

11/26/2003 Entry: "Allow Labeling Law to Take Effect in 2004"

Editorial: The Telegraph (Nashua and Southern New Hampshire)
Tuesday, November 25, 2003

KEY POINTS

BACKGROUND: As part of last-minute wheeling and dealing before departing for a month's vacation, members of Congress and the Bush administration seek to delay legislation to require labeling the country of origin for meats, produce and farm-raised fish.

CONCLUSION: The legislation is beneficial to consumers and ought to be allowed to take effect as originally planned.

Keeping consumers in the dark is the name of the game as Congress rushes to approve bills for its Thanksgiving to New Year's recess.

A compromise that's being worked out with the Bush administration would delay for two years a requirement that vendors must label the country of origin for meats, produce and farm-raised fish.

Opposed to this labeling provision are food processors and meat packers. It looks like they are going to get their way.

Delaying the start of the labeling requirement is one of the concessions being made by lawmakers and the Bush administration as part of the wheeling and dealing to get a \$390 billion spending bill for a number of federal agencies approved.

The food handlers and the Bush administration say requiring the labeling would be costly and would result in higher prices for consumers. The labeling provision was part of a 2002 farm bill approved last summer that was to take effect in September 2004. Now the effective start date for the labeling requirement would be delayed by two years.

Labeling the country of origin for imported foodstuffs would be beneficial to consumers. Some shoppers may be queasy, for example, about buying meats from other countries because they may worry about inadequate sanitation procedures. Others may have no qualms on this score.

But consumers should have the opportunity to decide for themselves. And that would require information right on the label.

Globalization means imports from around the world are found even in the supermarket or corner grocery store. Shoppers are provided with country of origin information on many products, from machinery to apparel. The same ought to apply to what they eat.

Delaying this labeling requirement by another two years shortchanges Americans by denying them essential information to make vital choices on what they serve their families and themselves.