

USDA issues final COOL rules

by **Janie Gabbett**, published on *Meatingplace.com*

(Jan. 13, 2009) — USDA announced it has issued details of its final regulation for the mandatory country-of-origin labeling (mCOOL) program.

The full text of the final rule will be published in the Jan. 15 *Federal Register*. The rule becomes effective on March 16, 2009, 60 days after the date of publication. Information about the final rule posted on USDA's web site include:

- [a copy of the final rule](#)
- [a summary of changes from the interim final rules](#)
- [revised FAQs](#)
- [a table outlining labeling options.](#)

One change USDA made was to eliminate a provision in the interim rules that allowed U.S. origin-covered commodities to be further processed or handled in a foreign country and retain their U.S. origin label.

USDA also said it received extensive feedback opposing the interim final rule that allowed U.S. origin product to be labeled with a mixed origin label. "It was never the intent of the Agency for the majority of product eligible to bear a U.S. origin declaration to bear a multiple origin designation. The Agency made additional modifications for clarity," USDA said in documents explaining the final rule.

USDA also eased restrictions on the order in which multiple countries of origin are listed on muscle cut meats.

USDA left unchanged from the interim rules its exclusion from mCOOL rules if a commodity is an ingredient in a processed food item. This provision had been criticized by some consumer groups and by Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund, United Stockgrowers of America (R-CALF).

Another provision that was criticized, but not changed, was the 60-day grace period for changing ground meat labels after a raw material from a specific origin is no longer in a processor's inventory.

The final rules provide for penalties of up to \$1,000 per violation for both retailers and suppliers not complying with the law.

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