

One voice, and that's what made the difference.

May 2002 Column – Country Life in B.C.

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Regardless of whether you're a rancher, grain farmer, poultryman, potato grower, dairyman or orchardist, it is evident Canada's farm sector is in crisis. By gutting farm policy, Canada has moved in the opposite direction to every developed nation in the world. Certainly behind the G-8. At the bottom of the OECD list.

By ignorance or agenda, we are killing Canada's independent farmers. And in so doing, we are killing Canadian agriculture. No other sector of our economy would put up with it. Yet politicians are sitting back having their way with things (playing one commodity or region off against another) because we lack a clear and unified voice to speak with authority and passion on issues of common importance to farmers.

What is equally evident is that there is no reason in the world for this to be happening.

ONE VOICE

As Alan Claridge, past president of the BC Fruit Growers Association, told me in a 1997 interview: 'When I went to Ottawa, they looked at me and said 'And just how many fruit growers do you represent?' I replied: 'I represent them all'. And that's what made the difference...''

At a March 24th meeting in Havana's Hotel Nacional, farmers from across Canada agreed with Claridge. They went on to identify sovereignty over water as the "spot" upon which all farmers could stand and together raise one clear and affirmative voice. A voice that — once empowered — could be raised in defense of other critical farm priorities. A strategy was adopted which includes a farmer team in each province to get the message out to farm organizations and commodity groups, columns and interviews by me with the farm press and, where feasible, in-person presentations. (See last month's column "High time for a revolution...")

SAVING CANADA'S WATER

Farmers and ranchers — more than any other sector — understand the relationship between water and life. Arguing for the retention of sovereignty over Canada's water resources is like arguing for the conservation of topsoil — both are motherhood issues.

In the elections leading up to the signing of the FTA and the NAFTA, Canadian politicians vigorously insisted that the FTA and the NAFTA did not include water. But as we now know, they both do. And the implications are frightening, particularly for agriculture.

Irrigation is a prime example of how national treatment will be argued to gain access to Canada's water. Access that is equal and proportional and in perpetuity

So what we have is a VERY BIG mistake that must be QUICKLY corrected.

A "FIX THE DEAL" ISSUE

And therein lies the rub. Anti-NAFTA groups have captured the water/trade issue as their poster child, using it as a reason why the NAFTA must be killed. This does water a great disservice. Water is not a "kill the deal" issue; it is a "fix the deal" issue. And the time to fix it is now... Regardless of how you feel about other aspects of the trade agreements.

The fix itself is a simple one:

- An amendment to the FTA and the NAFTA (a correction, not a renegotiation, remember we never negotiated to include water) to add water on the list of exempted items that are beyond the reach of the goods, services and investment provisions of the FTA and NAFTA. (Why would the US and Mexico sign such an amendment? Cause the 6 month out clause in both the NAFTA and the

FTA levels the playing field... Which is precisely why such clauses are inserted in agreements, to achieve "fairness" despite power disparities between the parties.)

- A diplomatic statement from Canada to the international community declaring that Canada's sovereignty over her water resources is absolute and will remain so in perpetuity.

All farmers calling for this together - in one voice - can get it done. How? By adopting a nice, polite little motherhood resolution (see below) that shows the Canadian government the path to rescue Canada's water. A resolution without a whisper of partisanship that everyone can embrace. A resolution that you have from now until Valentines Day to take before your farm groups and get passed. (This resolution, together with some background material, will also be posted on our web site www.farmertofarmer.ca.)

NOT ABOUT PARTISAN POLITICS.

This is not about partisan politics. This is neither pro nor anti the FTA or the NAFTA. This is about farm politics. About raising a strong and unified voice on an issue of urgent importance to Canada's farmers. An issue of critical importance to Canadian food security. A rational and powerful voice that, once empowered, can speak again on matters of common concern to Canada's farmers.

(And, as an added bonus, the non-farm community will stand up and cheer you for it because you will be delivering a message — with urgency and clarity — that inspires/empowers the hearts and minds of Canadian consumers — building loyalty and support where Canada's farmers need it most!)

Do you remember from your childhood when Tinkerbelle, dying, whispered to Peter Pan that if all the children said, "we believe in fairies" at the same time, she would be saved? And they did, and Tink lived? It's much the same. By calling for sovereignty over our water, Canada's farmers stand a good chance of changing the face of Canadian farm politics.

THE VOICE OF FARMERS

Over the next month, BC farmers will be liaising with farmer teams in each province to coordinate provincial strategies.

When we have the resolutions in hand from across Canada, I will take this forward as an Agrologist on your behalf. In a strong, credible and articulate manner. As a professional. On behalf of ALL of Canada's farmers. One voice. One issue. One strategy. One beginning.

Water is of strategic importance to Canadian agriculture. Who better than farmers to save it? The solution is crystal clear... Time is short. The clock is running. The count down to Valentine's Day 2003 has begun. Be able to tell your grandchildren that you were a part of this. Call me at 604-947-2893 if you need more information or want to help coordinate. For Canada's sake.

FARMERS RESOLUTION TO EXEMPT WATER FROM THE NAFTA

WHEREAS Canadian food security depends on water,
AND WHEREAS the NAFTA compromises Canada's control over this vital resource,
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the members of the _____
(name of your farm organization)

stand together with farmers and farm organizations from across Canada in calling on the Government of Canada to immediately:

1. secure an explicit exemption for water under the goods, services and investment provisions of the NAFTA and the FTA;
2. place a moratorium on any new water export initiatives until such an exemption is in place; and
3. secure an explicit exclusion for water and water related services under the GATS, the FTAA and all subsequent agreements related to international trade.

Once passed by your membership, return this resolution to your provincial coordinating team (they will be posted on our website) or directly to Wendy R. Holm, P.Ag., RR #1, L-25, Bowen Island, BC. V0N 1G0. Please include a short profile of your membership (number of farmers, etc.). <www.farmertofarmer.ca>, holm@farmertofarmer.ca, 604.947.2893.