



INSTITUTE FOR AGRICULTURE AND TRADE POLICY
2105 FIRST AVENUE SOUTH
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55404 USA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 28, 2004

Contact: Mike Skladany, 612-870-3402, mkskladany@iatp.org
Ben Lilliston, 202-223-3740, blilliston@iatp.org

Country of Origin Labeling Comes Up Short for Farmers and Consumers

Mandatory Labeling for Seafood Starts This Week

Minneapolis – While mandatory country of origin labeling (COOL) comes into effect for seafood on September 30th, U.S. farmers and consumers will not benefit from similar COOL requirements for meat and produce. The 2002 Farm Bill required mandatory COOL for fish, meat and produce by September 30, 2004. But Congress voted earlier this year to delay the requirement for meat and produce until September 2006.

After September 30, all fish and shellfish sold in supermarkets are supposed to carry labels stating the origin of the fish and whether it is “farmed” or “wild.” USDA has yet to issue an “interim final rule” on the labeling and any exceptions that would be included. The USDA is expected to issue the interim final rule on September 30th, but the agency likely won’t enforce the rule until a final rule is issued.

“U.S. consumers and fishermen deserve more from the USDA. The agency has had two years to develop these rules. Mandatory country-of-origin labeling for seafood should happen on September 30,” said Dr. Mike Skladany, director of IATP’s Fish Program. “COOL for seafood is a good first step towards consumer’s right-to-know and better fish and seafood choices. Since the vast majority of our seafood is imported, knowing whether fish is wild caught, farm raised and country of origin injects some first steps into a better understanding of our oceans, fishing and farm raised methods.”

“Recent research has found that ‘wild’ salmon have greater nutritional benefits than ‘farmed’ salmon, so COOL should help health conscious consumers,” said Skladany. “Additionally, COOL could greatly assist food safety efforts by making tracking and recalls easier for the food industry and regulators. It is very disappointing that Congress decided to slight public health by retracting its earlier commitment to mandatory COOL for meat and produce.”

Following the 2002 Farm Bill, Congress was aggressively pressured by the food industry to delay funding for COOL to cover meat and produce. The decision deprives consumers of basic information about where their food comes from, and hurts U.S. farmers and ranchers who would gain a marketing advantage in supermarkets. The Senate Appropriations Committee earlier this month rejected an effort by family farm groups to make mandatory COOL apply to meat and produce on January 1, 2005.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy promotes resilient family farms, rural communities and ecosystems around the world through research and education, science and technology, and advocacy.