

February 28, 2007

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
528 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
361A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

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

Dear Majority Leader Reid, Minority Leader McConnell, Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Chambliss:

On behalf of millions of consumers and producers, we write to urge 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. We represent millions of Americans that continue to stand united in support of this valuable program. Our coalition has grown impatient with the implementation delays in previous Congresses, which restricted USDA funds to implement this very popular provision. Your leadership is needed to ensure the intent of Congress and the will of the American people are 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. In January 2004, National Farmers Union commissioned a national poll of likely voters on the issue of mandatory COOL. That survey found 82 percent of respondents believed food should be labeled with country-of-origin information; 85 percent stated they would be more inclined to buy food produced in the United States; and 81 percent said they would be willing to pay a few cents more for food products grown and/or raised in the U.S. and identified as such.

Many of the myths surrounding mandatory COOL have begun to resurface, despite being unsubstantiated for years. Consumers and producers have grown impatient with the backdoor delays and the rhetoric of packers, processors and retailers that flies in the face of common-sense. 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.

Enclosed are three recent editorials that have been printed in support of repealing the implementation delay and moving forward with mandatory COOL as directed in the 2002 Farm Bill.

American consumers and producers have time and again expressed their strong support for this program. Given a choice, we believe consumers across the country will choose to purchase U.S. products; without mandatory COOL, consumers continue to be denied the ability to differentiate between U.S. and imported food products.

Thank you for your attention to this most important issue.

Sincerely,

Agriculture and Health Alive LLC (ME)
Alabama Contract Poultry Growers Association
Alaska Farmers Union
Alaska Marine Conservation Council
Alliance for a Sustainable Future (PA, NJ)
Ambler Environmental Advisory Council (PA)
American Agriculture Movement of South Dakota
American Agriculture Movement of Texas County (OK)
American Corn Growers Association
American Grassfed Association
Appalachian Crafts (KY)
Arkansas Farmers Union
Boulder County Community Gleaning Project (CO)
Buckeye Quality Beef Association (OH)
Calaveras County Cattlemen's Association (CA)
California Dairy Campaign
California Farmers Union
California Institute for Rural Studies
California National Farmers Organization
Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment (IA)
Caney Fork Headwaters Association (TN)
Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association (MA)
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association
Cattle Producers of Washington (WA)
Cattlemen's Texas Longhorn Registry (TX)
Center for Earth Spirituality and Rural Ministry (MN)
Center for Rural Affairs (NE)
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Center for Sustaining Agriculture & Natural Resources WSU (WA)
Church Women United of Chemung County (NY)

Church Women United of New York
Churches' Center for Land and People
Citizens Action Coalition (IN)
Citizens Awareness Network (MA)
Colorado Independent Cattle Growers Association
Colorado Women Involved in Farm Economics
Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CA)
Community Food Security Center, Community Food Bank, Inc. (AZ)
Community Food Security Coalition
Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture, Inc. (MA)
Community Markets (NY)
Community to Community Development (WA)
Concerned Citizens of Central Ohio
Consumer Federation of America
Cornucopia Institute
Countryside Conservancy Farmland Center (OH)
Court St. Joseph #139, Catholic Daughters of the Americas (NY)
Cruetzfeldt-Jakob Disease Foundation
Cumberland Countians for Peace & Justice (TN)
Dakota Resource Council (ND)
Dakota Rural Action (SD)
Endangered Habitats League (CA)
Equal Exchange (MA)
Family Dairies USA
Farm Aid
Farm Fresh Rhode Island
Farms Without Harm (MI)
Ferris Farm (NY)
Florida Farmers, Inc.
Food and Water Watch
Foodshed Alliance (NJ)
Genesis Farm (NJ)
Georgia Organics
Georgia Poultry Justice Alliance
Go Wild Consumer Education Campaign (WA)
GrassWorks, Inc. (WI)
Hahn Natural Foods (PA)
Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers of America Inc.
HOLA/National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association
Horseheads Grange #1118 (NY)
Humane Society of the United States
Idaho Farmers Union
Idaho Rural Council
Illinois Farmers Union

