

Stronach sharpens knife for Canadian beef farmers

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

Newmarket-Aurora MP Belinda Stronach has joined a fight to get the United States border open to older Canadian beef cattle.

The border closed in May 2003 after an Alberta cow tested positive for bovine spongiform encephalopathy, better known as mad cow disease.

Ms Stronach, official Opposition critic for International Trade, will be joined by western Conservative MPs in the campaign, linked to a court hearing in Montana in July.

Ms Stronach said she will go to Montana if necessary.

"If (Prime Minister) Paul Martin is too distracted by his own political misfortune to govern, we will continue to step up to the plate," Ms Stronach said. "Someone must defend the interests of hard-working and suffering Canadian ranchers and farmers."

Being allowed to ship south of the border is a serious matter for the beef industry, York Region Federation of Agriculture president Dr. Terry O'Connor stressed.

"The border closing has been a big blow to the beef industry here in

York Region and across Canada," Dr. O'Connor said. "What we have to do is to get our (domestic) slaughter capacity ramped up so we don't have to ship as much beef south of the border."

In 2002, the last full year of exports, Canada moved about \$1.7 billion of beef products to the United States and about the same amount of live cattle.

On March 4, days before the scheduled opening of the U.S. border to Canadian cattle, a judge in Montana accepted the argument of a American cattle ranchers' lobby group and granted a temporary

injunction prohibiting the opening.

The full hearing on a permanent court order is scheduled for July 27.

Canadian Cattlemen Association president Stan Eby said the group of U.S. producers that sued the U.S. department of Agriculture "knows there is nothing wrong" with Canadian cattle or beef.

"They are just trying to prolong the border closure as long as possible to reap short-term profit," Mr. Eby said. The U.S. has "nothing to fear and much to gain" from re-opening trade with Canada, Mr. Eby added.

Ms Stronach takes issue with the Liberals' handing of the Montana court hearing.

"The Liberal government chose the wrong legal option before the Montana judge and then failed even to appeal when they lost their application for status," Ms Stronach said.

Ms Stronach and the other MPs plan to file an application for intervenor status at the July court hearing next week.

If the Montana court denies the application, Ms Stronach said the three-member group will file an appeal.

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