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DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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Bill No. 60 – *The Animal Products Amendment Act, 2012*

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure to get into the debate on *The Animal Products Act* that's before us now, Bill No. 60. It's an important piece of legislation of course when we've seen things go drastically wrong in our food systems, our meat systems at the different food processing plants. We know what a drastic impact that can have on our consumers as people worry about the challenges of safety. And this is an important thing. It's hugely important.

And so when we have legislation before us like the bill today, we need to make sure that we get it right. And it sounds like the minister has been working very hard on that, and in fact often comments have been made about how he has consulted extensively. It's too bad that his seatmate wouldn't consult as much as he does but that can be a challenge, I know. So we only wish that . . . But I know and I don't want to make light. This is a hugely important, hugely important Act.

And so I think that this is one ... As I say, when we've seen situations that happened in Brooks, that we want to make sure that our food systems have integrity and have respect, and people know. And this is important though, no matter what, we debate the bills fully and completely, fully and completely, fully and completely. And so this is a critical piece of legislation before us. People have to have confidence in the products that are before them, particularly animal products, that they are inspected.

And it's interesting as I read through the minister's comments. And I have to say, the minister's comments for a piece of legislation that is only — how many pages is it? — eight pages, eight pages and he has more to say about that piece of legislation than his seatmate did about a piece of legislation that's 180 pages. And so I was expecting many more pages from the Minister of Labour. But I guess I'm missing that. But this is very good work, very good work here because we know how important it is.

But as I read through this, the discussion, the minister talks about how the Canadian Food

Inspection Agency typically would make the inspection services to the facilities that we have that are registered for meat inspection, that do meat slaughter and processing, but that they are intending to withdraw these services by December 31st of this year. And so it's critical that we get this in place and that we work through it.

So he talks about how the animal Act needs to be updated. In its current form, it doesn't provide the authority for third party delivery of inspection services, and we need to make sure that's available. We would prefer and we think, we believe actually on this side of the House that the best inspection is really done by government-employed inspectors. That's critical. So we would disagree with the minister on that part. But it does need to be inspected. That's critical. That's the first line. It's important that it gets done right and gets done properly, that the whole chain along the system is that we have confidence that it's being inspected, and that's very important.

So we have concerns about the third party aspect of it that, if that does happen, that there is a reporting process and that there's some way to hold these folks accountable. It's interesting. The CFIA [Canadian Food Inspection Agency] has given two years notice of their withdrawal of service. And so if this happens with the third party, we will be very interested and we will be watching that closely because again it gets back to that confidence in the system.

And clearly people don't really think too much about it until something . . . a crisis happens, a crisis like Brooks where you have huge facilities. And of course we all think about the big, big plant, but it's one that recognizes that when things go wrong, they go horribly wrong. And again, also I believe it was Maple Leaf in Toronto was the other food inspection. So this is important work.

So it talks about being amended to allow for a new brand inspection delivery model in Saskatchewan. And this is important that this gets done. He talks about how this was a federal decision that they would pull out and they had no input into it. And of course that is really too bad. That really is too bad, and that we should have been stronger on that, but we need to develop a new provincial meat inspection system to go forward.

And so apparently they've been consulting extensively with the affected meat processors, and I understand that there's 12 provincially registered facilities in the province and they've all been engaged to date. And of course they all would appreciate how important this piece of legislation is. And so when we think about this, it's very important and it goes right through.

Now it would be interesting . . . I don't know if the minister has consulted with consumers about this. He's probably consulted with the ranchers and the producers, the food processing plants, but has there been a consultation with consumers? They would be very interested in this. And this is why we, as I go back, that it's just very, very unfortunate and it's too bad. And of course we do see the federal government . . . We've had this conversation about the cuts to food inspection, the number of food inspectors' positions that have been cut by the federal government, and clearly this is the outcome of that. That now we're having to think about a third party delivery system of inspections.

So that's a big issue.

So another major initiative under this bill that he talks about is the flexibility it needs to move forward with the marketing assurance mechanism. So he talks about having, enabling industry-led fund producer marketing assurance funds, that this would happen so they could collect the fees from the industry to go into this fund. And it would help, be used to compensate producers when livestock buyers default on payments. And he gives an example as recently as G & M Livestock in Manitoba where apparently they must have sold some of their cattle to a buyer, and the buyer must have for some reason defaulted on payment. And of course that is really tough, really tough. And so that's something that must be addressed.

And so then he goes on and talks about the assurance fund and how allowing the industry the option of running their own program if they so choose. And again he's talking about how it's important that we make sure that legislation allows the producers to protect their most important investment, and that's their animals. And so, Mr. Speaker, it seems relatively straightforward, but I think it's one that again that we would have many questions in committee just because, as I say, when things go horribly wrong, and we've had a couple of experiences in the last few years with . . . We've talked about the Maple Leaf plant in Toronto and of course the Brooks plant in Alberta, the XL plant in Brooks. And it's important that we do all that we can as lawmakers to ensure that there's quality assurance in our products we buy, particularly meat, that can be so deadly, so deadly if things go wrong.

And I know it's hard for people. When we saw the pictures, the videos, the news coming out from the XL plant of the meat that was contaminated, and in fact we found out about it because of things that were . . . the inspection that was happening in the States. We need to do all that we can here in Saskatchewan to make sure that we have our confidence in the system.

Now the minister would talk about making sure we do stuff, all that we can, to protect the most important investments the producer has, and that's their animals. But I would also say that another important element of that is the customer, the consumer. I mean if there's no consumer, there's no point in having the animal, is there? You know, if nobody's going to buy the meat products, then why, why, why go to all this length? So this is an important link between the two. This is an important link between the consumer having confidence in the products that we raise here in Saskatchewan and we produce here in Saskatchewan, and then also as well what we produce as ranchers or livestock producers.

And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's critical that we ask questions but as I said earlier, it seems the minister has consulted about this. It's been two years since we first heard about this, and I think that some of the basic work has been done. But I'm not sure; I'm not confident. And we will be asking those questions about that in terms of, are there any stones left unturned? And so at that point, Mr. Speaker, I'd be very happy to move Bill No. 60, an Act to amend bill products Act, I'd be very happy to move that to committee. Thank you very much.