

## Got Milk? . . .Protecting Canada's Dairy Supply

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In the 2018 trade negotiations between the US, Canada and Mexico, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chrystia Freeland, traded the interests of Canada's dairy farmers and the consumers who need their products for some questionable language emphasizing gender issues. As leader of the Christian Heritage Party of Canada, I want Canadians to know that we stand behind our dairy producers. We want them to succeed and will defend our Canadian food supply chain.

The USMCA (US-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement)<sup>1</sup>—which has yet to be ratified in the US—is a perfect example of everything that's wrong with our current Liberal government. The PM displayed his penchant for overreach with his "progressive" social policies by insisting on the inclusion of language promoting sexual orientation and gender identity in what should have been a grown-ups' discussion of fair trade. This language is nowhere in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms and certainly does not belong in our international trade agreements, where it weakens our position on things that really matter, like the protection of our ability to produce our own high-quality food.

Mr. Trump, on the other hand, went to the bargaining table with three things in mind: the interests of US farmers, US businesses and the US economy. As President of the USA, that is his job. Why could our Prime Minister not do the same for Canadian interests? During negotiations Mr. Trump complained about Canadian tariffs on US dairy products and basically kicked the door open to more access for US producers. That, of course, reduces volume demand for Canadian products. Instead of protecting our dairy farmers, our PM pathetically demanded the inclusion of gender language in the USMCA.

Many of the issues about Canada's supply management system for dairy, eggs and poultry were grossly misrepresented in the media at the time, leaving viewers with the mistaken idea that Canadian dairy producers are gouging consumers. Nothing could be further from the truth. However, some politicians have seized on that narrative, including Maxime Bernier, leader of the PPC (Peoples' Party). Comparing apples to oranges and dairy producers to corporate monopolies, he seems willing to pit consumers against the producers upon whom we all depend for high-quality food products.

Make no mistake about it: Canadian dairy products carry greater production costs than US dairy products but they also are held to higher standards. Canadian dairy regulations have more stringent restrictions against antibiotics in the dairy supply stream and—unlike their US counterparts—allow zero artificial hormones like BST. Canadian milk standards restrict somatic cell counts to much lower levels than in the US. To improve and maintain consistent quality, Canadian dairy producers also participate in a comprehensive program called ProAction;<sup>2</sup> when fully implemented, ProAction will track five measurable performance pillars: Milk Quality, Food Safety, Animal Care and Livestock Traceability, Biosecurity and Environmental Sustainability. US dairy producers have nothing even close to this.

Canadian production costs are also affected by shorter growing seasons, greater transport costs for both inputs and finished products and the difference in US / CAD currency values. In addition, there are some

hidden US subsidies that give producers south of the border unfair advantages not readily apparent in the grocery store. I've had less opportunity to investigate eggs and poultry but presumably some of the same principles and conditions prevail. It should be noted that the Canadian system puts the brakes on oversupply in order to maintain consistent availability and product pricing. In the unregulated US system, many dairy farms are going out of business and suicides among bankrupt farmers have become an alarming reality. This must not happen here.

We simply cannot open the border to unrestricted imports of US dairy products. . . not without losing our dairy industry entirely. The state of Wisconsin produces more milk than all of Canada<sup>3</sup> and farmers there would waste no time driving Canadian farmers out of business. Canada's current quota and supply management system may need review; there are aspects of it which should be improved, such as facilitating the entry of young would-be dairy farmers into the system (an effort already underway in some provinces). But to simply call for supply management to be thrown out—as Mr. Bernier is doing—is irresponsible. We share his belief in free markets, entrepreneurship and individual initiative. But we also believe in protecting Canada's food supply, protecting the institution of the family farm and protecting our sovereignty as a nation.

President Trump is not afraid to use tariffs to achieve US economic goals. Canada must also be willing to use them—when necessary—to protect our ability to feed ourselves. The bungled trade negotiations are just one aspect of the current government's short-sighted failure to protect Canadian interests. Christian Heritage Party candidates across the country are presenting voters with an opportunity to bring common sense back to politics. Let's support our farmers and ensure continued access to high-quality food raised in Canada by Canadians.

## **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> [www.cglcc.ca/united-states-mexico-canada-agreement-usmca/](http://www.cglcc.ca/united-states-mexico-canada-agreement-usmca/)

<sup>2</sup> [www.milk.org/Corporate/proAction/proActionMain.aspx](http://www.milk.org/Corporate/proAction/proActionMain.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> [www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-dairy-canada-20180612-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-dairy-canada-20180612-story.html)