

Canadian Cattleman: Border Closing Is 'Huge Blow'

(Continued from Page A1)

Since a case of BSE was discovered in one cow in Alberta in May, the border has been closed to any live Canadian cattle coming into the U.S.

"The BSE deal is such a huge blow," Hirsche said. "We (the U.S. and Canada) are so intertwined, when you pull one arm out of it, the whole industry is out of whack."

Beef consumption in Canada has increased more than 60 percent since the crisis began, Hirsche said. Stepped-up promotion and supportive consumers are the reasons. But that extra demand hasn't solved what Hirsche sees as the biggest problem — the accumulation of cull bulls in the country.

Beef imports have actually increased in Canada to meet demand, while Canadian cull bulls are being held by ranchers simply because there is no place to slaughter them, according to Hirsche.

"In July and August we have

imported more beef from the U.S. and Australia than ever before," he said.

Most packing plants in Canada are only equipped to process finished steers and heifers, not the much bigger cull bulls, Hirsche said. Before the border closing, cull bulls were generally shipped to U.S. packing plants.

According to Hirsche, the problem started five years ago when major U.S. packers built facilities in Canada specifically for handling finished cattle.

"We (had) not killed a cull bull in Canada for five years," Hirsche said, noting that one small packing facility in Quebec was opened this summer to handle cull bulls.

Hirsche estimated "probably thousands" of cull bulls are awaiting slaughter in his country, along with some cull cows.

Government subsidies for producers and packers were quickly used up when live finished cattle prices plummeted from \$100 to \$38 a hundredweight about a month after the BSE was reported.

"All the subsidies are gone," Hirsche said. "As a producer, I have not gotten one cent."

An Oct. 21, USDA market summary reported 1,000-1,200-pound direct-sale select slaughter steers in Alberta sold for \$60 a hundredweight. Select slaughter steers at Ontario auctions went for \$52 a hundredweight.

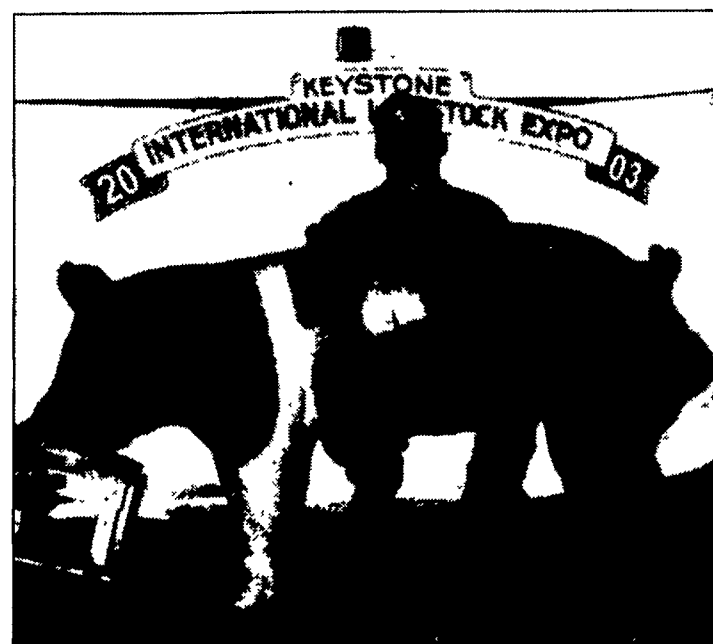
Meanwhile, U.S. live cattle prices soared above \$100 a hundredweight, peaking at \$120-\$130 the week that ended Oct. 17.

"Americans don't realize how integrated we are into the system," Hirsche said. "And Canadians don't either, nor did we care that much (before the crisis hit)."

To give an example of the degree of crackdown, Hirsche said he had a friend traveling from Canada to the U.S. with a McDonald's hamburger — and the customs officer at the border made him throw it out.

"It's been a real nightmare," Hirsche said.

Correction



In a photo that appeared in the Oct. 18 issue, *Lancaster Farming* was supplied with incorrect identification. This photo represents the grand champion Hampshire boar, exhibited by Jonathan Neutzel.

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