

February 26, 2007

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Chairman
U.S. House Agriculture Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Robert Goodlatte
Ranking Member
U.S. House Agriculture Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

Consumers Union strongly urges you to change the date of implementing mandatory country-of-origin labeling (COOL) for beef, pork, lamb, produce and peanuts to September 2007. The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 included a provision requiring retailers to notify consumers of the country-of-origin of beef, pork, lamb, produce, peanuts and seafood. Your leadership is needed to ensure the intent of Congress and the will of the American people is met.

As the delayed implementation date of September 2008 nears, opponents of mandatory COOL are trying to convince Congress that a change in statute is needed in order to reduce the expense and burden of the program. We do not support changing a statute that has not been given a chance to prove itself. USDA implemented mandatory COOL on farm-raised and wild-caught seafood effective April 4, 2005 with the existing statute; the experience gained from seafood implementation should be utilized by USDA to write a final rule on the remaining covered commodities that is not burdensome or expensive and meets the goal and intent of Congress.

Consumer surveys repeatedly demonstrate overwhelming support for mandatory COOL. A poll conducted in June 2005 by Public Citizen found 85 percent of respondents wanted COOL; 74 percent supported Congress making labeling a mandatory program; and 55 percent had "little or not much trust" in the meat, seafood, produce and grocery industries to voluntarily provide country-of-origin information.

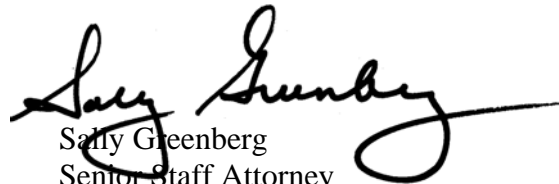
The time has come for Congress to end the prohibition on implementation funds for USDA and require the department to immediately prepare a common-sense rule for implementation of mandatory COOL; the regulation does not need to be burdensome or expensive.

Thank you for your attention to this most important issue.

Sincerely,

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cc: Senate and House Agriculture Committee Members

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