

11/11/2002 Entry: "They're Here! USDA ISSUES GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTARY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN LABELING"

Oct. 8, 2002-The U.S. Department of Agriculture has issued Interim Voluntary Country of Origin Labeling guidelines for certain commodities as required in the 2002 Farm Bill.

"Under the guidelines, fresh and frozen muscle cuts of beef, veal, lamb, pork, fish, fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables and peanuts may be labeled at retail to indicate their country of origin," said Agricultural Marketing Service Administrator A.J. Yates. "These guidelines provide uniform criteria for participating retailers."

Food service establishments, such as restaurants, lunchrooms, cafeterias, food stands, bars, lounges or similar enterprises selling prepared food to the public, are not covered.

Under the guidelines, a retailer can label a covered commodity with "United States Country of Origin" if certain criteria are met. For beef, the covered commodities must be derived exclusively from animals born, raised and slaughtered in the United States, including animals that were born and raised in Alaska or Hawaii and transported for a period not to exceed 60 days through Canada to the United States and slaughtered in the United States. Covered commodities for lamb and pork must be derived exclusively from animals born, raised and slaughtered in the United States. Farm-raised fish and shellfish covered commodities must be derived exclusively from fish or shellfish hatched, harvested and processed in the United States. Covered commodities for wild fish and shellfish must be derived exclusively from fish or shellfish either harvested in the waters of the United States or by a U.S. flagged vessel and processed in the United States or aboard a U.S. flagged ship. And, fresh and frozen fruits, vegetables and peanut covered commodities must be derived exclusively from produce or peanuts grown, packed and if applicable, processed in the United States.

The guidelines also provide guidance for products of mixed origin including products produced both in foreign markets and in the United States as well as labeling for blended or mixed products.

The Department also is required by the 2002 Farm Bill to promulgate a regulation for mandatory country of origin labeling by Sept. 30, 2004. Development of this mandatory regulation will begin in April 2003 and will likely be based on these voluntary guidelines as well as related input. Submissions on the utility of the voluntary guidelines are encouraged during the next 180 days.

The full text of the voluntary guidelines were published in the Oct. 11 Federal Register. The voluntary guidelines, related Farm Bill provisions, and questions and answers on the voluntary guidelines can be found at:

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/COOL>.

Submissions on the voluntary guidelines may be submitted to: Eric Forman, Associate Deputy Administrator, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, at eric.forman@usda.gov, or William Sessions, Associate Deputy Administrator, Livestock and Seed Program, at william.sessions@usda.gov