

Canadian Meat Business July/August 2012, Guest Editorial: James Laws



CANADA IS TRUSTED as a world leader in the provision of safe and wholesome meat. Last year we exported \$1.3 billion of beef and \$3.2 billion of pork to over 150 different countries around the world. We also exported approximately \$83 million worth of horse meat to some very sophisticated and demanding overseas markets such as Japan, France, Switzerland, Belgium and Kazakhstan.

That's why it is most disturbing to see the recent unfounded allegations made by British Columbia's NDP MP Alex Atamanenko against horse slaughter in Canada.

On Oct. 5, 2011 he introduced a private member's bill into Parliament entitled C-322 an act to amend the Health of Animals Act and the Meat Inspection Act. The act would ban the import, export and interprovincial movement of live horses for slaughter for human consumption. It would also ban the import and export of horse meat for human consumption.

The bill's preamble states that horses are ordinarily kept as pets for sporting and recreational purposes. It then goes on to claim that horse meat products for human consumption are likely to

contain prohibited substances. That is simply not true.

Mr. Atamanenko's campaign to ban horse slaughter alleges that Canada does not adequately monitor residues of phenylbutazone residues in horse meat and therefore, exposes humans to an unacceptable food safety risk. Phenylbutazone is a pain reliever and anti-inflammatory agent commonly used to treat lameness in horses.

The CFIA doesn't agree and has posted a fact sheet on horse meat on its website to counter the statements made by this member of Parliament. It states:

- The Agency has a monitoring program to randomly test meat based on international scientific standards as outlined by the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization. The testing is conducted at a frequency to detect trends in drug use violations.
- In addition to randomly sampling horse meat for chemical residues, the CFIA conducts targeted testing based on clinical observation of animals, before stunning and slaughter.
- Since 2002, the CFIA has been regularly testing horse meat for phenylbutazone. Results show a very high compliance rate for phenylbutazone residues. Canada's equipment and testing methods are among the most sensitive in the world and currently allow us to detect chemical residues in food at the level of parts per trillion.

Competent government authorities from Japan and Europe have audited and approved those Canadian horse slaughter facilities and the inspection and company food safety systems under which the horse meat is produced. They too monitor Canadian horse meat for residues. Canada would be quickly informed if any food safety issues were identified by these importing countries.

It's not just the \$83 million worth of horse meat exports that this MP's bill and recent communications put in question – but the credibility of the entire Canadian food inspection system. Canada's meat processing industry has annual sales of over \$21.3 billion and employs over 67,500 hardworking people here in Canada.

Given the choice, I'll put my faith in the Canadian Food Inspection Agency that values scientific rigour and professional and technical competence over a proposed law based on false information.

James Laws, P.Ag. is the executive director of the Canadian Meat Council