

Agriculture

Naturally, with our market buoyant we then witnessed, and still are witnessing, literally hundreds of loads of U.S. fat cattle being shipped to Canadian packers, particularly in Ontario. In the last six weeks Ontario packers have been able to buy these American cattle at up to 15 cents a pound cheaper. As an example, an 1,100 pound steer could be bought for \$165 less. I am told by responsible buyers for Ontario packers that the United States influx has been so strong that they have had either limited or no orders for Ontario cattle in the last six weeks. I am afraid many of the Ontario beef producers, by virtue of not selling their fat cattle now, will be restricted both by lack of money and accommodation and will not be able to buy their normal requirements of feeder calves from the west, which in turn will reflect in yet further disrupted markets in Ontario next year.

The sad part of this exercise is that it not only puts our producers in a very tenuous position but also our consumers in general are not getting the full benefit of these lower prices. I am given to understand that the Ontario packers are in a position where they can offer beef to the trade at 25 per cent less than they could have six weeks ago. The consumers in many instances are not receiving nearly that much of a price advantage. This is the background that prompted me to ask the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Gray) on October 19 if he had contacted the Food Prices Review Board as to why they have not shown more concern regarding the fact that beef prices have not come down in accordance with live purchase prices. I was utterly amazed when the minister answered by saying, "I think this question relates more to the responsibility of the Minister of Agriculture". With all due respect, I think the general public, and they are all consumers, deserves a more responsible answer to a very serious problem facing all Canadians.

Mrs. Plumptre, under questioning this week by the hon. member for Bruce (Mr. Whicher), tried to defend her obvious inaction in regard to the situation I have just outlined by saying that the board was looking into the fact that meat prices should be lower on account of lower live beef prices, but it would take a while for the lower prices to be evident since there is a time lag between killing and the retail shelf. What happened to the time lag when meat prices were going up so fast, bacon in particular on which as many as three escalating price stickers were put in one week?

I would like to give just one example of why I know beef prices have not come back down to a reasonable differential with live prices. Choice ground beef for restaurant consumption at the peak price cost \$1.29 per pound. It now costs \$1.13 and before the drastic escalation cost 93 cents. Beef hip cuts peaked at \$2.25 per pound and are still \$1.79, but there again they were \$1.15 not that long ago. These are London prices, Mr. Speaker. If the Food Prices Review Board is really serious about protecting the public, producers as well as consumers, then it will have to think of something more credible than that as an excuse.

As I have stated before in the House, my riding is in the heartland of Ontario's general agricultural production. Milk, eggs, beef, turkey, pork, corn and beans are produced in great quantities with some taking first place in production in Ontario. I have in past years actively participated

[Mr. Frank.]

manually in the production of many of those products. This gives me a considerable advantage over many of my colleagues, regardless of their party affiliation, in analyzing on behalf of both urban and rural dwellers when a particular product is being priced at the retail level out of proportion to the cost of production.

I am reminded of a planted question during the last campaign in one of the urban all-candidates meetings. It was: "What can you do for us here in the city?" My answer was then and still is now: One important contribution will be that because of my agricultural production background I will be able to recognize, and hopefully expose, if consumers are being charged unfairly for food products, or, as our socialist colleagues to the left would describe it, recognize "rip-offs".

One difference between my analysis and theirs is that I would expose unnecessary profits. They wish to eliminate all profits of business. They need to cut a new record, or at least change the needle, because I know the rank and file wage earner working for private enterprise business today recognizes his company has to show a profit or eventually he will not have a job. The members to my left will find this out in the next election.

Many people realize increases in food prices meet with much more resentment and bitterness than price increases in other commodities. The public becomes much more aware of a two cent increase for a dozen eggs than a \$250 increase in the price of a popular automobile. Although these reactions may be classified as irrational consumer complaints in regard to spiralling food prices, they are indeed quite legitimate. Price movement in the food sector can be logically approached, analysed and explained but cannot be prevented or eliminated without, in essence, imposing upon our political and economic systems.

If, over the long haul, consumers in general are going to have food product prices kept in line, the federal government has to be able to make decisions intelligently in consultation with its provincial counterparts which will have the long-range effect of maximum production at a profitable level to the producer. They must listen to the farmer for a change. Granted, as in every segment of the society you cannot believe everybody, but there are ways to overcome that problem.

As a good example of not heeding the farmers' advice on beef production, because of the total banning of diethylstilbestrol, better known as DES, the cost of fattening cattle has increased by at least 10 per cent. It is clear to most people who are knowledgeable in the production of beef that the decision to ban DES was based largely on emotion. DES was suspended first in the United States and then in Canada when it was found that heavy feeding of DES to rodents used in research produced lasiums in their liver similar to cancer. DES residues of not more than two parts per billion were found in less than 2 per cent of the beef livers examined, and on the strength of this skimpy evidence food critics were successful in having DES removed from the market on the grounds that it represented a threat to human health.

There are two important measurements I would like to use by way of illustration. Two parts per billion are the equivalent of two inches in 16,000 miles and the average yearly per capita consumption of beef liver in the United