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**national farmers union**  
*In Union Is Strength*

May 9, 2006

**An open letter to the United Nations**

Mr. Kofi Annan  
Secretary-General  
The United Nations  
Palais des Nations  
1211 Geneva 10  
Switzerland  
Via Fax: 011 41 22 917 0123

Dr. Jacques Diouf  
Director-General  
Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)  
of the United Nations  
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla  
00100 Rome, Italy  
Via Fax: 011 39 06 5705 3152

**Re: Rapidly declining global food supplies**

Dear Mr. Annan and Dr. Diouf:

It appears that the world is swiftly drawing down its food supplies. I write to inquire if the UN or its FAO have reached a similar conclusion.

Every six years, the world adds the equivalent of a North American population. The world's cropland area, however, is nearly static. The UN's FAOSTAT database shows only a 1% total increase in the area of arable and permanent crops over the past ten years. Further, that data shows that that area has been *declining* since 2001. With population increasing and the cropland area static or declining, *per capita* cropland area is fast declining.

The graph that is attached to this letter is compiled from United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) data covering the most recent 45 years. It depicts a chilling situation: In five of the last six years, our global population ate significantly more grains than farmers produced. In those six years, we have drawn down global supplies from a 116-day supply in 1999/2000 to a 69-day supply today. It is almost certain that the current decline in global food supplies is steeper than at any time since the Second World War, perhaps steeper than at any time in the past 100 years.

World food supplies have fallen to levels not seen since the 1970s. In the 1970s, however, our oceans were teeming with fish. In the 1970s, crop production in North America and elsewhere was much less intensive, with less fertilizer used and some of the land left fallow. Today, we are using unprecedented amounts of fertilizers and chemicals, farming nearly every acre every year, irrigating a record area, and generally maximizing production. We are pushing our land to produce, and even so, our production is not keeping pace.

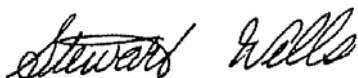
Most critically, today the world food production system is facing multiple threats from climate change, water shortages, and unstable fossil fuel supplies (nitrogen fertilizer—key to our global food system—is synthesized from natural gas).

Mr. Annan and Dr. Diouf, it appears to us that global population is rising rapidly, our cropland base is static or shrinking, production is struggling (and failing) to meet consumption, and that there is growing uncertainty over water and energy supplies and the stability of our climate. Taken together, these factors indicate we may be risking a calamitous shortfall in the world's grain supplies; global food security is rapidly eroding.

I request that you immediately make public the UN and FAO's assessments of current agricultural production and its ability to keep pace with a growing population. If your assessment is in accord with ours, I ask you to convene, with all possible haste and urgency, a summit of the world's leaders to address the massive challenges to the ability of humanity to continue feeding its growing numbers.

I thank you for your attention to our concerns, and I urge you to act rapidly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stewart Wells".

Stewart Wells  
President  
National Farmers Union  
Canada

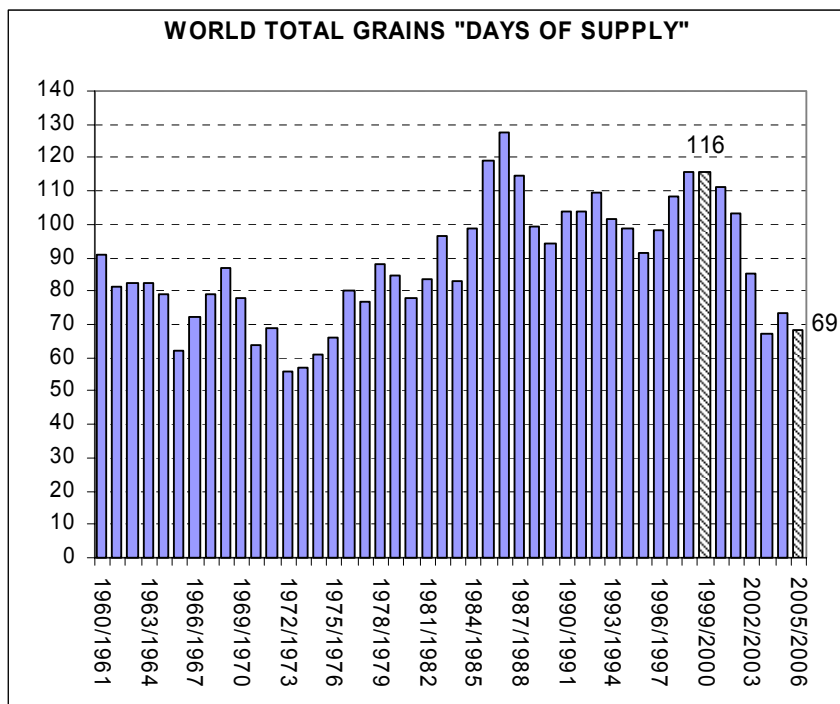
Attachments: Data on global grain supplies

### Data on global grain supplies

An attachment to Stewart Wells' May 9, 2006 letter to  
Mr. Mr. Kofi Annan and Dr. Jacques Diouf  
of the United Nations

The following graph is based on data compiled and published by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Data for recent grain use and ending stocks is published in a USDA report entitled *World Agriculture Supply and Demand Estimates* (WASDE) accessible at <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/reports/waobr/wasde-bb/> . Data for historic measures is contained in the *Production, Supply, and Demand* (PS&D) database accessible at <http://www.fas.usda.gov/psd/> .

The following graphs is based on the concept of a “stocks/use” ratio. That ratio is calculated by taking the amount of grain left at the end of the year in storage (“stocks”) worldwide and dividing it by the amount used during that year (“use”). For example: if there is 400 million metric tonnes of grain left in storage at the end of the year and the world used 2,000 million metric tonnes that year, then the stocks/use ratio is 20% (400/2000). The graph below goes one step further and multiplies that ratio by 365 to yield a result expressed as the number of days of supply. Currently, the world has about a 69-day supply of grain—the second-lowest since 1975.



Note: Graphs that also include oilseeds appear nearly identical to the one above because oilseed production and consumption are relatively small compared to that of grain (production volumes for oilseeds are about 10% to 15% of grain volumes).