

**ACTION ALERT**  
**April 18, 2003**

**Now's the Time to Tell Congress & USDA that Country of Origin Labeling Is Unfair, Burdensome and Won't Improve Food Safety**

With members of Congress returning home for Easter recess, now is the perfect time to let your lawmakers know that Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) is unfair, burdensome and won't improve food safety. Furthermore, USDA has announced a nationwide series of listening sessions to gather public input on the Country of Origin Labeling program. Independent retailers and wholesalers need to attend these meetings, make their voices heard, and tell USDA that this program can't be improved – it should be scrapped. **N.G.A.'s goal is repeal of the Country of Origin Labeling program, before it takes effect in September 2004.**

Winning this repeal will not be easy. It will require massive grassroots participation by our industry. Here is what you can do:

- **Attend and speak at USDA's listening sessions.** The Agricultural Marketing Service will be hosting a nationwide series of listening sessions on COOL, starting April 29 in Raleigh, NC. Full details on the sessions appear below. Plan to attend, sign in, and speak. If you can't attend, you can submit written comments for the record. Because USDA was directed by Congress to establish the COOL program, the agency cannot decide to reject it completely. But your comments will become part of the record, and it is very important for USDA to be aware of the severely burdensome impact this program will have on retailers and wholesalers. You will only have a limited time to speak – but those minutes will be vitally important for your industry.
- **Communicate to Congress.** Write to your members of Congress, and visit them in person when they are back home in their district offices. Tell them specifically that you support full repeal of the COOL program, which was contained in the 2002 Farm Bill. N.G.A. has talking points available on our website at [www.nationalgrocers.org](http://www.nationalgrocers.org).
- **Attend the 2003 Washington Conference.** There is strength in numbers. By attending the 2003 Washington Conference, cosponsored by N.G.A. and the Food Industry Association Executives, you'll have an opportunity to meet with targeted members of Congress to discuss this and other issues. The Washington Conference takes place June 16 to 18 – see [N.G.A. Meetings](#) for full schedule and registration information.
- **Assess your company's compliance costs.** Review the voluntary COOL guidelines and accompanying Q&A on AMS' website at [www.ams.usda.gov](http://www.ams.usda.gov). Generate an estimate of your compliance costs. This kind of hard data will be invaluable as N.G.A. makes the case for full repeal.
- **Discuss with your suppliers the costs they will face.** If you have not done so already, you should communicate with your suppliers about the additional

costs they will face, and about the responsibilities they will have in order to provide you with documentation on the country of origin of covered commodities. Ask for their help in fighting for repeal.

- **Write to your newspaper, talk in your community, generate awareness.** Get the message out to your community that the COOL program means higher costs with no benefit to consumers. Independent, community-focused grocers already provide their customers with a wealth of information on the food they buy. There are more effective and less expensive alternatives to a COOL mandate.

## USDA Listening Sessions

**N.G.A. is working aggressively to rescind the Country of Origin Labeling program.** Your grassroots participation is vital to letting USDA know that excessive implementation and compliance costs must not be imposed on independent grocers and their wholesalers. Below is the listing of upcoming USDA listening sessions on the COOL program.

Each session is scheduled to run from 1 to 4 p.m. local time. Each session will include a presentation by a USDA official on various aspects of the law, as well as a question and answer session. After the initial presentation, the public input session will begin. No preregistration is necessary, but participants wishing to speak must sign in. Questions can be addressed to the Agricultural Marketing Service's Livestock and Seed program at 202-720-5705, or sent via e-mail to [william.sessions@usda.gov](mailto:william.sessions@usda.gov). Those who cannot attend one of the sessions can submit written comments to: Country of Origin Labeling Program, Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA, Stop 0249, Room 2092-S, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-0249, or by fax to (202) 720-3499, or by e-mail to [cool@usda.gov](mailto:cool@usda.gov).

