

# BUSINESSMAN APPEALS FOR REINDEER MEAT INSPECTION



**WANTS MEAT REINDEER INSPECTION**—Thomas Johnson, left, has 500,000 pounds of reindeer meat for sale. His reindeer meat processing company has been hampered by the lack of federal meat inspection in the State. Johnson is shaking hands with Jerome Trigg, president of the Arctic Native Brotherhood. Willard Bowman, center, director of the State Commission on Human Rights, welcomed Johnson who was appointed to fill a vacancy in the Commission.

—Photo by TIMES EDITOR

## Eskimo Says He Can Move Millions of Pds. If Meat Was Inspected

"I have 500,000 pounds of reindeer meat for sale," stated Thomas Johnson. "We'd like to move this meat."

Thomas Johnson, an Eskimo, is the owner of the Northwestern Reindeer Processing Co. of Nome, a private firm that distributes reindeer meat to villages, cities and towns when there is a need for it.

"There is about 42 thousand head of reindeer in Seward Peninsular and other areas," said Johnson.

He said that out of this total, the herders and his processing company could probably sell about 2 million pounds of meat this year. He pointed out that the big stumbling block to sales that could be made is the lack of federal meat inspection.

Lack of this has continually hampered the reindeer meat sales in the past.

"I can supply a shipload of reindeer meat to Hong Kong

if only we had meat inspection," Johnson said.

He said there was an order for that amount but that it was impossible to ship it to Hong Kong because the United States Customs will only recognize federally inspected meat for shipment overseas.

### DISCLOSURE

Then Thomas Johnson made the following disclosure:

That the federally owned 10,000-head reindeer herd on Nunivak Island on the Bering Sea had been the biggest competitor of the Seward Peninsula reindeer herders and herders elsewhere.

"They ship theirs to Seattle on the Bureau ship, the North Star," said Johnson.

According to Johnson, the shipment of reindeer meat in question was inspected in Seattle and then shipped back to Alaska to markets in Anchorage and Fairbanks.

"What I would like to see here is that the State make all the meat inspections," He said. "I believe the State can do it and I believe

(Continued on page 7)



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(Continued from page 1)

it can have it federally approved. It's a State problem anyway from the employment standpoint."

Johnson said that if there was an establishment of meat inspection in Alaska, there could be three to four hundred native people employed in packaging, cutting, and wrapping and this work could last from three to four months yearly, even today.

Another difficulty is that Johnson and the herders cannot sell reindeer meat to Anchorage, Fairbanks and other larger cities because of the lack of meat inspection.

He said that he did get a temporary permit to sell to Anchorage last year. As a result of no meat inspection, the herders are limited to

sell to villages and the orders are usually from 25 head to 75; that if there was inspection, this amount could be increased a great deal.

Johnson also said that the Eskimo population of Alaska does not care for corral-butchered reindeer meat. Once the reindeer is corralled, it develops an unnatural quality in its meat and the taste becomes unpleasant.

The herders, on receiving meat orders, now drive their herds to accessible areas and "range-kill" the supply. This manner of butchering retains the natural meat flavor.

Two years ago, Hooper Bay people received some corral-butchered reindeer meat which they couldn't eat.

"They fed a lot of that to the dogs and last year they had to ship a supply of them back to Anchorage," Johnson said.

He said he now has 12,000 pounds to be delivered to Hooper Bay, that 15,000 pounds have already been delivered to Bethel and 2,000 pounds will be delivered to Lower Yukon and St. Michael.

"Our company tries to sell meat outside of Seward Peninsula. We want them (the herders) to have a first crack at it in this area, but if they can't due to transportation problems and other problems, we supply the meat," said Thomas Johnson.

He said that the biggest herd in the Seward Peninsula was the Golovin herd owned by Sigfried Aukongak that numbers over 14,000.

In Deering, Alfred Karmun and Charlie Clark have 3,000 and 2,000 respectively. Paul Hadley of Buckland has 3,000 head and Fred Goodhope's Cape Espenberg herd numbers at 3,000 head.

The Teller herd of the late Johnny Kakaruk, now managed by his sons, numbers 8,000. There are other comparatively small herds in other areas.

## LOUD HOLLER

Thomas Johnson has been quite vociferous in the past when it came to establishing a meat inspection service in the State.

"If a person hollers long and hard, somebody is going to hear him eventually," he said. "Let's face it. I can say 96 per cent of our people in the Northwest are unemployed."

There are signs now that Johnny and others, like Martin Olson of Golovin, are being heard. Last week, the Nome Employment Development Conference passed the following recommendation:

"That immediate action be taken by the State of Alaska in cooperation with the Reindeer Herders Association and the Arctic Native Brotherhood to facilitate the implementation of the reindeer industry including:

"A. Obtaining federal inspection for meat processing, development of appropriate and proper facilities for such processing and upgrading, and improvement of airports to permit adequate transportation arrangements for the industry."