



Consumer Federation of America

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Statement of CFA's Chris Waldrop on the Implementation of Country of Origin Labeling

Today is a good day for consumer right-to-know. After a long six-year delay, consumers will finally be able to know the origin of much of their food when they're shopping in the supermarket. Today, mandatory country of origin labeling (COOL) goes into effect for a range of foods, including: beef, pork, lamb, chicken, goat meat, fresh fruits and vegetables, ginseng, peanuts, pecans, and macadamia nuts.

Consumers have repeatedly and overwhelmingly expressed their support for mandatory COOL over the years. Poll after poll has demonstrated strong consumer support for this important information. Now, mandatory COOL is finally a reality and consumers will be able to identify where much of their food comes from.

But it's not all good news. In crafting the rules for its COOL program, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has exempted some food products that should be covered under the law. USDA exempts almost all peanuts, pecans and macadamia nuts because it considers "roasting" a form of "processing" and processed foods are not covered under the law. It also considers "curing" and "smoking" a form of processing so that many pork products will not be covered. Furthermore, USDA says that combining two or more covered foods results in a food item that is not covered under the law. This means that frozen peas and carrots or bagged mixed greens would be exempt from the law.

This broad definition is nonsensical and runs contrary to consumer expectations and the intent of the law. Consumers expect these foods to be labeled with their country of origin and not to find some products labeled while other similar products are not. USDA needs to revise its regulations so that these products are labeled appropriately with their country of origin.

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Consumer Federation of America is a non-profit association of more than 300 organizations with a combined membership of over 50 million Americans nationwide. CFA was established in 1968 to advance the consumer interest through research, education and advocacy. Chris Waldrop is the Director of the Food Policy Institute at CFA.