<b>April 29 -- Raleigh, N.C.</b> Jim Graham Building Hall of Fame Room 1025 Blue Ridge Road Raleigh, N.C. 27607	<b>June 4 -- Cody, Wyo.</b> Holiday Inn 1701 Sheridan Ave. Cody, Wyo. 82414
<b>May 1 -- Austin, Texas</b> William B. Travis Building, Room 1-111 1701 North Congress Ave. Austin, Texas 78711	<b>June 6 -- Billings, Mont.</b> Holiday Inn 5500 Midland Road Billings, Mont. 59101
<b>May 2 -- Pasco, Wash.</b> Red Lion Hotel 2525 North 20th Ave. Pasco, Wash. 99301	<b>June 12 -- Sacramento, Calif.</b> California - EPA Headquarters Joe Serna Jr. Building Central Valley Auditorium 1001 I St. Sacramento, Calif. 95814
<b>May 6 -- Kansas City, Mo.</b> Hilton Kansas City Airport 8801 NW 112th St. Kansas City, Mo. 64153	<b>June 19 -- Baton Rouge, La.</b> Southern University Agr. Research and Ext. Center B.A. Little Drive Baton Rouge, La. 70813

**May 8 -- Kearney, Neb.** University of Nebraska at Kearney 905 West 25th St. Kearney, Neb. 68849

**June 24 -- St. Paul, Minn.** University of Minnesota Earle Brown Continuing Education Center 1890 Buford Ave. St. Paul, Minn. 55108

**May 14 -- Orlando, Fla.** Orange County Administration Building Board of County Commission Chambers 201 South Rosalind Orlando, Fla. 32801

**June 26 -- Lancaster, Pa.** Lancaster Farm and Home Center 1383 Arcadia Road Lancaster, Pa. 17601

The voluntary guidelines as well as an explanatory Q&A and additional information from the Agricultural Marketing Service are available for download on AMS' website at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/cool/>. **If you have any questions, or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Mike Mason, N.G.A. Director of Public Affairs, at (703) 516-0700 or [mmason@nationalgrocers.org](mailto:mmason@nationalgrocers.org).**

## **N.G.A. Talking Points on Country of Origin Labeling**

Proponents of country of origin labeling sold the plan to Congress by saying it would improve the safety of the food supply and "give more information to consumers." Here are some facts to emphasize when you speak out about the COOL program:

- The voluntary guidelines provide a framework for a system that will shift costs and burdens to retailers that will be reflected in consumer prices, while providing no increase in food safety.
- The COOL requirements would hold retailers accountable for maintaining a verifiable audit trail for individual items – back to where an animal was born or a plant picked. Producers and suppliers should be responsible for verifying and certifying the country of origin.
- The COOL recordkeeping requirement would force retailers to keep two-years worth of records at the point of sale on every covered product -- fresh and frozen muscle cuts of beef, veal, lamb, pork and fish, fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables, and peanuts — that indicate their country of origin.
- USDA has drastically underestimated the cost burden that the recordkeeping alone would place on retailers and wholesalers -- AMS estimated the cost at \$628 million per year for retailers and \$340 million for wholesalers, for the first year alone. Even that is too low, and doesn't include costs for such things as printing and applying labels, changes to computer systems, etc.
- The entire COOL program is fundamentally anti-small business – independent retailers and wholesalers will face disproportionately higher compliance costs compared to their larger competitors.
- The entire COOL program is fundamentally flawed, revealing itself to be not about food safety at all. If it were about ensuring a more safe food supply, why are restaurants not covered? Why are beef, lamb and pork covered but not chicken or turkey? In fact, what really drove this was domestic agricultural producers seeking to discredit their foreign competitors and using fears of

terrorist activity to their own advantage – and leaving independent retailers and wholesalers, as well as consumers, to foot the bill.

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If you have questions or need additional information, contact Tom Wenning at [publicaffairs@nationalgrocers.org](mailto:publicaffairs@nationalgrocers.org).

Would you prefer to receive Action and Recall Alerts via e-mail? E-mail us at [publicaffairs@nationalgrocers.org](mailto:publicaffairs@nationalgrocers.org).

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