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Cowlandia – The Cattlemen’s Nightmare.

Drover’s never fails to meet expectations for nonsense. In an article in the Drovers Daily, written by Nevil Speer (January 3rd 2023, aginfo@farmjournal.com) we are offered a vision of a place called “Cowlandia” where a “free trade” utopia for cattle producers is imperiled by “anti-globalists.” Only one thing about this fairytale rings true: “free trade” always was a fairytale.

What “free trade” has given us is the off-shoring of much of America’s industry. The loss of millions of good paying jobs impoverished entire sections of our country. The theft of sensitive technology including much that affects our national security and military preparedness. Global supply chains ridiculously prone to disruption. And a trade deficit running at more than a half a billion a year for the past thirty years.

As for us in the cow business, “free trade” has not given us much of anything except for headaches and red ink. Just sticking to recent history (we won’t mention the rotten meat from Brazil, or the market dislocation caused by BSE cattle from Canada, or the fact that Canada subsidized their feeding sector), in 2015, Country of Origin Labelling for beef (COOL) was repealed because, the World Trade Organization, decided that labeled beef violates the principals of “free trade.” For some reason, only beef and pork labeling violate this principal. Immediately, cattle prices collapsed resulting in the loss of some 45,000 independent feedlots, and who knows how many cow/calf operators.

We are told by the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) and the Cattlemen’s Beef Board (CBB) that each year, thanks to “free trade” in beef exports, hundreds of dollars are returned to the pockets of beef producers. In 2020 this, apparently, amounted \$381.91 per head. I don’t think that I got my check, maybe it got lost in the mail, because I can remember 2020 as not being all that great. In fact, the spread between producer returns and the packer/retail cartel was the largest ever. According to Senator Chuck Grassley, packers were clearing \$1000 per head after owning the cattle for just two weeks.

The CBB through the NCBA spends a lot of our checkoff dollars on promoting exports of beef, and this alleged \$381.91 dividend is, supposedly, our reward for having paid that \$1.00 per head tax. In 2020 we imported 3,339,329,000 pounds of beef and veal. This is the equivalent to 5,640,758 head of cattle. The Checkoff collects \$1.00 for each 592 pounds (apparently the amount of beef resulting from one Brazilian cow) so it also amounted to \$5,640,758 in Checkoff tax revenue. That same year we also imported 2,114,667 head of live cattle from Canada and Mexico. Presumably this resulted in another \$2,114,667 dollars in the Checkoff kitty. This would be a grand total of \$7,755,425.

Back in 2020, the CBB says that they spent \$8.35 million promoting the export of beef, \$594,309 more than what they collected from imported beef and cattle. Since we exported only

the equivalent of 5,901,372 head (2,950,686,000 pounds divided by 592) that leaves us with a surplus of imports over exports amounting to 2,777,158 head.

So how grateful should we be for this alleged \$381.91 bonus? Let's say that if we only exported the same amount that we imported, and not 2,777,158 extra head to over supply the market, what would have been the price of cattle in 2020? Wouldn't that have put the \$381.91 per head bonus, that I never noticed, to shame?

Why are we importing beef and cattle, collecting the checkoff tax on them, and then spending that much and more to export beef that we imported in the first place? Doesn't make a lot of sense does it! Cowlandia, the "Free Trade" utopia is a fairytale that definitely benefits someone; however, I am yet to understand how it benefits me.

By the way, I am not an "anti-globalist" but I do believe that we have a right to protect our national sovereignty and our strategic industries. What is more strategic than food? The "globalist free traders" are using imports (and exports) to manipulate the US and world markets for beef and cattle. In the process, destroying ranches, farms, independent feeders, and rural communities. So far, "free trade" has not been a good bargain no matter how many checkoff tax dollars we waste on it.

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