

Includes reference to CETA and supply management

Canadian beef and pork producers might have felt a bit jittery when U.S. food giant Tyson Foods Inc. announced it would no longer buy slaughtered beef from Canada because of the high costs of the Country of Origin Labelling (COOL), but Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz has promised retaliation against COOL if other processors follow suit.

That might sound a bit like the tail wagging the dog, but some will recall that the USDA backed off a plan for inspection warehouses at border crossings because of Agriculture Canada's opposition on the eve of the signing of the original Free Trade Agreement.

And, according to Mr. Ritz, there is a long list of U.S. exports to Canada, with a value of about \$2.2-billion, that could be subject to retaliation ? provided that the World Trade Organization approves.

According to the Canadian Press, those products include cattle, pigs, cheese, pasta, some fruits and vegetables, chocolate and maple syrup, 38 products in all.

Implementation of COOL has not only proven costly in terms of the labelling but also cumbersome in terms of production interruptions. Mr. Ritz told CP that Canada ?has industry allies within the U.S., including the American Association of Meat Processors, along with other industry players, who have sought a court injunction in U.S. federal court against the implementation of the labelling requirements.?

He is quoted as saying that 100 senators and congressmen have also signed on to support the industry-led court action.

Meantime, there's also a faint hope that the current U.S. farm bill, now before Congress, will fix the legislation and end the discrimination against Canadian and Mexican meat in the U.S.

In other current international farm-related issues, MP David Tilson says the Canada Europe Trade Agreement (CETA) is not going to impact Canadian supply management.

Mr. Tilson has served several years on the committee that devised CETA.

?I have spoken with Gerry Ritz, and he has assured me that supply management will not be disturbed.?

He added that the continuation of supply management has been part of the agreement.

The stance on a quota system is likely good news for those who are already producing within the system, and quotas are said to be worth more than the acreage on which dairy products, chickens and so forth are produced.

But it might not be good news for young farmers trying to break into the supply managed farm industries.

Already, in fact, there is a move afoot among independent chicken growers in opposition to controls.

By Wes Keller