

April 2, 2013

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

The undersigned 229 farm, rural, faith, environmental and consumer organizations write in strong support of a regulatory change to the Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) requirements for meat that will provide consumers with additional and more accurate information about the source of their food. The information age has touched nearly every part of daily life in the United States. Americans want to know more about just about everything they own or consume, and that includes knowing the origins of their food.

More than 20 state legislatures are considering bills that demand more information about how food is produced and gets passed along to the consumer through labeling. These legislative efforts as well as enthusiasm for local food systems are clear indications that consumers want more information about their food, especially where it was produced.

In 2002, after years of effort by consumers and farmers, mandatory country-of-origin labels for meats, poultry, vegetables, fruits, and some nuts were included in the Farm Bill, which were then expanded in 2008. A recent ruling at the World Trade Organization (WTO) required the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to change the regulations that implement COOL in order to comply with the WTO restrictions.

The only acceptable way to respond to the WTO challenge is to make labels more informative for consumers, not water them down. U.S. farmers and ranchers are proud of what they produce and should be allowed to promote their products. Consumers deserve clear, direct, and informative labels. Providing more accurate labels with more information is a win-win situation for producers and consumers alike.

Our organizations urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture to strengthen the rules for COOL, which will allow farmers and ranchers to take pride in their products and allow the American public to know the origins of their food and make more informed food purchasing decisions.

Sincerely,

Organizations

350 Berks & Lehigh Valley Climate Action (PA)
Abby's Health and Nutrition (FL)
Adams Farm Slaughterhouse (MA)
Agricultural Missions, Inc. (NY)
Alabama Contract Poultry Growers Association
Alaska Farmers Union
Alliance for a Sustainable Future (PA)

Ambler Environmental Advisory Council
Ambler Food Coop (PA)
American Agriculture Movement
American Corn Growers Institute for Public Policy
American Federation of Government Employees
(AFL-CIO), Local 3354, USDA-St. Louis
American Grassfed Association

American Raw Milk Producers Pricing Association
 American Sheep Industry Association
 Arizona Consumers Council Foundation
 Arkansas Farmers Union
 Ashtabula, Geauga, Lake County (OH) Farmers' Union
 Berks (PA) Gas Truth
 Bull Mountain Land Alliance (MT)
 California Dairy Campaign
 California Farmers Union
 California State Grange
 Campaign for Contract Agriculture Reform
 Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment
 Caney Fork Headwaters Association (TN)
 Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (NC)
 Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri
 Cattle Producers of Louisiana
 Cattle Producers of Washington
 Cattlemen's Texas Longhorn Registry
 Center for Earth Spirituality and Rural Ministry (MN)
 Center for Food Safety
 Center for International Policy-Americas Program
 Center for Media and Democracy's Food Rights Network
 Center for Rural Affairs
 Central Co-op (WA)
 Cheyenne Area Landowners Coalition (WY)
 Chicago Consumer Coalition
 Church Women United of New York State
 Citizen Action Coalition of Indiana
 Citizens for Sanity.Com, Inc. (FL)
 The CJD Foundation
 Coalition for a Prosperous America
 Colorado Independent CattleGrowers Association
 Community Farm Alliance (KY)
 Community Food and Justice Coalition (CA)
 ConnPIRG
 Consumer Assistance Council, Inc.
 Consumer Federation of America
 The Consumer Federation of the Southeast
 Consumers Union
 Contract Poultry Growers Association of the Virginias
 The Cornucopia Institute
 Cornucopia Network NJ/TN Chapter
 Cottonwood Resource Council (MT)
 Cuatro Puertas (NM)
 Dakota Resource Council
 Dakota Rural Action of SD
 Dawson Resource Council (MT)
 EarthSave Miami
 East New York Farms!/United Community Centers
 Ecological Farming Association (CA)
 The Ecology Party of Florida
 Endangered Habitats League (CA)
 Environmental Health Watch (OH)
 Equal Exchange
 Fair Food Matters (MI)
 FairShare CSA Coalition (WI)

