

COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN-LABELING

AMERICA'S RIGHT TO KNOW

What is COOL?

Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) shows consumers where products come from. Most products in the U.S. require origin labeling, but not beef nor pork. COOL (for meat) was enacted in 2013, yet Congress repealed it in 2015 due to potential trade penalties allowed under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (see the timeline on back).

Montana COOL would require country-of-origin placarding (a sign, not a label) for beef at retail locations so that consumers can choose the origin of the beef they buy.



Benefits of COOL

TRANSPARENCY

A true free market depends on transparency. Without information, consumers can't make informed decisions about what they are consuming and where it comes from. Right now, labeling laws permit imported beef products to be labeled "Product of USA" even if it is only repackaged in the U.S., misleading consumers.

Montana COOL would require beef in grocery stores to have signage or "placards" saying where it comes from so consumers have more transparent information.



GOOD FOR AGRICULTURE

COOL would not only enable consumers to make informed decisions about the meat they buy, but also benefit ranchers. Before COOL was repealed, cattle prices were at an all-time high, resulting in higher incomes for producers. **After COOL was repealed, cattle prices fell, costing individual producers tens of thousands of dollars.** Now, ranchers have to seek out specialty markets if they want consumers to know where their beef comes from, but this is not realistic for producers with large herds or who live in remote areas.



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2005

Montana passes state COOL with language to sunset upon passage of federal COOL.

2009

National COOL goes into effect.

2011

WTO rules that COOL violates NAFTA agreements because it doesn't fully show country of origin.

2014

WTO rules that 2013 amendments are inadequate.

2015

- Canada and Mexico threaten USA with retaliatory tariffs of \$1.1 billion for COOL.
- Congress repeals COOL.

2008

- Federal COOL passes in 2008 Farm Bill.
- Canada and Mexico sue USA through World Trade Organization (WTO) for requiring beef and pork labeling.

2013

- COOL is amended to include multi-country labeling for where meat is born, raised, and slaughtered.
- Meat Packer Trade Associations and Canadian and Mexican cattle associations sue USDA alleging COOL is unconstitutional and unlawful. USDA wins.

2016

Meat is allowed to be labeled a "product of the USA" despite having been slightly processed or altered in the U.S. This is still happening across the country.

GOOD FOR WORKERS

Since COOL was repealed, 14,000 jobs in American meatpacking facilities have been lost. Without COOL, processing meat overseas is cheaper and perpetuates the exploitation of workers and the environment.

AMERICANS APPROVE

Since COOL was first introduced in Congress in 2002, it has maintained a higher than 90% approval rating among American consumers. The only opposition comes from the meatpacking industry and trade groups that stand to benefit by consumers not knowing where their meat comes from.

Is it legal?

While NAFTA gave Canada and Mexico leverage to repeal COOL at the federal level, NAFTA is under intense renegotiation. The provisions that led to the repeal of COOL are on the chopping block, but the whole deal won't be completed for several years.

While the WTO has allowed Canada and Mexico to slap fines on the U.S. for federal COOL, our proposal for simple placarding is different, and has never been ruled on by the WTO.

In fact, past legal rulings show that placarding is a state's right to "communicate information to its citizen-consumers, which is protected both by the first Amendment and by the last sentence of 21 U.S.C. 678 (the Federal Meat Inspection Act)."

WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

To learn more about COOL and other issues that affect family farms and ranches, contact Maggie at 406-248-1154 or maggie@northernplains.org