



Les
Producteurs
de lait
du Québec

Rebuttal by Les Producteurs de lait du Québec to the piece entitled "Fermes, lactocrates et autres bureaucrates" (Farms, "Lactocrats" and Other Bureaucrats) by Alain Dubuc published in La Presse+ on October 7, 2017

This rebuttal was sent to La Presse, but has not been published.

Supply management: for a human-scale agriculture

Alain Dubuc does not like supply management in agriculture. He regularly criticizes this agricultural policy, which applies to dairy, poultry and egg production, even though he recognizes in his piece on Saturday, October 7 that it provides "farmers with a stable and decent income."

He associates supply management with a "dominant, industrial and standardized" agricultural model, as opposed to "another more environmentally-friendly human-scale agriculture" discussed by Marc Séguin in his documentary "*La ferme et son État*." The reality is much more complex and full of nuances. Here are some facts that put things into perspective.

First, let's deal with the matter of human-scale agriculture. Quebec is the largest producer of milk in Canada. The average dairy farm in Quebec, which is supply managed, had 64 cows in 2016, while less than 100 of the some 5,500 farms in the province milked more than 200 cows. The average dairy farm in the United States, which is not supply managed, had 223 cows, while in California, the largest milk producing state in the U.S., the average farm had over 1,200 cows.

Market globalization and undisciplined milk production in large milk producing countries, especially in Europe, since supply management was abandoned, and the United States, have caused the global dairy crisis that has dragged on since 2015. This situation is accelerating the polarization of agricultural models. Milk is increasingly produced by very large operations, while very small artisanal farms meet the demand for niche products by certain consumers.

Quebec producers and their union organization – which Mr. Dubuc disdainfully calls "lactocrats" – mobilized during the CETA negotiations to prevent this vicious cycle. They did not do so to prevent local consumers from gaining access to European cheeses, which are already very present here. Canada imports nearly 8% to 10% of its dairy product needs; the United States imports less than 3%. And good luck if you are looking for cheeses from outside the European Union on supermarket shelves in France, Italy and Spain. Who is actually more protectionist?

Mr. Dubuc continues by accusing collective marketing mechanisms of promoting "a culture of uniformity and standardization." However, the dairy industry is one of the industries that has evolved toward artisanal food production over the last 30 years. In 2016, there were 57 small artisanal cheese makers or dairy plants. The *Our Cheeses* site of Les Producteurs de lait du Québec features more than 500 different cheeses, which are the pride of many regions. Not so bad for a model that "leads to a culture of *status quo*!"

According to Mr. Dubuc, rather than digging its heels in to defend supply management, their union should prepare producers for the inevitable transition. A transition toward what? Toward the U.S. model? Toward the model in Europe, which has subjected its milk producers to a never-ending crisis since it abandoned quotas?

The debate on agriculture and the diversity of production models is legitimate and should take place. Milk producers, just like all farmers, care about developing their model, as they have done many times in the past. However, don't count on them to ditch an agricultural policy that has proven itself.

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