government shipping subsidies and cheap labor costs, these foreign countries have been able to dump their surplus mink production on our markets at an average price of $12 per pelt while the cost alone for the American mink rancher to produce a pelt is $18. There seems to be no voluntary letup in sight for this mink import problem.

The present rise in the number of imported pelts and increase in the proportion of the U.S. market which they occupy has disrupted our domestic market and caused a decline in prices. Almost 50 percent of our Nation's mink ranchers have been forced out of business since 1962 due to this rising volume of low-priced foreign pelts. In Wisconsin in the past year alone, the number of mink ranches declined from slightly over 900 to 713. In my own congressional district, 14.5 percent of the mink ranches have gone out of business during the past year. The cause for this clearly appears to be the rising tide of imports. Mink ranching, however, is a vital enterprise for thousands of families across the United States, who have an investment of nearly $200 million in ranch production alone, and it is no wonder that our domestic mink producers have begun to protest the level of imports.

While it is clear that a demand exists in the United States for more mink pelts than currently are supplied by domestic growers, our domestic producers object to the growing percentage of our market being taken by these imported pelts, and we have witnessed the disastrous effects on the American mink rancher from the price depressing deluge of foreign mink imports.

The Congress must enact legislation to protect the American mink ranchers from excessive imports. Since even our domestic mink producers acknowledge that there is a substantial market in the United States for foreign pelts, we, then, must address ourselves to the question of what should be the percentage of imported pelts in the U.S. market. The legislation which I have sponsored, H.R. 11461, is primarily designed to stabilize the mink market in the United States rather than impose severe restrictions on imports. My bill would allow foreign mink pelts to continue entering the country duty free until the annual total equals 40 percent of the domestic consumption in the United States. All pelts imported after that point would be subject to a duty equal to 50 percent of their value.

My bill differs from the other measures before this committee in that it sets an effective date at the beginning of November rather than the beginning of January. This earlier effective date is occasioned by the fact that mink pelts are marketed in a season which begins in late November each year. By advancing the effective date of the quota and duty by 2 months, my bill will cover the marketing season and will provide immediate relief for the many domestic mink ranchers who face danger of extinction due to the volume of imports.

My proposal is just and fair to all concerned, for until some attention is paid to the question of how the U.S. market demand for mink will be satisfied, both the domestic and foreign producers of pelts will be jeopardized by overproduction. It is as important for foreign mink producers as it is for our domestic growers to know how large a market for pelts exists in the United States and how much should and will be produced.

H.R. 11461 will enable our American mink ranchers to retain the domestic markets that they have developed through their years of hard work and promotion. At the same time, this legislation will allow