Family Farm Defenders
 Farm Aid
 Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance
 Farmworker Association of Florida
 Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund
 Florida School of Holistic Living
 Food & Water Watch
 Food Chain Workers Alliance
 Food Democracy Now!
 Food for Maine's Future
 Friends of the Earth U.S.
 Genesis Farm (NJ)
 Global Organic Specialty Source, Inc.
 Going Green Tampa
 GRACE Communications Foundation
 Hawaii Farmers Union
 Healthy Communities Consulting
 Healthy Farms Healthy People Coalition
 Hmong National Development, Inc.
 The Home Grown Institute
 Illinois Farmers Union
 Illinois Stewardship Alliance
 Independent Beef Association of North Dakota (I-BAND)
 Independent Cattlemen of Nebraska
 Independent Cattlemen of Wyoming
 Indian Nations Conservation Alliance
 Indiana Farmers Union
 Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
 International Texas Longhorn Association
 Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement
 Iowa Farmers Union
 Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (MD)
 Kansas Cattlemen's Association
 Kansas Farmers Union
 LaMontanita Food Coop (NM)
 Land Loss Prevention Project
 Land Stewardship Project (MN)
 Made in the USA Foundation, Inc.
 Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA)
 Maine Sustainable Agriculture Society
 Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
 Massachusetts Consumers' Coalition
 Metropolitan Organizign Stragey Enabling Strength (MOSES, MI)
 Michigan Farmers Union
 Michigan Land Trustees
 MichUCAN
 Midwest Environmental Advocates (WI)
 Minnesota Farmers Union
 Mississippi Assoc. of Cooperatives
 Missouri Farmers Union
 Missouri National Farmers Organization
 Missouri Rural Crisis Center
 Missouri's Best Beef Cooperative
 Mo Betta Green Marketplace (CO)

Montana Farmers Union
 Murray County (OK) Independent Cattlemen's Association
 Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative (OK)
 National Association of Counties
 National Association of Farm Animal Welfare
 National Catholic Rural Life Conference
 National Consumers League
 National Cooperative Grocers Association (NCGA)
 National Family Farm Coalition
 National Farmers Organization
 National Farmers Union
 National Grange
 National Hmong American Farmers, Inc.
 National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association
 National Organic Coalition
 National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
 National Wildlife Federation
 National Women Involved in Farm Economics
 Nature Abounds (PA)
 Nebraska Farmers Union
 Nebraska State Grange
 Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society
 Nebraska Wildlife Federation
 Nebraska Women Involved in Farm Economics (NE WIFE)
 Nevada Live Stock Association
 New England Farmers Union
 New Entry Sustainable Farming Project
 North Dakota Farmers Union
 Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance
 Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. - CT
 Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. - NH
 Northeast Organic Farming Association, Interstate Council (NOFA-IC)
 Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
 Northern Plains Resource Council (MT)
 Northern Wisconsin Beef Producers
 Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance (MA)
 Oglala Sioux Livestock and Land Owners Association (SD)
 Ohio Environmental Stewardship Alliance
 Ohio Farmers Union
 Oregon Farmers Union
 Oregon Rural Action
 Organic Consumers Association
 Organic Farmers' Agency for Relationship Marketing (OFARM)
 Organic Seed Alliance
 Organic Seed Growers and Trade Association (OSGATA)
 Organic Valley
 Organically Grown Company (OR)
 Organization for Competitive Markets
 Partnership for Earth Spirituality
 Peach Bottom Concerned Citizens Group (PBCCG) (PA)
 Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture
 Pennsylvania Farmers Union
 Pennypack Farm and Education Center (PA)
 Pesticide Action Network North America
 Plan it 4 Planet (MI)
 Powder River Basin Resource Council (WY)
 Progress Ohio
 Progressive Agriculture Organization (PA)
 ProgressNow New Mexico
 Public Citizen
 R-CALF United Stockgrowers of America
 Rainbow Natural Grocery (MS)
 Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Western American Province
 Religious Sisters of Charity
 The Resilience Hub/Portland Maine Permaculture
 Revisional International (CO)
 Rocky Mountain Farmers Union
 Rosebud Protective Association (MT)
 Rural Advancement Foundation International - USA (RAFI-USA)
 Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural
 Rural Development Leadership Network (NY)
 Rural Vermont
 The Second Chance Foundation
 Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia (PA)
 Slow Food Nebraska
 Small Planet Institute
 South Dakota Farmers Union
 South Dakota Sheep Growers Association
 South Dakota Stockgrowers Association
 Southwest Environmental Center (NM)
 Sustain LA
 Sustainable Food Center (TX)
 Sustainable Living Systems
 Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Assoc.
 Tooling, Manufacturing and Technologies Assoc.
 Trappe Landing Farm & Native Sanctuary
 U.S. Cattlemen's Association
 U.S. Public Interest Research Group (USPIRG)
 United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries
 UrbiCulture Community Farms (CO)
 Utah Farmers Union
 Virginia Association for Biological Farming
 Virginia Citizens Consumer Council
 Washington Biotechnology Action Council
 Washington Farmers Union
 Weiser River Resource Council (ID)
 Western Colorado Congress
 Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC)
 Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
 WhyHunger
 Willimantic Food Cooperative (CT)
 Winter Garden Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (TX)
 Wisconsin Farmers Union
 Wisconsin State AFL-CIO
 Women Involved in Farm Economics (WIFE)
 Women, Food and Agriculture Network