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U.S. Cattlemen's Association Joins Farmers Union to Close COOL Loophole

The U.S. Cattlemen's Association (USCA) said today it has signed a letter crafted by the National Farmers Union (NFU) to Secretary of Agriculture Ed Schafer requesting that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) immediately remedy a loophole in the agency's interim final rule (IFR) for country-of-origin labeling (COOL) that would allow beef packers to circumvent the law by labeling all beef products under the "multiple countries" category.

The following statements can be attributed to Jon Wooster, USCA President, San Lucas, Calif.

"The country-of-origin labeling law is set for implementation on October 1. When USDA released its interim final rule, USCA immediately identified a loophole in the language that would permit packers to label U.S. beef under the multiple countries category. USCA immediately expressed to USDA its concern and opposition to this provision in the rule. The agency has not signaled its intent to rewrite this language.

"This loophole in the interim final rule defies the intent of Congress and does not carry out the statutory language as outlined in the 2008 Farm Bill and mandated by Congress.

"Tom Buis, President of the National Farmers Union was a key COOL negotiator during congressional Farm Bill debate on several COOL provisions. He was asked to serve in that role by the Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee. Developing a compromise on this particular area of the COOL law was not an easy task, but language was adopted that specifically defines boundaries for the multiple countries category. USCA's expectation was that the rule for implementation would be written by USDA to uphold the law passed by Congress. Unfortunately, with regard to this specific issue, that has not been the case.

"U.S. ranchers who raise exclusive U.S. beef want their product identified as such in retail cases. Allowing processors to label all products as if from multiple countries denies consumers that information and permits packers to continue with business as usual.

"USCA is pleased to join Farmer's Union on this issue. With the impending implementation of COOL we must ensure that the will and intent of U.S. ranchers and Congress is carried out. USCA will continue to monitor this situation closely.

The letter to USDA can be viewed at www.uscattlemen.org.

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Established in March 2007, USCA is committed to concentrating its efforts in Washington, DC to enhance and expand the cattle industry's voice on Capitol Hill. USCA has a full-time presence in Washington, giving cattle producers across the country a strong influence on policy development. For more information go to www.uscattlemen.org.