

The meat packing industry of this country is a major industry. It is the largest single food industry in Canada. It is the third largest manufacturing industry, exceeded only by the automobile and small appliance industries.

● (1420)

In 1971 the beef industry contributed 12 per cent of the gross national product. I suggest that the most important part of the beef industry are those tens of thousands of beef producers all across this country. We consider it to be such a major industry, and so important to this country, that it behooves the Canadian government, the provincial governments, the House of Commons, the Senate, and all those interested in the national welfare, to ensure that beef producers have policies which will enable them to stay in business.

No beef producing country in the world that I know of, or have read about, takes the attitude: We will open our borders, we will let everyone ship into our country without quotas or restrictions, because we believe in free trade. No country that I know of is doing that. If any did, it would wipe out its beef industry. Our beef industry would not last more than a couple of years if we opened our doors without restriction to countries which obviously have lower costs of production.

We consider it important to keep our Canadian beef industry, an industry supported by 24 million acres of grain and hay, and by 45 million acres of pastureland. Would we consider for one moment letting this part of our nation go barren because we said we were going to give away the beef industry, because of short-sighted policies, to suppliers in other countries?

Therefore, after looking at the whole question very thoroughly and having held hearings in many parts of the country—there were nine public hearings across Canada, and many hearings in Ottawa—we have brought forward certain proposals.

Honourable senators, we sometimes wonder how the public views the Senate, whether it gives us any credence, and whether it considers us of any importance in the public life of this country. I wish to say that beef producers without exception—and that includes approximately 1,800 who attended our meetings—were pleased that senators had given them an opportunity to air their views. At all of the meetings, and in all the representations, not one single word of criticism of the Senate as an institution was uttered. They were glad we were there; they appreciated the opportunity to present their views; and they felt that what the senators were doing was important to them.

The Senate may or may not be considered in the best light in certain areas, but I suggest that leaders of agriculture in this country look to the Senate to provide a forum for their views; they look to knowledgeable and sympathetic senators, who are present in this chamber in large numbers, to present their views and to take action wherever possible on their behalf.

I believe that our report looks at the questions reasonably and sensibly. We are promoting policies that should lend themselves to sympathetic consideration by the government.

The first thing we propose—something which, I suggest, is pretty simple—is that we should have a policy, that we should not proceed without a policy, and that the policy should be a long-term one.

The second suggestion is that there be established basic quotas on imports into Canada based on long-term averages of a nation's access to our market, in such a way as to reflect their historic position and to be fair both to their producers and our own. Those quotas should be known and placed in the law so that each country involved will know exactly where it stands.

We are not suggesting that there should be rigid or fixed quotas. When these quotas are established—based on an historical average calculated over the period from 1967 to 1974, which is a period covering years when we were net exporters of beef and years when we were net importers of beef, and which, in our opinion, is a reasonable and fair base period to take—we suggest that for the future they should be adjusted upwards when beef consumption in Canada on a per capita basis increases. If we eat more beef in Canada, we can allow more imports. Also, as our population goes up, we can allow more imports in relation to our increase in population. We should not try to produce everything ourselves. We should work with and co-operate with our neighbours and friends in a fair and reasonable fashion.

However, we have also put forward a third factor, which is along these lines: when the production of beef goes up in this country, we should reverse the policy that we have tended to have, and the policy that the Americans have expressed in their beef import law, namely, that when domestic production goes up, imports go up. We think this should be reversed. We think that when our own production goes up, there should be fewer imports. That only stands to reason. When we are producing more ourselves, or when we are producing a relatively larger proportion of our own market, we should accept less from the United States, Australia and New Zealand.

I do not want to give too many quotes today, but I was most interested to hear the recommendation of the Honourable Marvin Moore, the Alberta Minister of Agriculture, that:

The Government of Canada should impose annual global quotas (with quarterly limits) on imports of live and processed beef.

Quotas for live and processed beef exports from the United States should be established to guarantee equal market share, if possible.

In other words, the Minister of Agriculture of Alberta recommended that our quotas should not apply only to Australia and New Zealand, but should apply in a fair manner to all of those nations, including the United States, our good friends, who have access to our market.

We have suggested that there should be a very modest increase in the tariff. I do not think we put that forward as