

11/25/2003 Entry: "BONO CRITICIZES DEAL TO KILL MANDATORY COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN LABELING OF FRESH PRODUCE"

Washington, DC -- Congresswoman Mary Bono (R-CA) vigorously protested House and Senate appropriators inclusion in the 2004 Fiscal Year Omnibus legislation a two-year delay for implementing country-of-origin labeling for fresh fruits, vegetables and meats. This delay could be the first step towards repealing mandatory country-of-origin labeling entirely, according to Bono.

"At a time when people have died or been taken ill due to the hepatitis A outbreak in Pennsylvania linked to imported produce, Congress should lead the way in ensuring our health and safety rather than taking actions to weaken these standards," said Bono. "What some people do not consider is that while chain restaurants may not be hurt by omitting onions from their menu, our U.S. growers who supply good, safe onions will be."

Mexican green onions (scallions) were most likely to blame for the recent hepatitis A outbreak. However, when consumers go to the grocery store to shop for scallions, without knowing the country of origin, they will most likely avoid all green onions, including green onions grown in the United States that must meet higher standards.

Intended to go into effect on September 30, 2004, mandatory country-of-origin labeling has come under repeated attack from various retail groups. Dave Frederickson, president of the National Farmers Union, stated recently, "It is a travesty that U.S. consumers' interests are losing out to pressure from the retailers, packers and processors, who all have aggressively fought this law since its inception."

Bono, whose amendment to the farm bill to institute mandatory country-of-origin labeling, passed with overwhelming bi-partisan support (296-121, Roll Call 370, October 4, 2001), sites strong support for mandatory labeling both in the Coachella Valley and throughout the rest of the nation.

"It is a shame that the interests of the few have overcome the will of the majority," said Bono. "But, I can assure you that the fight is not yet over and I will continue to battle this new challenge with vigor."