

NFU Says Loophole Stands in Way of COOL

WASHINGTON (Sept. 17, 2008) – National Farmers Union today expressed disappointment in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) interpretation of the country-of-origin labeling (COOL) provision in the 2008 Farm Bill and urged the department to immediately reinterpret the provision. COOL is scheduled to go into effect Oct. 1, 2008.

NFU was joined by R-CALF USA and the U.S. Cattlemen’s Association (USCA) in a letter to USDA Secretary Schafer expressing concern over reports large meat processors intend to circumvent both the intent and letter of the labeling law.

“The law clearly states that products born, raised and slaughtered in the United States are to be labeled as a product of the United States. Despite this clear language, USDA’s rules will allow packers to label exclusively American products with those from other countries,” NFU President Tom Buis said.

The Farm Bill language explicitly states exclusively born, raised and processed U.S. animals cannot be used in the multiple-country category (category 2).

“USDA has created a loophole big enough to drive a truck through, violating the spirit, letter and intent of the law and deceiving consumers who have consistently shown support for buying U.S. products,” Buis said. “This is about truth in labeling.”

The COOL provision in the Farm Bill was a compromise agreement that creates four labeling categories:

1. Products exclusively born, raised and processed in the United States would be labeled as a U.S. product;
2. Products from animals that were not exclusively born, raised and processed in the United States and not imported for immediate slaughter be labeled with all countries in which the animal may have been born, raised or processed;
3. An animal that was imported for immediate processing may be labeled as a product of the importing country and the United States; and
4. Animals that were born, raised and processed in a foreign country will be labeled as a product of the country of origin.

“We negotiated in good-faith, offering flexibility for processors to transition their facilities to appropriately segregate animals,” Buis said. “Yet processors have been clear about their intent to take advantage of our efforts. This is a disservice to COOL and consumers.”

Despite COOL’s inclusion in the 2002 Farm Bill, the provision was never implemented. Buis said both producers and consumers have waited far too long for COOL to become a reality.