

Tyson Cool With Federal Labeling Law

by **Tom Johnston** on 10/16/2008

Tyson Foods Inc. said it will comply with federal mandatory country-of-origin labeling law by labeling most of its retail, fresh meat cuts as a product of the United States.

The Springdale, Ark.-based protein giant originally stated intentions to avert the high costs associated with segregating livestock and products by labeling most of its beef and pork cuts, including those derived from U.S.-born livestock, under the multi-country Category B level.

As USDA intends it, however, the law seeks to differentiate U.S. meat products from those of other countries. The agency quickly said it would work to close that “loophole.”

In a letter to customers and producers, Tyson Fresh Meats Senior Group Vice President James Lochner said, “If we do not take measures to more fully meet the desires of mCOOL advocates and many lawmakers, and label a large percentage of retail, fresh meat cuts as a product of the U.S., it is likely some flexibility included in the current regulations will be eliminated.”

Tyson now says it aims to label almost all beef and pork from livestock born, raised and processed in the U.S. with the Category A label by the middle of 2009. The company estimates nearly 90% of all the fresh beef and pork cuts produced in the United States would qualify for that label. However, Tyson will continue sourcing foreign livestock, and will label product from those animals as Category B or C “in the least cumbersome manner allowed by USDA.”

Requests

Meanwhile, the company said it is asking USDA to simplify the livestock identification process for producers. Tyson also asked Congress and USDA for market transparency in terms of documenting how COOL impacts livestock values, and has requested that USDA expand price reporting to include these new livestock and product categories.

Tyson also is asking its livestock suppliers to segregate all foreign-born livestock. The company will accept a continuous affidavit if a producer chooses to produce and sell exclusively Category A or Category B livestock. It will require those who produce and sell both Category A and Category B livestock to present an affidavit for each load unless the

producer raises livestock in multiple locations and can designate specific feeding operations as Category A or Category B.

“Increased costs will result from these changes,” Lochner wrote. “Ultimately, we believe these additional expenses will have to be passed on through higher finished product prices or reduced prices for livestock.”

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