

Slaughter of Calves

calves by beef producers in the province of Quebec. Such destruction is abhorrent both to the producers themselves and to consumers throughout Canada.

Men do not raise cattle, farmers do not produce any kind of product in order to see them or it destroyed. Hungry people, whether in this country or abroad, and many of them are abroad, do not sit back in any state of equanimity or pleasure beholding the deliberate destruction of food, whether it be beef or some other product. Something has surely gone astray in Canada when this situation exists.

I want next to deal with the question of blame. Who is to blame? Is it some institution? Is it the farmers? Indirectly are the consumers responsible? The answer surely is that none of these groups is to blame. The answer surely is that the blame must rest squarely on the shoulders of the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan).

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: He, and he alone, is responsible for the total lack of a beef production policy, a lack that has resulted in the situation where producers are losing approximately \$150 per calf and have to resort to killing their products in order to dramatize their plight.

I repeat, Mr. Speaker, it is the Minister of Agriculture, and he alone, who is responsible for this situation. He, and he alone, has permitted a vicious cost price freeze—squeeze leading—

An hon. Member: A freeze?

Mr. Broadbent: We would have had a freeze if we had had the gentlemen to my right forming the government. That is perhaps the sole advantage of the present situation. It is the Minister of Agriculture who permitted this cost price squeeze which led to tonight's emergency debate.

● (2010)

During the past 18 months we have not had total inaction by the minister. He has certainly been very active. However, the action really amounts to a hodgepodge of ad hoc policies on beef which contradict themselves and, from month to month, lead to solutions which on a previous date were considered by the minister to be totally inappropriate. Let me be a little more specific.

During the past 18 months we have had increased tariffs on beef. These were followed by decreased tariffs. We had the elimination of tariffs. We then had them reintroduced. A few months ago the minister banned the importation of all beef from the United States. He then lifted that ban. Now we have a quota system for the importation of beef from the United States.

I see the minister is making notes. It is refreshing to see him involved hopefully in some constructive activity. I hope we will hear from him later this evening. The minister has done everything but give this country a coherent, rational, beef-producing policy that would, as a minimum, ensure the survival of Canadian produced calves over the coming winter months.

[Mr. Broadbent.]

What specifically ought to be done in the short-term emergency situation? I do not want just to waste time by condemning the minister for his inaction or lack of coherent policy. I want to come to grips with the immediate emergency situation by making some constructive suggestions.

First, in the short run the federal government must catch up with the provincial governments. The prairie governments of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta some time ago introduced special measures to help the producers of beef. They wanted federal assistance. They wanted federal action, but they did not get any from this minister.

Yesterday the province of Quebec took a much needed step to help the producers of beef. However, there is not one of these programs which, in itself, is sufficient to deal with a situation that is national in scope. The provincial governments simply do not have the financial resources to do what is needed in the current situation.

The federal minister must immediately guarantee that our beef producers will receive, as a minimum, their costs of production in keeping the calves they must feed during the coming winter months. That must be done as a minimum, and it must be done immediately. Only by guaranteeing our producers that they will be subsidized to the extent of the difference between costs and market prices next spring can our beef industry be salvaged from the present crisis.

I do not use the word "crisis" lightly. If the product is not saved during the coming winter months it will mean one thing, and one thing only. Next spring, summer and fall we will have much higher beef prices in Canada. The consumers think they are experiencing difficulty now. If the minister does not take immediate steps to deal with the problem over winter months, Canadian consumers will be much worse off next year.

Second, for the long term the federal government must establish a national marketing board for beef.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Broadbent: I expected that. I expected my friends on my right, ever as they are back in the 19th century in terms of economic and social thinking, to oppose a beef marketing board. We have the hoots and catcalls now. I repeat, for the long run we must establish a national beef marketing agency. Without such an agency that would bring to the production of beef a sense of coherence and rationality, the horror produced in the minds of people watching television last night will, next spring and next fall, be repeated in the same minds due to the resulting increase in price. The only way of breaking the vicious up and down price cycle so harmful to farmers and producers alike is to establish a marketing agency for beef.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: I say to my Conservative colleagues, and I use the terms loosely, that over 60 per cent of our agricultural products are marketed by such agencies. The only major agricultural product excluded from such marketing agencies is beef. I suggest it has been, to a considerable degree, the sense of coherence and organization