



STATEMENT

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Vilsack, Kirk Comment on Canadian Panel Request Regarding Country-of-Origin Labeling

WASHINGTON, October 7, 2009 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and United States Trade Representative Ron Kirk today issued a statement regarding Canada's request to establish a dispute settlement panel at the World Trade Organization (WTO) to review their claims in a dispute regarding country of origin labeling (COOL) required by the 2008 Farm Bill for certain agricultural products. The panel request will be considered at the October 23, 2009, meeting of the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body.

From Secretary Vilsack and Ambassador Kirk:

"We regret that formal consultations have not been successful in resolving Canada's concerns over country of origin labeling (COOL) required by the 2008 Farm Bill for certain agricultural products.

"We believe that our implementation of COOL provides information to consumers in a manner consistent with our World Trade Organization commitments.

"Countries have agreed since long before the existence of the WTO that country of origin labeling is a legitimate policy. It is common for other countries to require that goods be labeled as to their origin.

"We hope to continue to work with Canada to resolve this issue amicably."

Background: The Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (the 2008 Farm Bill) mandates country-of-origin labeling (COOL) at the retail level for beef, lamb, pork, chicken, goat, perishable agricultural commodities, and certain nuts as of September 30, 2008. The statute sets out four categories of country of origin for meat: A) exclusively U.S. origin; B) multiple countries of origin; C) animals imported for immediate slaughter; and D) exclusively foreign origin. On August 1, 2008, USDA published an Interim Final Rule to implement the COOL statutory requirements. On December 1, 2008, Canada requested WTO dispute settlement consultations on the COOL interim rule, and Mexico similarly requested consultations on December 17, 2008. Pursuant to a January 7, 2009 procedural agreement, Canada committed not to pursue WTO dispute settlement until September 2009 if the Final Rule contained certain flexibilities in meat labeling. On January 15, 2009, USDA published the Final Rule on COOL. On February 20, 2009, Secretary Vilsack announced that the Final Rule

would take effect as originally scheduled on March 16, 2009. Canada and Mexico sent a new consultations request regarding the Final Rule to the United States on May 7, 2009.

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