

# Congressmen Harken, Bedell call attention to pork trade imbalance

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Rep. Tom Harkin (D-Ia.) said recently that the Canadian government's subsidizing of pig exports to the U.S. has "not lived up to the 'good neighbor' relationship the U.S. and Canada have always enjoyed in the past."

Harkin spoke after hearings were held by his agricultural Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy and Poultry to review the impact of Canadian pork imports on U.S. livestock producers.

Since 1977, Harkin noted in his opening remarks at the hearings, the import of live hogs from Canada has increased tenfold and the U.S. is now absorbing over 20 percent of all Canadian hog production.

"While this still represents a relatively small percentage of U.S. production," Harkin said, "the trend is clear and disturbing. The Canadians are using a domestic price stabilization program to subsidize and target their hog exports into our northeastern and midwestern hog markets."

"I am convinced that this recent influx of Canadian hogs is substantially affecting hog prices in Iowa and elsewhere," Harkin added.

"In the past, Canadians have always been our 'good neighbors,' but now our hog farmers are being hurt by unfair trade. I don't think 'good neighbors' would take advantage of this situation," Harkin added after the hearings.

Testimony by the National Pork

Producers Council revealed that the Canadian government subsidizes pork producers when the market price falls below the last five-year average, at 90 percent of that average. That contrasts with the fact that U.S. producers have never received nor sought a government subsidy of this nature.

"When you have this subsidy, along with the current U.S. exchange rate, U.S. markets are obviously going to be much more attractive to Canadian producers than their own domestic markets," Harkin said.

Among the witnesses who testified in the hearings was Mr. Don Gingerich, representing the Iowa Pork Producers Association.

Harkin said he first learned of the problem when his subcommittee held a field hearing in Mason City, Iowa a few months ago. At that hearing a farmer from Marion, Iowa testified that local hog prices were being affected by Canadian hogs shipped into a nearby packing plant.

Harkin and fellow Iowa Congressman Berkley Bedell are sponsors of legislation that would require the Secretary of Agriculture to determine the level of the Canadian hog subsidy and for the Secretary of the Treasury to impose an import duty to offset the subsidy advantage enjoyed by Canadian hog farmers.

"I am hopeful that we can resolve the matter in a constructive and cooperative fashion," Congressman Bedell

said.

"The evidence shows that Canadian pork producers have taken advantage of these government subsidy programs and the virtually unrestricted access to U.S. markets which they enjoy to sharply increase their exports to the United States," Bedell continued. "Live hog imports, for example, were 447,000 head in 1983. The U.S.-Canadian trade gap in

pork last year totaled \$236 million. By contrast, U.S. pork producers exported just \$27 million to Canada last year."

According to Dr. Glenn Grimes, a livestock economist at the University of Missouri, the Canadian imports may have cost U.S. pork producers from \$345 million to \$554 million last year.

"All we are asking is that our

producers be able to compete under fair and equal terms," Bedell said.

"There is no doubt, from what we heard at this hearing today, (May 24) that a significant trade imbalance exists between the U.S. and Canada and many of our hog farmers' problems are a direct result of it," Harkin said after the hearings.

## AHI and ACSH speak out on antibiotics

(Editor's note: As the controversy over the low-level use of antibiotics in livestock feed continues, the following article, recently appearing in a newsletter published by the Animal Health Institute of Alexandria, Virginia, seems particularly appropriate.)

In 1977, FDA proposed to ban the low-level feed use of penicillin, and to restrict such uses of the tetracyclines drastically. The proposals were in response to an ongoing debate over the theoretical possibility that the subtherapeutic use of these antibiotics in animal feeds might somehow compromise their effectiveness in human medicine. The theory involves "antibiotic resistance," a process in which disease-causing organisms become resistant to antibiotics.

In a 1980 report to Congress, a National Academy of Sciences committee concluded that "the hazard to human health has been

neither proven nor disproven." Faced with inconclusive information, action was postponed on the FDA proposals pending further research.

But just because further FDA action was delayed doesn't mean the controversy has abated.

Low-level or sub-therapeutic feeding of antibiotics is, of course, a common practice among livestock producers because of the positive effects it has on animal growth and disease prevention.

The consumer benefit was well documented. The USDA estimates a saving of as much as \$3.5 billion a year on beef, pork and poultry purchases. Despite the benefits, some have called for an end to antibiotic feeding.

In an attempt to force action on low-level antibiotic use, even before the current study was finished, some critics petitioned the government. They sought to achieve through political pressure

what could not be supported by way of scientific investigation.

The Animal Health Institute took immediate exception to the criticism calling the charges "unwarranted" and "misinformed."

"Contrary to the 'indiscriminate' use allegation contained in the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) petition, antibiotics, like other animal drugs, are among the most pervasively regulated articles in U.S. commerce," AHI said in a letter to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Margaret Heckler.

"Pursuant to the animal drug provisions of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, antibiotics used in animals must be approved for safety to both humans and animals and for efficacy in the target animal species.

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