

The domestic industry has lost over 50 per cent of its domestic market and over 50 percent of the domestic ranchers have been forced out of business since 1959. American mink ranchers have spent over \$20,000,000 in the last 20 years to create a domestic market for mink. So what happens? Foreigners who have done nothing to create the market are now inundating it with pelts of low quality and lower prices. Domestic ranchers have provided these funds on a self-assessment basis for nearly every pelt they market. The foreign producers have provided little or nothing to the promotion of the "image of mink." The truth is that foreign mink are coming into this country in such quantities and such prices that the domestic rancher is being forced from the ranch. With the reduction in the number of domestic ranchers there is less and less money available to promote mink. If this continues, mink will go the way of fox, otter, raccoon and other non-promoted pelts.

The attrition among domestic mink ranchers is appalling. Twice they have been before the Tariff Commission, but in each instance it was a lesson in futility. In 1959, the National Board of Fur Farm Organizations, the spokesman for the domestic ranchers, sought and received a hearing. At that time there were over 7,000 mink ranchers in the United States. In 1967, after many, many bills had been introduced in the Congress to provide some relief for the domestic mink ranchers, the President directed the Tariff Commission to conduct another investigation of the industry with special emphasis on the impact of imports on the domestic industry. The Tariff Commission compiled many figures, but provided neither conclusions or recommendations for the domestic ranchers. By the time the 1967 hearings had concluded there were only slightly over 3,100 mink ranchers left in the United States. In January, 1967, I had 73 mink ranchers left in the Second District of Idaho and today, according to the National Board I have only 60. At this rate of attrition, it will not take long before there is no domestic mink ranching industry.

Mr. Chairman, many of these ranchers who have been forced out of business have been friends of mine. They generally have their life's savings tied up in the ranch. They have saved to get together equipment to modernize their ranches so they would be competitive with the foreign ranches. Because of the high costs of operating a ranch or farm of any kind in the United States they have been unable to compete. So what happens? There is very little to recover when a mink ranch goes out of business. The breeding herd is pelted out generally and gets a lower price on the market than the regular auction price averages. The pens, watering facilities, sheds and other equipment are almost a total loss. With more and more ranchers going out of business every day there is very little secondary market for this equipment.

It is true that years ago many people got into mink ranching as a side-line or as a hobby. That is no longer true today because this type of rancher is among the first to be washed out. Costs are so high and since few, if any, domestic ranchers have a cost of production low enough to compete it becomes too expensive for a side-line or hobby. Generally, the hobby rancher or the side-line operator was early in the exit from the business. Generally, those ranchers who have been driven out of business in the past year have been commercial or near commercial enterprises. It is estimated by the Tariff Commission that to be "commercial" a rancher must have at least 250 breeder females and produce at least 1,000 pelts per year. A ranch of this size cannot be handled as a side-line or hobby, according to the National Board.

Mr. Chairman, I do hope that some relief can be given to these ranchers. They are tax paying American citizens who have worked hard to create an industry. They are entitled to at least some degree of protection as provided in my bill.

Thank you.

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
OFFICE OF THE MINORITY LEADER,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, D.C. May 27, 1968.

HON. WILBUR MILLS,
Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means,
U. S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: Enclosed is a petition signed by a number of my constituents in Kent County, Michigan, in support of H.R. 6694, "to give a measure of protection from excessive duty-free imports to the domestic mink ranching industry."