

January 22, 2014

Dear Farm Bill Conferee:

The undersigned 98 farm, ranch, consumer, rural, labor and faith-based Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) advocates urge the 2014 Farm Bill conference to reject any changes to the final country of origin labeling rules that do not provide consumers with additional and more accurate information about the source of their food. Consumers and farmers overwhelmingly support the implementation of these commonsense rules.

The final country-of-origin labeling rules for meat products went into effect in May of 2013 and were the product of literally more than a decade of advocacy by farmer, rancher, rural, faith-based and consumer organizations across the country. The powerful meatpacker and poultry industry lobby have tried to delay and derail these rules since they were first included in the 2002 Farm Bill and again in the 2008 Farm Bill.

These final rules provide clear information to consumers that balances the small cost of implementation (which even using the inflated industry cost figures amounts to less than 1¢ per pound of pork or beef processed at American plants). The final rules are in line with the World Trade Organization's Appellate Body report. In contrast, the purported amendment to COOL would significantly erode the quality of information disclosed to consumers while maintaining the current cost of segregating livestock.

The proposal floated the week of January 13th would replace the production-step labeling that delineates where an animal was born, raised and slaughtered with either a "product of USA" or "product of North America" label. This labeling scheme fails to remedy the critique of the WTO dispute panels because it would perpetuate consumer deception, as the United States is part of North America, and would still require meatpackers to keep all-American born and raised livestock separate from livestock born and/or raised in Canada or Mexico.

This North American or NAFTA-meat label is entirely unacceptable and many COOL advocates would oppose a farm bill that contained this language. Now is not the time to roll back the country of origin labeling provisions behind the closed doors of the conference process. Any changes to country of origin labeling should occur in full view of the American public with ample debate and recorded votes.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Missions, Inc. (NY)
American Agriculture Movement
American Federation of Government Employees (AFL-CIO), Local 3354, USDA-St. Louis
Berks (PA) Gas Truth
Buckeye Quality Beef Association (OH)
Campaign for Contract Agriculture Reform
Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (NC)
Cattle Producers of Louisiana

Cattle Producers of Washington
Center for Earth Spirituality and Rural Ministry (MN)
Center for Media and Democracy's Food Rights Network
Center for Rural Affairs
Central Co-op (WA)
Chicago Consumer Coalition
Church Women United of New York State
Citizen Action Coalition of Indiana
CJD Foundation
Coalition for a Prosperous America

Colorado Independent Cattle Growers Association
 Community Farm Alliance (KY)
 Community Food and Justice Coalition (CA)
 Consumer Assistance Council, Inc.
 Consumer Federation of America
 Consumer Federation of California
 Consumer Federation of the Southeast
 Contract Poultry Growers Association of the Virginias
 Cornucopia Institute
 Dakota Resource Council
 Dakota Rural Action
 East New York Farms!/United Community Centers
 Ecological Farming Association (CA)
 Endangered Habitats League (CA)
 Fair World Project
 Family Farm Defenders (WI)
 Farm Aid
 Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance
 Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc.
 Food & Water Watch
 Food Chain Workers Alliance
 Food Democracy Now!
 Grassroots International
 Hmong National Development, Inc.
 Illinois Stewardship Alliance
 Independent Beef Association of North Dakota (I-BAND)
 Independent Cattlemen of Nebraska
 Independent Cattlemen of Wyoming
 Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
 International Brotherhood of Teamsters
 Intertribal Agriculture Council
 Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement
 Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (MD)
 Kansas Cattlemen's Association
 Land Stewardship Project (MN)
 Massey Road Producers, Dubuque County (IA)
 Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (WI)
 Michigan Land Trustees
 Midwest Organic Dairy Producers Association
 Missouri Farmers Union
 Missouri Rural Crisis Center
 Missouri's Best Beef Co-Operative
 Murray County, Oklahoma Independent Cattlemen's
 Association
 National Consumers League
 National Family Farm Coalition
 National Farmers Organization
 National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association
 Nevada Live Stock Association
 New Entry Sustainable Farming Project
 Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. - CT
 Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. - NY
 Northeast Organic Farming Association, Interstate
 Council (NOFA-IC)
 Northern Plains Resource Council (MT)
 Northern Wisconsin Beef Producers
 Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance (MA)
 Northwest Farm Bill Action Group
 Oglala Sioux Livestock and Land Owners Association
 (SD)
 Oregon Rural Action
 Organic Consumers Association
 Organic Farmers' Agency for Relationship Marketing
 (OFARM)
 Organic Seed Alliance
 Organization for Competitive Markets
 Other Worlds (LA)
 Peach Bottom Concerned Citizens Group (PBCCG) (PA)
 Pesticide Action Network North America
 Powder River Basin Resource Council (WY)
 Progressive Agriculture Organization (PA)
 Public Citizen
 R-CALF USA
 Rural Advancement Foundation International - USA
 (RAFI-USA)
 Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural
 South Dakota Stockgrowers Association
 Sustain LA
 Virginia Association for Biological Farming
 Virginia Citizens Consumer Council
 Western Colorado Congress
 Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC)
 Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
 WhyHunger