

11/24/2003 Entry: "Bush Administration, Meat Packers Attempt to Kill Meat Labeling Law"

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Washington, DC - Senator Tom Daschle today criticized a plan that would kill country-of-origin labeling for meat after negotiations on a critical piece of legislation excluded Democrats. The new farm bill, which became law in May of 2002 contained a provision to require country-of-origin labeling (COOL) for many products, including meats, fruits and vegetables. But news of a last-minute deal, crafted without Democratic input, appears to be a precursor to repealing COOL.

Over the last several days, Republicans met in private, denying Democratic members of the Appropriations Committee access to the meetings. The tentative agreement reached in the meetings would initially delay implementation of COOL for two years - beyond next year's presidential election.

"At the urging of White House officials and the large meat-packing cartel, there appears to be an agreement that will effectively kill the new country-of-origin labeling law," said Daschle. "This is a very thinly disguised proposal to kill COOL. I don't think the American people will be fooled."

The proposal to kill COOL comes after the Senate spoke strongly in favor of COOL just days ago. On November 6, by a vote of 58 to 36, the Senate adopted a Daschle amendment that instructed House and Senate negotiators to preserve COOL. More than 50 million Americans represented by 135 farm and consumer organizations have written Congress in support of COOL as written in the farm bill.

"There is simply no reasonable justification for this action," Daschle added. "This may be a win for the Bush Administration and the meat-packing cartel, but the people are losing on this one."

Daschle continued: "Let there be no mistake about what this proposed delay means. It means the Bush Administration wants to kill the COOL law, they just don't want to do it before the presidential election because they know the majority of people in our nation want labeling."

The proposal not only calls for a delay in COOL for meat and meat products, as was proposed in the House bill, but for fruits and vegetables also. The only labeling provision that will go into effect on time (September of next year)

concerns wild fish, a provision supported by Alaska Senator Ted Stevens, the Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

The proposal is now expected to be included in a large omnibus appropriations measure that will be considered in the next few days.