmers’ institute
38. Okanagan-Kootenay Cherry Growers Assoc.
39. Peace River District Womens Institute
40. Pemberton Women’s Institute
41. Pitt Meadows Farmers Institute
42. Prince George Farmers’ Institute
43. Quick Women’s Institute
44. Reid Lake Farmers’ Institute
45. Rock Creek Farmers’ Institute
46. Shawnigan Cobble Hill Farmers Institute
47. Shuswap Thompson Organic Producers Assoc.
48. Similkameen Okanagan Organic Prod. Assoc
49. Smithers Farmers’ Institute
50. South Coastal Dairy Education Association
51. Surrey Farmers’ Institute
52. TaTa Creek Farmers Institute
53. Tatalrose Farmers’ Institute

NON-FARM GROUPS

54. BC Soil and Water Conservation Society
55. New Brunswick Partners in Agriculture
56. J.K Agro Industries Inc.
57. Peace Valley Environmental Association
58. Public Citizen, Washington, DC