

06/27/2003 Entry: "R-CALF USA Testifies Before House Ag Committee on COOL"

Washington, D.C. – “Maybe the problem is simply that packers and retailers stand to lose the economic benefits they have long enjoyed by not disclosing the origin of beef along with the ability unmarked imports have given them to distort consumer demand signals to the U.S. producer,” explained R-CALF United Stockgrowers of America (R-CALF USA) President Leo McDonnell.

In today’s hearing, the U.S. House Agriculture Committee heard testimony on country of origin labeling (COOL) from U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), producer organizations, and representatives of the packing and retail sectors. McDonnell dispelled some of the anti-COOL myths being used by the opposing groups to undermine support for the law. Concerning comments that COOL is being used as a thinly veiled trade barriers, McDonnell said, “This simply is not true. COOL has never restricted the flow of imports.” Obviously, with over ninety percent of products being imported into the United States already carrying a label and the fact the U.S. is the largest importing nation in the world, one could hardly say that COOL has acted as a trade barrier.

The pressure is being put on the USDA by supporters of COOL in Congress, consumer groups, and producers to implement the rules in a consistent and concise manner in which the law directed. Congress outlined several established programs which allows the use of presumption of origin already utilized by the USDA.

Mr. McDonnell stated, “USDA is confirming origin claims for beef every day under its USDA purchase programs without imposing a single cost on producers; without requiring a single record from producers; without requiring a single self certification from producers; and, without requiring a mandatory identification system or violating either trade or domestic laws.” He also added, “It’s also important to note that USDA now requires that Uruguayan beef be solely born, raised, and slaughtered, and requires only self certification by the country’s government officials with no trace back. Why does USDA feel the need to individually trace back U.S. cattle to the producer, but not peanuts, tomatoes, a head of lettuce, or even Uruguayan beef from the recently FMD-infected country?”

Country of origin labeling is not only a competition tool; it is a producer transparency tool for consumer demand. In an era known as the ‘information age,’ COOL is long overdue.

R-CALF USA, the Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund, United Stockgrowers of America is a national, non-profit cattle association representing cattle producers in the areas of trade and marketing. R-CALF USA has 8,700 individual members in 43 states and more than 46 affiliated local and state cattle and farm

organizations. For more information, visit www.r-calfusa.com or call 406-252-2516.

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