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WORC & 165 Groups Send Letter to President: Support Labeling Law

WASHINGTON (December 3, 2003) - A coalition of 165 agriculture and consumer groups sent a letter to President Bush today stating that a two-year delay of the mandatory country-of-origin labeling law is not supported by the overwhelming majority of agriculture producers or consumers and urges the President to oppose Congressional efforts to delay country-of-origin labeling.

"Support for country of origin labeling is overwhelming," said Mabel Dobbs, a rancher from Weiser, Idaho, who chairs WORC's Livestock Committee. "The three organizations trying to kill labeling are miniscule by comparison."

Among the groups sending the letter to President Bush are the Western Organization of Resource Councils and its member groups: Dakota Rural Action (South Dakota), Dakota Resource Council (North Dakota), Northern Plains Resource Council (Montana), Idaho Rural Council and Way out West (Idaho), Powder River Basin Resource Council (Wyoming), and the Western Colorado Congress.

The full letter to President Bush follows:

December 3, 2003

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Bush:

It is with great concern that we write regarding comments made by Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman relative to country-of-origin labeling. The Secretary is quoted in recent media reports saying Congress is blocking implementation of the labeling law (COOL) at the behest of farm groups. As representatives of the majority of individuals affected by this law, we want to make you aware that the overwhelming majority of farmers, ranchers and consumers support this law.

The Secretary cited three organizations in favor of delaying country-of-origin labeling. The three organizations she cited represent only a small fraction of the two million

producers impacted by the law. A coalition of over 130 agriculture and consumer groups has repeatedly voiced its support to Congress in favor of the COOL law you signed into effect in 2002. This broad coalition represents over 50 million Americans.

While the Department and many in your administration have been quick to criticize the law, they have yet to offer any constructive advice on how to make this law workable and fair to all affected parties. Worse yet, the administration has unfortunately sent signals that it is open to a repeal of the law. Country-of-origin labeling is a marketing tool American producers need to promote the superiority of their products and differentiate them from commodities produced in other countries. We find it ironic that over 40 of our trading partners have country-of-origin labeling programs, yet with all of our resources and technology, the U.S. cannot determine a method of implementation that provides our consumers with the same information. Without this program in place, we are putting at risk two of our three largest beef export markets, Japan and Korea. The law was written in a fashion to provide the Secretary substantial flexibility to implement the program in a producer and consumer friendly fashion. As consumers and industry participants in strong support of the country-of-origin labeling law, we are open to hearing the ideas of the Secretary and your administration to establish an efficient and workable mandatory labeling system as contained in the 2002 farm bill.

To reiterate, over 50 million Americans support mandatory labeling for meats, produce, fish and peanuts. We urge you to encourage congressional leaders to rectify the gross error they are making by attempting to undermine the labeling law within the 2004 appropriations bill. Congress must be encouraged to defend the country-of-origin labeling law on behalf of U.S. producers and consumers.

Sincerely,

Alaska Farmers Union
American Agriculture Movement, Inc
American Corn Growers Association
American Meat Goat Association
American Raw Milk Producers Pricing Assoc. (WI)
Arkansas Farmers Union
Ashtabula Co. Farmers Union (OH)
Assoc. of West Virginia Livestock Auction Markets
Baker County Livestock Association (OR)
Beartooth Stockgrowers Association (MT)
Bonner County Cattlemen's Association (ID)
Burleigh Co. Farm Bureau (ND)
Calaveras Co. Cattlemen's Assoc. (CA)
California Dairy Campaign
California Farmers Union
California National Farmers Organization
Campaign to Reclaim Rural America (MT)
Cape Cod Cranberry Growers' Association

