



# ACTION ALERT

January 4, 2005

## **USDA Extends Comment Period for Interim Final Rule for Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling of Fish and Shellfish**

The USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service announced on December 27, 2004, that it extended the comment period on the interim final rule for the mandatory country of origin labeling program for fish and shellfish. **The January 3, 2005 deadline has been extended to February 2, 2005. While the comment period has been extended, the effective date for the industry's compliance with the interim final rule still remains April 4, 2005.**

"We are extending the comment period to ensure that all those wishing to comment have the opportunity to do so," said A.J. Yates, AMS administrator. "We strongly encourage all interested parties to submit comments."

The N.G.A., together with the Food Marketing Institute, requested that the comment period be extended. As our members have been working diligently to develop systems to implement the interim final rule, additional challenges, such as required implementation of lot numbers or other unique identifiers, have been discovered that were not previously in the proposed rule. The interim final rule represents a significant departure in a number of respects from the USDA's previous two interpretations of the mandatory country of origin labeling law. Although many of the changes are improvements, our membership must be given sufficient time for review and compliance.

N.G.A. has invited representatives of the USDA to address requirements of the rule to the N.G.A. Government Relations Leadership Council and convention attendees at our convention on the afternoon of Wednesday, February 9<sup>th</sup>.

The interim final rule was published in the October 5, 2004, Federal Register. Details of the comment period extension were published in the December 28, 2004, Federal Register. Comments may be sent via e-mail to: [cool@usda.gov](mailto:cool@usda.gov) or sent regular mail to: Country of Origin Labeling Program, Agricultural Marketing Service, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, USDA STOP 0249, Washington, DC 20250-0249, no later than February 2, 2005. Copies of the interim final rule and additional information can be found at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/cool/index.htm>.

Please contact Erik Lieberman, N.G.A Director of Government Relations, with any questions at (703) 516-0700 or at [elieberman@nationalgrocers.org](mailto:elieberman@nationalgrocers.org).