

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Coast-to-Coast Coalition Urges Congress to Reject Changes to Country of Origin Labels in Budget Battle

More than 200 farm, consumer, rural, faith and other groups demand Congress to keep cool on COOL

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Today, a coalition of 207 farm, faith, environmental, labor, rural and consumer organizations delivered a letter to the Senate urging the legislators to reject any effort to repeal, rescind or weaken country of origin labeling (COOL) in any federal spending legislation.

“Congress needs to stay the course on COOL and leave it alone, especially now that the Obama administration has appealed the current decision to the WTO,” said Roger Johnson, President, National Farmers Union. “COOL has been embraced by consumers who want to know where their food comes from and by family farmers who are proud to provide that information.”

Congress enacted COOL in both the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills and chose to expand COOL coverage to additional products such as venison in the 2014 Farm Bill. The World Trade Organization (WTO) has been considering a dispute over COOL since 2008. At each stage of the WTO dispute, the trade body has been increasingly receptive to the legitimacy of the COOL labels. The broad-based coalition of groups on the letter demonstrates the continued strong support for COOL from all sectors of the food system.

“U.S. consumers overwhelmingly support country of origin labeling,” said Chris Waldrop, Director of the Food Policy Institute at Consumer Federation of America. “In fact, they want even more information about the source of their meat including where the animal was born, raised and slaughtered. Congress should not deny consumers this important information.”

COOL is being attacked by a coalition of special interests including the meat industry, food processing companies, the Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers that have pressed the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Congress to prematurely rescind or suspend COOL before the WTO dispute process has been completed.

“Congress should not unconditionally surrender to the special interest saber-rattling on COOL,” said Food & Water Watch Executive Director Wenonah Hauter. “Congress should not short circuit the WTO process at the behest of the meatpackers and their special interest allies.”

Last week the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative announced it would appeal the most recent stage in the dispute, a move likely to extend the timeline of the dispute by many months. The signing organizations believe there are strong grounds for a successful appeal because the WTO overestimated the costs and underestimated the benefits of the labels. Further, the WTO inappropriately suggested that COOL caused declining livestock exports to the United States, but the economic downturn was a greater cause of the change in exports and in recent years exports have been soaring, even with COOL requirements in place.

“As livestock producers and consumers, our members stand strong in our commitment to COOL and urge our Congressional representatives to support the pending appeal and let the process proceed,” said Mabel Dobbs, a rancher from Weiser, Idaho, and member of the Western Organization of Resource Councils.

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A copy of the letter is available [here](#).