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July 16, 1970

STATEMENT OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D-MONT)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

COPY

S. 3942 - INSPECTION OF IMPORTED MEATS

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, for this opportunity to appear before you in behalf of my bill, S. 3942, on inspection of imported meat.

There is nothing more important to consumers and to those who produce meat in this country---and we have both in Montana---than the maintenance of absolute confidence in the purity, wholesomeness and sanitary quality of the meat and animal products offered consumers.

Per capita consumption of beef has grown from 85 pounds in 1960 to 110 pounds last year, and of all meats from 161 pounds to 183 pounds per person. The Department of Agriculture is forecasting continued growth, and this is all because American consumers have confidence in our system of inspection and, therefore, in the quality of the meat allowed to be offered to the public at stores.

In recent years, when proof was offered that some slipshod practices existed in handling of meat, Congress has promptly provided for poultry inspection and for improved meat inspection. We have voted the most rigid requirements considered desirable on our own meat packing and processing establishments, and we have voted to require that meat imported into the United States be produced under equally sanitary conditions so it will meet standards of wholesomeness equal to ours.

My confidence in the quality and thoroughness of inspection of imported meat was shaken when Dr. John Melcher, a Montana veterinarian who was elected to Congress just a year ago at a special election, described to me what he had learned as a result of a personal investigation into the nature of our inspection of foreign meat plants and of meat as it comes into the United States.

We have only 14 or 15 men who travel the globe to make sure that more than 1,100 foreign packing plants are designed and operated to meet our sanitation requirements, and that the day-to-day inspection of meat as it moves down the packing house lines is equal to the inspection standards and requirements we maintain. The annual report of the inspection branch at USDA shows that one of these men frequently inspects three plants a day, which certainly isn't much of an inspection of the plant, the pre-mortem or post-mortem procedures, the boning, cooking or freezing, packing and handling of meat destined for the United States. In his hour or two visit, he cannot, of course, assure himself that there is pre-mortem examination of all animals butchered around the year, or that there is thorough post-mortem inspection of every carcass on the packing line 365 days a year---that has to be taken on faith that the governments in Central and South America, Oceania, Europe and the East all provide rigid day-to-day inspection equal to ours.

We run a check on the results of the inspection on foreign plants when meat arrives in the United States. The equivalent of about 75 man years is devoted to sampling the 1.6 billion pounds of meat shipped to us to make sure that the defects in it do not exceed certain tolerances: one minor defect per 30 pounds, one major defect per 400 pounds, and one critical defect per 4,000 pounds. Congressman Melcher will discuss those defects and their classification.

It is my understanding---and if it is not correct we should make it so---that as meat moves down processing lines in an American packing plant, if any defect is discovered which affects the absolute wholesomeness of a piece of meat, that piece of meat is pulled off the line and the defect eliminated or the meat "tanked" and removed completely from any possibility of human use.

The bill which I introduced in the Senate, a companion to Congressman Melcher's H.R. 17444, provides for thorough inspection of all animal products imported into the United States, and that means piece by piece inspection, after thawing, of the fresh and frozen meat which arrives at our ports of entry.

We cannot provide hundreds or even thousands of United States inspectors in foreign plants to maintain daily vigilance over meat produced in each of them which may be shipped to us. We can inspect these products thoroughly which are offered for our markets, and that is what the bill proposes be done.

I am concerned about the volume of meat and animal products being imported into the United States. Unregulated, it can have extremely serious consequences for our domestic producers, upon whom we must rely for the great bulk of our meat, dairy products and other animal foods. We deal with the problem of volume in separate import quota legislation. I authored the Meat Import Law of 1965.

This question of thorough inspection is a separate question, just as important as any import quota, for failure to guarantee American consumers that imported meat--- which is mixed with our own in ground and processed products and is unidentifiable as imported meat except in rare instances where it comes in in consumer packages--- is absolutely wholesome and sanitary can destroy confidence in the meat and animal products on the shelves and in the coolers of our stores.

If that is done, we will undoubtedly see an end to the rise in per capita consumption of meat, and it may very well decline.

Congressman Melcher will testify today. As a veterinarian he can discuss with you in some detail the existing inspection procedures, and such problems as the failure of Australia to eliminate certain defects in shipments to us. This aspect of the problem is very technical and I defer to my colleague, Dr. Melcher, who is a very thorough person. At least, we have found him to be as a veterinarian in Forsyth, Montana; as a Congressional candidate from the Second District, and as a Congressman.