

CETA: Les Producteurs de lait du Québec is troubled by the Premier's statements

Longueuil, June 19, 2014/CNW – Bruno Letendre, Chairman of Les Producteurs de lait du Québec, is astounded and troubled by statements made by Quebec's Premier suggesting that the unresolved issue of compensation for Quebec's cheese makers will not prevent the Canada-EU free trade agreement from being ratified. **"I understand that it is in Quebec's interest to ratify the free trade agreement with Europe. But it worries me that the head of government of the largest milk producing province in Canada is now suggesting, after meeting with European ambassadors, that he would be willing to ratify the agreement without guarantees that his milk and cheese industry will be properly compensated."**

Letendre hopes to be quickly reassured that the Quebec government is willing to engage Ottawa on the compensations promised by Prime Minister Harper himself. **"Yesterday, the House of Commons unanimously adopted a motion that details all of the measures demanded by milk and cheese producers, which are designed to mitigate and offset the impact of the additional European cheese imports in Canada. We expect Quebec to show leadership by making sure that these measures will be comprehensive and disclosed soon."**

Motion M496, which was tabled by Ruth Ellen Brosseau, Member of Parliament and Deputy Critic for Agriculture for the NDP, demands that the federal government immediately disclose the details of the financial compensation that will be paid, set the longest possible period for implementing the Agreement, end tariff quota circumvention and improper product classification at borders, impose the same production and processing requirements on the products that will be imported, and agree to provide marketing support.

The chairman also believes that it is unrealistic to think that access to the European market will compensate for the losses sustained by Quebec's cheese industry, as suggested by Premier Couillard. **"Europe is the world's largest cheese producer and exporter, and its dairy industry is heavily subsidized, whereas we receive no subsidies. We will never be able to compete with the European treasury."**

With over 400 varieties of cheese, Quebec is Canada's top cheese producer. In fact, it produces over 50% of Canadian cheese and more than 60% of its fine and artisanal cheese. Moreover, Quebec has seen remarkable growth in its number of small artisanal cheese makers, which now stands at 51, representing an increase of nearly 50% since 2000. It currently boasts 90 cheese makers in total.

It should be noted that the additional import quota of 17,700 tonnes of cheese that has been conceded to Europe corresponds to over 30% of the fine cheese market in Canada. This means that 180 million litres of milk will no longer be produced or processed here, resulting in \$150 million in lost sales for milk producers and \$300 million in lost annual cheese sales for cheese makers.

About Les Producteurs de lait du Québec

Every year, Quebec's 5,900 producers deliver nearly 3 billion litres of milk, which yield a total of \$2 billion in revenues for farms. Milk production creates around 60,000 jobs in Quebec and contributes as much as \$5.1 billion to the GDP.

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