Center for Rural Affairs (NE)
Central Oregon Cattlemen's Association
Chefs Collaborative, Inc. (MA)
Citizen Action Coalition (IN)
Cochise-Graham Cattle Growers Assoc. (AZ)
Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CA)
Consumer Federation of America
Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease Foundation (OH)
Dakota Resource Council (ND)
Dakota Rural Action (SD)
Defenders of Wildlife
Eagle County Cattlemen's Assoc. (CO)
Family Farm Defenders (WI)
Farm Aid
Farm Wives United (NY)
Federation of Southern Cooperatives
Florida Association of Livestock Markets
Florida Farmers, Inc
Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association
Florida Tomato Exchange
Geauga Co. Farmers Union (OH)
Georgia Livestock Markets Association
Grant Co. Stockgrowers (OR)
Grant County Stockgrowers Assoc. (WA)
Harding County Stockgrowers Assoc. (SD)
Holy Cross Cattlemen's Association (CO)
Hot Springs County Farm Bureau (WY)
Houston County Cattlemen (MN)
Idaho County Farm Bureau
Idaho Rural Council
Illinois Farmers Union
Illinois Stewardship Alliance
Independent Cattlemen's Assoc. of Texas
Indiana Farmers Union
Indiana National Farmers Organization
Institute for Agriculture and Trade (MN)
Institute for Rural America (WI)
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement
Iowa Farmers Union
Just Food (NY)
Kansas Cattlemen's Association
Kansas Farmers Union
Kansas Hereford Association
Kansas NFO
Kemper County Farm Bureau (MS)
Kit Carson County Cattlemen (OR)

Kittitas County Cattlemen's Assoc. (WA)
Lafayette County Cattlemen's Assoc. (MO)
Land Stewardship Project (MN)
Lincoln County Stockman's Assoc. (CO)
Livestock Marketing Association
Madera County Cattlemen's Assoc. (CA)
Malheur County Cattlemen's Assoc. (OR)
Merced-Mariposa Cattlemen's Assoc. (CA)
Michigan Farmers Union
Minnesota Citizens Organized Acting Together
Minnesota Farmers Union
Minnesota National Farmers Organization
Mississippi Livestock Markets Association
Missouri American Agriculture Movement
Missouri Farmers Union
Missouri Rural Crisis Center
Missouri Stockgrowers Association
Modoc County Cattlemen's Association (CA)
Montana Agri-Women
Montana Cattlemen's Association
Montana Farmers Union
Montana National Farmers Organization
Montana/Wyoming Indian Stockgrowers Assoc.
National Assoc. 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
Nebraska American Corn Growers Assoc.
Nebraska Farmers Union
Nebraska Grange
Nebraska Livestock Markets Association
Nebraska Wildlife Federation
Nebraska Women Involved in Farm Economics
Nevada Live Stock Association
New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association
New Mexico Public Lands Council
New Mexico Wool Growers, Inc
New York Beef Producers Association
New York National Farmers Organization
Nobels County Farmers Union (MN)
North Carolina Auction Markets Association
North Carolina Contract Poultry Growers Assoc.
North Dakota Farmers Union

North Dakota Livestock Marketing Association
North Dakota Professional Insurance Agents Assoc.
Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. (NY)
Northern Plains Resource Council (MT)
Northern Wisconsin Beef Producers Association.
Ohio Farmers Union
Oklahoma American Agriculture Movement
Oklahoma Farmers Union
Oregon Cranberry Farmers' Alliance
Oregon Farmers Union
Oregon Limousine Breeders
Oregon Livestock Producers Association
Organization for Competitive Markets
Pennsylvania Assoc. for Sustainable Agriculture
Pennsylvania Farmers Union
Pennsylvania Livestock Auction Assoc.
Perkins Co. Livestock Improvement Assoc. (SD)
Platte County Farm Bureau (NE)
Powder River Basin Resource Council
Progressive Agriculture Organization (PA)
Public Citizen
Pueblo County Stockmen (CO)
R-CALF United Stock Growers of America
Reclaim Rural America, Inc. (MT)
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union
Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA
Rural Roots (ID)
Rural Vermont
Sierra Club National Agriculture Committee
South Carolina Livestock Markets Association
South Dakota Farmers Union
South Dakota Livestock Auction Markets Association
South Dakota Stockgrowers Association
South Texas Hereford Association
Southwestern Colorado Livestock Association
Southeast Wyoming Cattlefeeders Association
Southern Colorado Livestock
Southern Research and Development Corp. (LA)
Southern Shrimp Alliance
Soybean Producers of America
Stevens County Cattlemen's Assoc. (WA)
Sustainable Earth (IN)
Texas Farmers Union
Utah Farmers Union
Washington Cattlemen's Association
Washington Co. Stockman's Assoc. (CO)

Washington Farmers Union
Watauga Stockyard Association (ND/SD)
Way Out West Rural Action Group (ID)
Western Colorado Congress
Western Organization of Resource Councils
Wisconsin Farmers Union
Wisconsin National Farmers Organization
Women Involved in Farm Economics
Wyoming Stock Growers Assoc.

cc: Members of Congress, Secretary Ann Veneman