



Consumer Federation of America

food&waterwatch



November 13, 2013

Dear Farm Bill Conferee:

The undersigned consumer organizations respectfully urge you to defend the U.S. Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) law and reject calls for changing it.

COOL provides consumers with important information about the source of their food that American families genuinely value. Survey results released in May 2013 by the Consumer Federation of America showed that 90% of Americans believe they have the right to know the country of origin of the fresh meat they purchase. A 2008 poll from Consumers Union found that 95% of U.S. adults agreed that country-of-origin labeling for products should always be available at the point of purchase. Additionally, American businesses, especially farmers and ranchers who take pride in the foods they produce, would also be harmed by weakening or eliminating current COOL law. Congress should not repeal or change this popular law.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) modest revision to COOL earlier this year, crafted through an open and transparent process, addressed the concerns expressed in the 2012 World Trade Organization (WTO) ruling against the popular labeling policy. The change improved the old country-of-origin labels, cited by the WTO as too ambiguous, with new labels that more clearly disclose information to consumers. Both USDA and the U.S. Trade Representative have expressed confidence that these changes bring COOL into compliance with the rules of the WTO.

Congress made its determination in 2008 that Country-of-Origin Labeling should be the law of the land and we urge you to defend the law. Repealing or weakening COOL would affect more than just meat and poultry. Foods ranging from fish and shellfish to fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables and many nuts are all required to be labeled with country of origin under the law. Changing these regulations would have far-reaching negative impacts on consumers who deserve and expect accurate information regarding the origin of their food. There is no need for a legislative change to the broadly-supported law and we urge you to reject any such efforts.

Sincerely

Consumer Federation of America
Consumers Union
Food & Water Watch
National Consumers League
Public Citizen