# Court ruling is good news for cheese connoisseurs

**BY WENDY HOLM, SPECIAL TO THE SUN** OCTOBER 17, 2009

In a world where the dumbing down of our food has become a global trend, last week's Federal Court ruling quashing Saputo, Parmalat and Kraft's challenge of Canada's new cheese regulations is a victory for those of us who love our cheese.

In its 51-page ruling, the court was very clear: If it is not made with fresh, whole Canadian milk, it can't be called Canadian cheese.

Under the Canadian Agricultural Products Act and the Food and Drugs Act, the federal government has the right to regulate the whole milk content of cheese manufactured or imported into Canada and sold in interprovincial or export trade.

For farmers, the benefits are obvious: 37 per cent of milk produced by Canadian cows is destined for cheese manufacture.

Without the new cheese regulations, one-third of Canada's cows would be out of work.

Rural communities across Canada also benefit: The court decision means that the value-added transformation of grass and sunshine and water into milk and cheese will continue, building important community capital.

Most important, consumers can count on the fact that when they say "cheese", that's exactly what they will get -- high quality, tasty, safe and nutritious Canadian cheese made with whole Canadian milk.

The February 2008 Journal of Horticultural Science revealed that vegetables we consume today have lost between 10 to 40 per cent of their nutritional content through changes in breeding, production, processing and transportation to reduce costs and enhance competitiveness in a new, more aggressive global marketplace.

In the dairy sector, globalization triggered a rapid shift in the composition of two things Canadian consumers love the most: ice cream and cheese.

Unless you are lucky enough to live close to one of the smaller creameries still making ice cream from fluid milk, you are probably one of many Canadians for whom imported sweetened butter oil, skim milk powder and water is the new "ice cream."

In the case of cheese, the Big Three cheese-makers began several years ago to substitute cheaper imported milk protein concentrates, milk protein products and whey protein products for whole fluid milk in their manufacturing processes.

This displaces Canadian milk, which last year alone cost our dairy farmers over $250 million in surplus removal costs.

But the real hit is in the marketplace, where declining quality can only result in a drop in consumer demand for Canadian cheese.

Indeed, in evidence before the Federal Court, a St. Albert's Cheese Co-operative Master Cheesemaker with 40 years' experience explained that the process of converting fresh liquid milk into a powdered milk derivative has an immediate impact on taste.

He testified that even small quantities of milk derivatives (greater than five per cent) can affect the taste, texture and consistency of cheese compared to cheese made with fresh milk.

And so, last December, Ottawa put a stop to it.

After two years of trying to bring farmers and processors to a common position, Ottawa recognized the impasse and enacted regulations to reflect a compromise.

The new whole-milk content regulations preserve the flavour, smell, texture and feel that consumers have come to expect when they buy a given variety of Canadian cheese, while still permitting varying amounts of powdered milk derivatives to be used in most varieties (up to five per cent in soft cheeses, 17 per cent in hard cheeses, 37 per cent in mozzarella and none in Canadian Cheddar).

For consumers and for industry, the choice, of course, still exists: any manufacturer is free to produce or import and sell a product with higher than allowed levels of milk derivatives.

They simply cannot call it cheese. And that's a good thing.

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