

International Trade Minister Admits Supply-Management on the Chopping Block

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Hunter River, PEI - International Trade Minister David Emerson is sacrificing Canada's supply management system to appease the Bush administration at the expense of Canada's farmers, particularly in Ontario and Quebec, Liberal Opposition Agriculture Critic Wayne Easter said today.

"We have seen this coming with the Harper government's attack on the Canadian Wheat Board. We knew that the dismantlement of the Wheat Board was the first step to killing orderly marketing systems and now Minister Emerson has admitted it," said Easter.

Minister Emerson told The Western Producer that producers of dairy, poultry and egg products must prepare to be open to free trade in their sectors for the "national interest."

In the same article, Mr. Emerson claims that supply management has forced Canada into a "defensive trade negotiating policy at the expense of competitive exporters."

"What Mr. Emerson has done is a public service. Unlike the Minister of Agriculture, Chuck Strahl, who has said repeatedly that the Conservative government has no intention of undermining supply management as it has the Canadian Wheat Board, Minister Emerson has put the lie to those statements," Mr. Easter said.

"Mr. Emerson has finally confirmed that farmers, regardless of whether they are working through the Canadian Wheat Board or involved in one of our successful supply managed commodity sectors are under direct and immediate threat by the Conservative government. The direct threat to supply management from the Harper Conservatives has been around as long as the party itself," Mr. Easter said.

"Canadians are getting yet another clear look at the hypocrisy of the Harper government," Mr. Easter added. "Liberal governments have been long-time defenders of supply-management and this Liberal Opposition will continue to fight to defend that system against whatever attacks Mr. Harper and his cabinet have in store."

The supply-management industries in Canada are doing well compared to others and it is prized as a tool that enables producers to gain some power in the marketplace. Without supply-management, dairy, egg and poultry farmers will not be able to recover their cost of production or compete with international markets.

Combined, the Canadian egg, dairy and poultry sectors generate over \$6.8 billion in farm cash receipts or 20 percent of total primary agriculture, more than \$39 billion of economic activity, and over 215,000 jobs in Canada.

"What our supply management system and the Canadian Wheat Board have achieved is that both have contributed to the empowerment of farmers in the marketplace. Unfortunately, the Harper Conservatives have an agenda which will remove that power from our primary producers and their agenda will and must be challenged," Mr. Easter said.

Mr. Easter said supply-management provides high quality products at reasonable and stable prices for consumers, while ensuring price increases are in line or lower than that of other commodities, such as beef, pork and bread.

"Compared to the rest of the world Canadians spend less on their food than just about any other country," he said. "This treachery is the Harper government's gift to the United States and the E.U., both of whom have attacked Canada's supply-management system and the Canadian Wheat Board at the WTO for years.

"This is a complete sellout of Canada's farmers to our giant international competitors."

Mr. Easter said this betrayal comes on the heels of months of undemocratic and unprincipled attacks on the Canadian Wheat Board, which culminated this week in the firing of the Board's President and CEO.

"This is a government that has consistently misled and attempted to manipulate the public to achieve its ends. What is now clear is that farmers from Prince Edward Island to British Columbia, from Saskatchewan to Quebec and every province and territory between, have one thing in common: a justifiable reason to ensure the Conservative government is defeated and removed from the office they do not deserve to hold."