

COOL, Other Laws on Hold for Obama Review

by **Tom Johnston**, published on Meatingplace.com Jan. 22, 2009

(Jan. 22, 2009) — The long, winding and very bumpy road for mandatory country-of-origin labeling law and other legislation could continue as President Barack Obama's administration on Wednesday ordered all federal agencies to freeze new or pending regulations of the Bush administration until the new camp approves them.

White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel issued a memorandum to all federal agencies that, among other things, directs them to consider extending for 60 days the effective date of regulations that have been published but have not yet taken effect "for purposes of reviewing questions of law and policy raised by those regulations." In such a case, a notice-and-comment period of 30 days would be reopened.

Published Jan. 15 in the Federal Register, the final COOL law is slated to take effect March 16. However, the memo indicates Obama is asking agency heads to use discretion.

"It appears that there is some discretion given as to whether or not published final rules will be enacted as is or reviewed," American Meat Institute spokesman Dave Ray told Meatingplace. "So it's not certain what will happen with COOL."

Concerns

Some would expect the Obama camp to tighten up COOL rules, which, for example, currently allow meatpackers to commingle as few as one foreign animal with domestic cattle and label the entire day's production as of mixed-country origin. The true intent of the law, say its proponents, is to differentiate U.S. product from foreign product.

"The main concern of packers has, I believe, always been complexity," National Meat Association spokesman Jeremy Russell told Meatingplace. "The more complex the mandatory COOL labeling system the more costly — and the more likely there will be errors."

Meanwhile, other regulations the Obama administration might review include a rule proposed by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service regarding an official numbering system for the National Animal Identification initiative, which was published Jan. 13. New provisions in the 2008 farm bill also hang in the balance. The disposition of the Food and Drug Administration's new guidance on genetically engineered animals also is unclear.

To read the full text of the memorandum, [click here](#).

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