

News From Livestock Marketing Association
Kansas City, MO
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Statements, procedures to move COOL livestock origin information along ownership chain developed at ‘unprecedented’ industry meeting

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Seventy representatives of over 30 livestock industry, related groups and organizations gathered recently in Kansas City, in a meeting organized by Livestock Marketing Association and co-hosted by the National Meat Association and the National Farmers Union, to tackle a key issue as the federal Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) law takes effect Sept. 30.

That issue: agreeing on universal procedures and language for the documents necessary to move livestock origin claims along the custody/ownership chain to slaughter, to ensure that meat, covered under COOL, is accurately labeled at the retail level.

That objective was reached with the development of three universal “Country of Origin Affidavit/Declaration” statements. These statements are being recommended to the livestock industry to establish and forward origin claims on livestock covered by the COOL law – cattle (including veal), swine, sheep and goats.

“This was an unprecedented meeting,” LMA President Bobby Smith said. “And it made sense for LMA to be instrumental in putting it together, since America’s livestock markets already move millions of livestock every year, from one owner to another.

“We’re pleased to work with our industry partners to develop the language of the necessary origin documentation, so that the ultimate goal of COOL – telling consumers where their meat comes from – is reached.”

The three agreed-upon country of origin affidavit/declaration statements:

...A continuous country of origin affidavit/declaration. This will allow producers to make a continuous origin affidavit, that would be kept on file by the market, stocker, feeder or slaughter plant, until revoked by the affidavit’s signer.

.....A supporting declaration of origin for specific transactions involving livestock from producers with a continuous affidavit on file, or as a “stand alone” affidavit/declaration related to a specific transaction. This language could be used on check-in sheets, invoices and/or other sales documents.

...The third statement covers direct transactions to packers from producers, marketing businesses and feeders. The COOL law requires packers to maintain country of origin records for one year, and they must be able to obtain records from their immediate suppliers within that period, to substantiate COOL claims. This statement says the livestock supplier will maintain those records for one year from date of delivery of the livestock, and will make them available, as required by the COOL law.

Producers are reminded that, in addition to using this new affidavit/declaration of origin process, the U.S. Department of Agriculture is permitting packers to rely on an official ear tag and/or marking on animals that

are part of a National Animal Identification System compliant system, or other official ID system, such as the Canadian or Mexican official systems.

Meeting participants agreed to encourage USDA to permit producers selling live animals to visually inspect their livestock for markings indicating foreign origin. It was agreed that the presence or absence of such markings would constitute “first hand” knowledge of those animals’ origin, and would support an affidavit of origin.

This visual inspection is particularly important for the industry for the period between July 15, 2008 (all livestock in the U.S. prior to July 15 are considered to be of U.S. origin) and whenever the final regulation is published.

That’s because producers have moved livestock, particularly cattle, without all of the origin information that may be necessary, and it would be very difficult, if not impossible to recreate the paper trail on many of these animals, the group agreed.

A letter outlining the conclusions of the Aug. 26 meeting will be presented soon to USDA Undersecretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Bruce Knight. He was present at the meeting and urged the group to “be bold” in developing ideas for implementing the COOL law.

LMA’s President Smith said the industry-wide initiatives emerging from the meeting “do just that, and will benefit both our industry and our consumer customers.” Those organizations or companies which have agreed to implement COOL according to the plan described here, are: American Farm Bureau Federation; American Foods Group; American Hereford Association; American Meat Institute; American Sheep Industry Association; Cargill Meat Solutions;

Dairy Farmers of America; FPL Food; Greater Omaha Packing Co.; John Morrell Co.; Kansas Livestock Association; Livestock Marketing Association; National Cattlemen’s Beef Association; National Farmers Organization; National Farmers Union;

National Livestock Producers Association; National Meat Association; National Milk Producers Federation; National Pork Producers Council; National Pork Board; R-CALF USA; Smithfield Beef Group; Texas Cattle Feeders Association; Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, and U.S. Cattlemen’s Association.

The affidavit/declaration statements, and an “Industry Stakeholder Letter,” are available at www.lmaweb.com <<http://www.lmaweb.com/>> . Click on the “COOL Materials 9/08” link in the upper right corner of the home page.

