

Apple Growers Appeal For Relief From Imports

WASHINGTON, D.C. — American apple growers have appealed to the International Trade Commission (ITC) for injury relief from a flood of foreign apple juice. Growers, processors and farm group spokespersons appeared before an International Trade Commission hearing Wednesday to list their grievances. The hearing was the government's response to a complaint filed by the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF). AFBF and 28 state Farm Bureaus contributed funds necessary for the trade complaint.

A large share of the imported product is made from concentrated red apple juice, subsidized by Eastern European countries, transhipped through

Western Europe and exported to the U.S. The juice imports have weakened prices for all apples. Farm Bureau is seeking temporary relief in the form of quotas or tariffs.

To answer the formal complaint, the ITC must determine if the domestic apple juice industry is being hurt by imports.

Ken Nye, AFBF commodity specialist, testified that "Virtually every apple grower in the 35 apple producing states is being injured by concentrated apple juice imports. As consumer demand for apple juice began to increase rapidly in the 1970's, domestic growers expanded their production. The five-fold surge in imports in less than five years has resulted in reduced grower prices and

actual abandonment of apples on which production expenses already had been incurred." Juice prices serve as a "floor" price for fresh and processing apples.

"Low demand for juice apples has created chaos in every segment of the industry," said Thomas Butler, marketing manager for an affiliate of the Michigan Farm Bureau Federation.

Ransomville, New York apple grower Paul Baker testified, "It costs us in excess of \$6 a hundredweight to grow and harvest our apples. Last fall, we were offered \$3/cwt. to not only grow and harvest these apples but also to pay for the freight."

American apple juice processors cannot offer growers better prices

and still be competitive in the market place, said processor Peter Morrison. "Our price of 3.5 cents a pound to growers is the lowest in 10 years. It costs us \$6.22 per gallon to produce concentrated apple juice. It is easy to see that we will not be able to compete very long against foreign apple juice concentrate being brought into this country at prices ranging from \$4.75 to \$5.15 per gallon."

"It is a tragedy of the greatest magnitude that juice markets developed by the domestic industries and supported by our advertising dollars are lost to cheap foreign concentrate, often of dubious quality, and in many cases stripped of its flavor because the essence has been removed," said

Michigan grower Jerry Sietsema. "If we had a viable, stable market for our juice apples and received a fair price for them, it also would enhance the quality of both our fresh pack and sauce and slices because marginal fruit now forced into those other uses would be sold for juice. This would raise both the quality and price of fruit in these other two markets."

Paul Drazek, AFBF international trade specialist, said temporary relief in the form of tariffs or quotas for five years would provide incentive for the revitalization of idled U.S. processing capacity.

"The ITC will determine by May 17 if the concentrate imports are injuring the domestic industry," Drazek added.

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