

06/11/2003 Entry: "KCA Tells USDA: Implement COOL in a Way that Benefits U.S. Producers and Consumers"

Billings, MT – Whether for it or against it, Country of Origin Labeling is law according to Kansas Cattlemen's Association Communications Director Ashlea Redding who spoke to the United States Department of Agriculture during the Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) "listening session" held here June 6th.

In testimony before the USDA, Redding said, "The important thing now is to make sure that COOL is implemented in a way that benefits the U.S. producer and consumer."

Redding recommended that COOL be implemented in such a way so that only the imports are labeled and that the importer should bear the burden of proof. She noted that any live animal coming into the United States is already identified in some form or fashion and that meat coming into the country is labeled with a country of origin. She also said that COOL is in compliance with World Trade Organization rules, citing Article IX of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

Redding also talked about COOL as a safety and confidence issue as well, saying, "We produce the safest food supply in the world, but yet because we don't label it, consumers don't know what they're buying. That's actually pretty scary when you consider the beef we import into the United States from countries known to have BSE-countries like Switzerland who last year had 24 confirmed cases, yet so far in 2003 we've imported over 34,000 pounds. What would happen to consumer confidence if the average everyday consumer knew this when they went to the market? The consumer needs to know where our food is coming from."

Redding encouraged USDA to implement COOL in its original intent as written and recommended by R-CALF USA, the Kansas Cattlemen's Association and the Americans for Country of Origin Labeling."

As a final note, Redding also encouraged USDA officials to take great care when considering reopening the U.S.-Canadian border to imports saying, "Keep in mind the Canadian cattle are still on feed and now, not only are the numbers backing up, but the weights as well, increasing beef production. If the borders are thrown wide open and those cattle come flooding south again, it will have a detrimental effect on the cattle markets as whole, driving down the prices. On behalf of the United States cattle producer, please take great care when considering reopening the border to trade."

The Kansas Cattlemen's Association is a producer run, grassroots cattlemen's association representing some 1500 members in 20 states.