Illinois National Farmers Organization
Illinois Stewardship Alliance
Independent Beef Association of North Dakota
Independent Cattlemen of Iowa
Independent Cattlemen of Nebraska
Independent Cattlemen's Association of Texas
Indiana Farmers Union
Indiana National Farmers Organization
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
International Texas Longhorn Association (OH)
Intertribal Agriculture Council (MT)
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement
Iowa Farmers Union
Kansas Cattlemen's Association
Kansas Farmers Union
Kit Carson County Cattlemen's Association (CO)
Ladies of Charity of Chemung County (NY)
Land Stewardship Project (MN)
League of Rural Voters (MN)
Líderes Campesinas (CA)
Lincoln County Stockmen's Association (CO)
Little Seed CSA (NY)
Louisiana Shrimp Association
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
Mesa County Cattlemen's Association (CO)
Michigan Farmers Union
Michigan Land Trustees
Midwest Organic Dairy Producers Association (WI)
Minnesota Cattlemen's Association
Minnesota Farmers Union
Mississippi Contract Poultry Growers Association
Mississippi Livestock Markets Association, Inc.
Missouri Farmers Union
Missouri National Farmers Organization
Montana Cattlemen's Association
Montana Farmers Union
Moonglow Farms (WI)
Morrow County Livestock Growers Association (OR)
National Association of Counties
National Association of Farmer Elected Committees
National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture
National Catholic Rural Life Conference
National Consumers League
National Family Farm Coalition

National Farmers Organization
National Farmers Union
National Grange
Nature's International Certification Services (WI)
Nebraska Farmers Union
Nebraska Grange
Nebraska State AFL-CIO
Nebraska Women Involved in Farm Economics
Neighborhood Farmers Market Alliance (WA)
Network for Environmental & Economic Responsibility (TN)
Nevada Live Stock Association
New England Farmers Union (ME, NH, VT, MA, CT, RI)
New England Small Farm Institute
New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (MA)
New Mexico Farmers Marketing Association
New York Beef Producers Association
New York National Farmers Organization
New York State Grange
New York Women Involved in Farm Economics
North Carolina Contract Poultry Growers Association
North Dakota Farmers Union
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Massachusetts
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Rhode Island
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont
Northeast Pasture Consortium
Northern Plains Resource Council (MT)
Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance
NY Farms!
Ohio Environmental Council
Ohio Family Farm Coalition
Ohio Farmers Union
Ohio National Farmers Organization
Oregon Cranberry Farmers' Alliance
Oregon Farmers Union
Oregon Livestock Producers Association
Oregon Rural Action
Organic Choice Milk Procurement (WI)
Organic Consumers Association
Organic Farmers' Agency for Relationship Marketing, Inc. (WI)
Organization for Competitive Markets
Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Association (CA)
Partnership for Earth Spirituality
Past Regents' Club of the Diocese of Rochester (NY)

PCC Natural Markets (WA)
Pennsylvania Farmers Union
Pennypack Farm Education Center for Sustainable Food Systems (PA)
Pesticide Action Network North America
Powder River Basin Resource Council (WY)
R-CALF United Stock Growers of America
Regional Farm And Food Network (NY)
Research, Education, Action and Policy on Food Group (WI)
Rochester Roots, Inc. (NY)
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union (CO, WY, NM)
Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA
Rural Opportunities Inc. (NY)
Rural Roots (ID)
Seattle Chapter of Chefs Collaborative
Sisters Hill Farm (NY)
Small Potatoes Gleaning Project (WA)
Sno-Valley Tilth (WA)
Social Concerns Office-Diocese of Jefferson City (MO)
Society for Animal Protective Legislation (Animal Welfare Institute)
South Dakota Farmers Union
South Dakota Livestock Auction Markets Association
South Dakota Stockgrowers Association
Southern Mutual Help (LA)
Southern Shrimp Alliance
Spokane County Cattlemen's Association (WA)
Sprout Creek Farm (NY)
St. John the Baptist Fraternity, Secular Franciscan Order (NY)
Stevens County Cattlemen's Association (WA)
Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Sustainable Living Systems (MT)
Taste of the North Fork, Inc (NY)
Texas Farmers Union
Torborg Farms (MN)
True Roots (PA)
Utah Farmers Union
Veritable Vegetable (CA)
Virginia Association for Biological Farming
Wal*Mart Watch
Washington Biotechnology Action Council
Washington Cattlemen's Association
Washington County Stockmen's Association (CO)
Washington Farmers Union
Washington Sustainable Food and Farming Network
Western Organization of Resource Councils
Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (MT)

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COOL Coalition

Wintergarden Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (TX)
Wisconsin Farmers Union
Wisconsin Independent Livestock Dealers Association
Wisconsin National Farmers Organization
Wisconsin Partners for SustainAbility
Women Involved in Farm Economics
World Hunger Year

Enclosure

cc: Sen. Kohl, chairman of Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Related Agencies

Sen. Bennett, ranking member of Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Related Agencies