

# National protest could be in the works

By ROB SAVAGE

Thomson News Service

MISSISSAUGA - Threats that farmers may stage a national protest continue - with a possibility of action within the next few weeks.

Roger George, president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, told delegates at the federation's annual convention Monday he expects strong support for any action taken.

"Very soon, I may call upon you to participate in a show of national farm solidarity," George said in a speech to the OFA, which represents about 20,000 farm families.

"But let me tell you this: if I ask you to back me, you had better be there."

OFA officials initially talked about a demonstration during an officers' meeting in Toronto last month.

George told reporters Monday he believes there is support in other provinces for a national protest. However, he was vague about the type of protest that would be staged.

The timing is also uncertain. But George said if trade issues were the focus of the protest, the event might have to take place in the next few weeks - possibly before Dec. 20, the deadline for an agreement in principle on agriculture at the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) talks in Geneva.

"I believe the support is there," George told reporters about a possible protest. "Farmers in Canada are very frustrated."

George wouldn't give specific details about the protest, saying only that plans were in place. During the annual meeting, there was talk of a march on Ottawa.

A protest would follow on the momentum of the farmers' rallies and demonstrations this past summer. A number of events such as a rally in Dresden were held to press different levels of government to help farmers.

A number of Ontario farms have gone out of business due to economic pressures such as heavy subsidization in Europe that has led to near-record low produce prices.

George, of Powassan, told reporters that about one-half of the full-time farms in his area have gone under. Along with the loss of farms, jobs have been lost in spinoff businesses, he said.

Governments have taken some actions to help farmers. The federal government recently announced \$800 million to help farmers while Ontario committed \$35 million to support. But George said a long-term plan is needed.

Some farmers attending the convention were prepared to protest if necessary.

"It's important to have a united front," said Dick Buitenhuis, a cash crop farmer from Ridgetown. "We've been pushed around long enough. It's about time we say no more."

Dan Dagleish, of Romney Township, said a protest may be the farmers' only solution.

"It's come to that stage," he said in an interview. "If you want a viable agriculture industry in Ontario or Canada, you have to be willing to go that extra mile."

Dagleish said upcoming generations of young people on farms won't go into the business

if the money isn't there.

However, Jake Geluk, a cash crop farmer from Ridgetown,

had some reservations about a protest. He would only participate if the event was large

enough to warrant the effort, he said.

"It has to be well organized."

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