

06/27/2003 Entry: "Is The COOL Debate Hurting The Industry? Our Perspective, BEEF Cow/Calf Weekly"

No issue has been cussed and discussed like country-of-origin labeling (COOL). There is no compromise that is acceptable and both sides feel passionate about it. Of course, it is important to remember what the debate is supposed to be about and what it has become.

Both sides of the debate are in favor of having the product labeled. The proponents believe it must be mandatory. The opponents are fundamentally opposed to a government imposed mandatory program. Proponents believe that the cost of the program will be more than covered by increased demand. Opponents believe the legislation's costs will exceed the benefits. Proponents believe the legislation can be implemented in a way that doesn't burden the industry. Opponents believe the legislation is fundamentally flawed.

These are the types of issues that the industry should have been able to resolve — it should have been able to find a workable solution. The issue is not about COOL, but much deeper and much more philosophical in nature.

The problem is that as the debate has become more and more about different visions for the future, the stakes have been raised. There is no longer room for common ground, and so much political capital has been expended that victory has been the goal rather than policy. This in and of itself is nothing new in the struggle for political power.

Other issues are being dragged into the debate about COOL. Individual identification (ID) is a prime example of the adding-on of subjects to the debate.

With the Department of Homeland Security, the Food and Drug Administration, USDA and our global trading partners talking about traceback capabilities and requirements the industry needs to be proactive. However, it is impossible to deny that the ID issue will affect the COOL battle and as a result, the industry's response is being tempered by COOL.

Nearly every issue the industry is facing is in danger of being handled the same way — no compromise, winner takes all. It's beginning to appear like the cold war of the cattle industry, don't worry about the issue — just pick your side. The industry is the one who will ultimately pay the price if we allow this mentality to continue.

Troy Marshall
BEEF Cow/Calf Weekly