May 13, 2013 Action Alert from Nebraska Farmers Union!

Many of you have at one time or another supported our efforts to get and keep clear and effective Country of Origin Labeling for U.S. food products. Thanks to all our efforts, COOL is now the law. That law was challenged by lawsuits from Mexico and Canada in the WTO. USDA has responded in a fashion that we support that makes more consistent and clear where the product was born, raised, and processed so U.S. food consumers can make informed buying decisions in the market place about the food their families consume. We believe the USDA has taken the right approach and will be viewed positively by the WTO.

Unfortunately, Nebraska Senator Mike Johanns has offered the following amendment to the Senate Agriculture Committee for consideration of mark up for their Farm Bill proposal tomorrow, Tuesday, May 14th.

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To eliminate country-of-origin labeling for livestock and poultry.

This amendment strikes country-of-origin labeling requirements for livestock and poultry. The WTO Appellate Body has found our COOL requirements are not in compliance with our trade

obligations. USDA's proposed solution is unlikely to solve this problem and makes compliance more expensive.

We strongly OPPOSE this repeal of COOL. This is a clear case of catering to the meat packers at the expense of both food consumers and producers.

We are asking you to ASAP:

1. Write and send letters-to-the-editor and press releases. Because of the time issue, we urge you to use the electronic delivery and follow up phone calls instead of the mail.
2. Generate phone calls, emails, and letters to all members of the Senate Agriculture Committee. Again, in the interest of time, email is the best way to do so quickly.
3. Help us spread the word ASAP to your members, friends, neighbors, etc.

Attached is a list of newspapers and how to contact them, and the roster for the Senate Ag Committee.

Below is my update of the NFU talking points we were using to oppose the House Agriculture Committee study of COOL, which we know to be a “witch hunt”.

* COOL is the law of the land. It is overwhelmingly supported by U.S. food consumers, U.S. food consumers, and the U.S. public. The law itself was passed and supported by the last two Farm Bills.
* U.S. food producers deserve to have clear, transparent, understandable information and labeling about where the food products they are buying for their families came from, where it was raised, and where it was processed. That way, they can vote with their pocketbooks over the quality, safety, and health and labor standards that were used in its production and processing.
* U.S. food producers have a basic and fundamental right to differentiate the food products they grow in the U.S. marketplace from their competitors, including Canada and Mexico. U.S. food producers are rightly proud of the quality of the products they grow, and the safety of the food products they grow.
* We oppose any legislative changes, studies or delays in implementation of Country of Origin Labeling, and Senator Johanns’ outright repeal of COOL.
* WTO COOL challenge issues are being appropriately addressed through the Administration. There is no reason whatsoever for any legislative “fixes” or “repeals” at this time. Following the final release of the USDA proposed rule on COOL, the issue will be addressed within the WTO. Let that process work before any legislative responses are considered.
* If the proposed changes offered through the USDA rule are not deemed acceptable by Canada and Mexico, they can then request that the WTO address the issue further.
* Tariffs:  There is an abundance of misinformation being circulated regarding possible tariffs assessed by Canada to US products if the U.S. does not come into compliance. The WTO process needs to have the opportunity to work. The WTO is a long ways from completing its process much less imposing any tariffs.
* The WTO stated: “the panel did not err…in finding that the provision of consumer information on origin is a legitimate objective within the meaning of Article 2.2”; meaning that the labeling of a meat product’s origin and providing consumers with more information about the origin of the food they eat does not violate any WTO statutes and is not more trade restrictive than necessary to fulfill a legitimate policy objective.
* Canada is working to implement a COOL system, and 47 other countries had either enacted or were planning COOL in 2007.
* The OMB found that the proposed changes to rule were not economically significant.
* The packers, processors, and retailers have cried wolf before - they said COOL would cost almost $2 billion and cost thousands of jobs, but those claims turned out to be way off base.
* A 2008 Consumer Reports poll found that 95% of consumers believe that processed or packaged food should be labeled by their country of origin and that country of origin should always be available at point of purchase.