

USDA moves funds to implement COOL

by **Lisa M. Keefe**, published on *Meatingplace.com*

(Jan. 7, 2009) — The USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) plans to move \$3.18 million out of its Specialty Crop Block Grant budget of \$49 million to help pay for implementation of the country-of-origin labeling (COOL) program in fiscal 2009.

The so-called interchange transfer was outlined in a letter that USDA Secretary Ed Shafer sent to Congress as an update on USDA activities. The funds transfer is provided for in the 2008 Farm Bill.

The transfer will enable the COOL program to move forward during the current fiscal year toward its full operational level. The program is expected to conduct a retailer survey, accelerate and expand training for State employees so that retail surveillance reviews and suppliers audits can occur during the second half of the fiscal year, initiate development of an audit tracking system, conduct outreach and educational activities for affected parties, and hire 10 temporary employees for program administration.

In a newsletter, the National Meat Association noted that, with the funds transfer, "It is clear that AMS plans to implement COOL as scheduled with enforcement for meat products beginning in April."

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