

Fighting for the U.S. Cattle Producer!



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February 29, 2016

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Forestry and Nutrition
326A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Forestry and Nutrition
326A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

Re: Please Oppose Any Effort to Establish a Voluntary COOL Law

Dear Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow, and Committee Members:

We understand an effort is underway to amend Chairman Robert's GMO labeling legislation to include a voluntary labeling law for country-of-origin labeling (COOL). We further understand that the effort to establish a voluntary COOL law will be limited only to beef and pork, commodities that Congress exempted from the U.S. mandatory COOL law pursuant to a directive by the World Trade Organization (WTO).

As the largest producer-only trade association representing the U.S. cattle industry, R-CALF USA was a lead supporter of mandatory COOL for beef. We were dismayed when Congress repealed COOL for beef and pork. However, we believe a voluntary COOL law for beef and pork will be worse than no COOL law at all. We urge the Committee and Congress to reject any effort to establish a voluntary COOL law for beef and pork.

Our reasons for our strenuous opposition to a voluntary COOL law for beef and pork are many and include:

1. Establishing a stop-gap, voluntary COOL law will foreclose our industry's opportunity to reestablish a workable mandatory COOL law for beef and pork in a new Congress. Thus, a voluntary COOL law will cause the U.S. cattle industry to suffer long-term harm.
2. Because four of the most powerful COOL opponents – Tyson, Cargill, JBS and National Beef – also control approximately 85 percent of all fed cattle slaughter in the U.S., at best producers will have but a very small opportunity to voluntarily label beef and they will have to do so with the residual packers that control only about 15 percent of the packer market.

February 29, 2016

Page 2

3. Even though about 15 percent of the fed cattle market may potentially be controlled by COOL-friendly packers, most cow/calf producers and backgrounders and stockers sell their cattle to feedlot operators. And, once their cattle are sold, they have no means to cause any downstream buyers to associate the beef from the cattle they have sold with a COOL label.
4. Indeed, of the 729,000 remaining cattle producers in the U.S., only 27,189, or less than 4 percent, are feedlot owners or managers that actually sell cattle directly to downstream packers. And, as already mentioned, 85 percent of their cattle is sold to anti-COOL packers. Therefore, a voluntary COOL law is likely to accord only a very small fraction of the nation's cattle-producing population with any opportunity to label beef, while effectively denying COOL for all the rest.

Again, and for the reasons stated above, we respectfully urge the Committee to reject any amendment that attempts to establish a voluntary COOL law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Bullard". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Bill Bullard, CEO