

06/18/2003 Entry: "House Ag Subcommittee Denies COOL Money"

WASHINGTON (AP) -- A House panel voted Tuesday to deny the Agriculture Department money to force meatpackers and retailers mark their products with labels describing where the meat originated.

The requirement to tell shoppers on product labels where the animal that produced the meat was born, raised and slaughtered was part of the \$196 billion farm bill that President Bush signed into law last year. Food processors, retailers and some farmers have been complaining ever since that it would cost them millions of dollars to carry out.

On a unanimous voice vote, the House Agriculture Committee's subcommittee on appropriations approved language in the bill for USDA operations that specifies none of the agency's money can be used for implementing the labeling requirement on meat.

Rep. Henry Bonilla, R-Texas, the subcommittee chairman, said lawmakers need time to determine costs before processors have to start providing the labels. "Before any decision is made, the producers, processors, retailers and meat industry must have the opportunity to consider the ramifications," Bonilla said.

The Agriculture Department estimates it would cost \$1.9 billion for keeping careful records on where animals are born, raised and slaughtered.

"How much study do they need?" asked Arthur Jaeger, assistant director for the Consumer Federation of America. "Implementation was specifically put off until fall of 2004, specifically to allow thorough review and consideration of how to implement it.

"They've had plenty of time to do it. Why on earth would you need more?"

See more on this topic, in MARKET NEWS, DTN AgNews.

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