SAN FRANCISCO — American sugar producers are in trouble because of increases in low-priced sugar imports, the president of the U.S. Beet Sugar Assn. Tuesday told the U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC) holding hearings here.

David C. Carter, head of the Washington-based trade association representing the nation's beet sugar processors, said that current prices for sugar in the U.S. are below production costs here and in most other producing nations.

"HOWEVER, U.S. producers are not competing against foreign producers for the U.S. market. They are competing against the policies of foreign governments that need hard American currency," Carter said.

Carter's testimony was presented during hearings on the impact of sugar imports on the domestic sugar industry held by the USITC.

The Trade Reform Act of 1974 empowers the trade commission to recommend action if its investigation shows that increased imports of a product "injures or threatens injury" to a domestic producer of the same or a similar product.

In his testimony, Carter contended that foreign sugar imports are "currently nearly 500,000 tons ahead of 1975," adding that much of the nearly four million tons imported thus far in 1976 was being sold below the cost of production.

"WITH THE EXCESS world production projected for this and the next crop year, the situation will get markedly worse rather than improve," he declared.

Carter urged that the USITC recommend to the federal government the adoption of a long term sugar program.

"The question is not whether the U.S. will have a sugar policy. Instead, it is whether the U.S. will have its own sugar policy or whether that policy will be established by the whim of foreign governments."

Most nations of the world have sugar programs to protect their consumers and producers from the unstable world market, Carter pointed out.

CARTER SAID a U.S. sugar policy should recognize:

- That as a matter of national security, a significant part of our sugar requirements should be obtained from domestic sources;
- That a viable domestic sugar industry must be maintained in order to meet this national responsibility;
- That consumers should be assured not only of supplies, but of reasonable and stable prices, as well, and
- That a U.S. sugar program should be capable of meeting shortages as well as surplus situations.

The hearing board's recommendations are not expected until mid-March.