

October 29, 2013

Dear Farm Bill Conferee:

The undersigned organizations, representing family farmers, ranchers, producers and consumers from across the nation, respectfully urge you to ignore calls for changing U.S. Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) law. A recent letter signed by members of the agribusiness industry and packer-producer organizations uses threats of Canadian retaliation as a scare tactic to encourage Congress to make changes to the popular COOL law.

In fact, the letter by agribusiness and packer-producer groups misrepresents the World Trade Organization (WTO) decision on COOL. A WTO panel affirmed the right of the United States to require COOL for meat products, but said that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) had to adjust some provisions in order to be fully compliant with WTO requirements. USDA followed a carefully considered, open and transparent process as it crafted changes to the rule which provides consumers with additional information on where each of the production steps for cattle -- born, raised and slaughtered - - occurs. The final rule complies with the WTO ruling and is consistent with U.S. law. We strongly support it and urge you to defend it.

There is no need for a legislative change to the law. USDA's changes to the COOL rule are currently being evaluated in two forums: the WTO, based on an appeal by Canada and Mexico, and the courts, based on a lawsuit brought against USDA by many of the same packer-producer organizations, agribusinesses, and foreign competitors on the aforementioned letter. Congressional interference in these matters would be premature and is unwarranted.

Congress made its determination in 2008 that Country-of-Origin Labeling should be the law of the land. The agribusiness and packer-producer groups are merely trying to scare members of Congress into changing the law to benefit their bottom lines. We were dismayed to learn that language in the House version of the 2013 Farm Bill directing USDA to conduct a study on the implementation of COOL was meant to serve as placeholder language for complete repeal of the COOL law. We strongly oppose such action.

COOL is a top priority for our organizations. Any effort to change it in the Farm Bill would affect our groups' support of that legislation. Farmers, ranchers, producers and consumers strongly support COOL and we strongly urge you to defend the current law.

Sincerely,

National Farmers Union



United States Cattlemen's Association



Consumer Federation of America



American Sheep Industry Association

