

## **05/16/2002 Entry: "Protesters want U.S. Beef"**

By: DANIEL JOHNSON, The Daily Republic April 22, 2002

Mitchell area farmers hit the streets Saturday to protest the importing of beef for fast food restaurants.

"We are trying to get them to label our meat. And to get McDonald's to not serve foreign meat," said Tracy Van Gorp, a protester and farmer from Plankinton.

The protesters, about 25, took up position outside the Mitchell McDonald's and Burger King locations on North Main and South Burr.

The action was spurred by a recent announcement by McDonald's Corp. that it is running a test program in 400 of the chain's 13,000 stores - all in the Southeast - to use beef from foreign-raised cattle due to a shortage of American beef that is lean enough and cheap enough to use.

Bruce Haines of Mitchell, the area supervisor for eight McDonald's stores owned by Dale Porter of Mitchell, said his company locally is in support of the farmers' mission.

"We told McDonald's we don't support their test," he said.

Haines said that the McDonald's stores in South Dakota only use American beef. He said he pulled a box of beef out of the freezer to show the USDA inspection label to some of the protesters.

Haines said that McDonald's Corp. decided to do the test to stay competitive with other burger franchises that use imported beef along with American beef.

"They have an unfair advantage," he said.

This week in Las Vegas, Haines said his company will be attending the National McDonald's Convention, and he said they will bring the issue of foreign beef with them.

"I don't know why the U.S. imports any beef," he said.

In the United States, the lean beef that the fast-food chains need for their burgers usually comes from female cattle that are slaughtered for ground beef when they are too old for breeding or producing milk.

But according to previous Associated Press reports, ranchers have been cutting back on their cow herds for several years, so now there are not enough animals

to meet the burger industry's demands. Additionally, lean beef from Australia and New Zealand sells for 5 cents to 20 cents per pound cheaper than U.S. product.

But protesters said Saturday that Americans should have a choice when buying meat products.

Foreign meat, said Steve Jensen, a farmer and protester from Alpena, is not inspected by the USDA and is more prone to disease.

Jensen said his group hopes to get some attention from Saturday's activities, and they plan to be in Sioux Falls when President Bush visits Wednesday.

"Let him know how the country feels," Jensen said.

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