

KCA Continues to Promote USA Beef and Support Improvements in COOL

Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) is one of those issues that U. S. cattle producers adamantly support. Since its implementation, COOL has continuously been in the spotlight. With a lot of recent development, KCA continues to move forward with supporting COOL, improving its implementation, and promoting USA Beef.

COOL became a national hit in 2002, when Congress created language in the Farm Bill to distinguish where beef and other commodities originated. Although it stood stagnant for six years, in 2008, KCA, along with a coalition of groups, helped to showcase the importance of the COOL, and Congress took further steps to not only include it on the Farm Bill but implement it into law.

In 2010 KCA participated in the Kansas State Fair legislative forum where the KCA representative asked the question, "With the WTO's preliminary finding against country of origin labeling, whereas 95% of the US people support COOL, do you think, we, as a country, should give up our constitutional rights as a sovereign nation and withdraw the COOL law?" Senator Roberts stepped forward and stated, "Loss of sovereignty, not on my watch." With that statement, KCA has continued to press the Kansas delegation to support U.S. sovereignty and the U.S. COOL program.

KCA didn't stop there. The association's staff has been steadfast in communicating with our legislators and helped create coalitions to raise awareness to consumer groups. KCA has hosted county meetings showcasing COOL and retailers that have embraced USA beef labeling. KCA is supporting a recent petition to move forward with COOL and encourages anyone who wants to know more about where their food comes from to join the petition in support of it. Earlier in the year, KCA member, Mason Greene, erected a large "USA Beef" billboard on his property along the Kansas turnpike, where it still stands today. Through his creativeness and generosity, KCA developed a marketing program aimed at creating more opportunities to promote USA beef.

When more than a year ago, Canada and Mexico filed a dispute with the WTO to eliminate COOL, KCA once again sprang into action providing factual information and logical reasoning for the need for COOL. KCA has maintained regular communication with the U.S. Trade Representative's Office and USDA. KCA has offered a number of reasons why maintaining COOL is important. Consumers deserve to know where their food comes from to make an informed purchasing decision. Processors already label and segregate commodities for branded products and have the capability to distinguish origin without being overly burdened. With less than 1% of imported food inspected, U.S. producers deserve the opportunity to distinguish their healthy wholesome food from imported products. Still, after a non-favorable preliminary finding of the WTO last year, with support from groups like KCA, the U.S. Trade Representative did not cave to Canada and Mexico and instead stood its ground defending the U.S. law. The WTO appellate panel did find the U.S. has the right to U.S. COOL. The WTO, however, found less favorably to the U.S. in its implementation method, stating that COOL's current implementation creates a "less favorable treatment to imported cattle" and requested that the U.S. create an implementation process that complies with its obligations under agreement with the WTO. Just last month, KCA contacted the President of the United States, Congress and USDA Secretary Vilsack providing recommendations to maintain the implementation of COOL and stressed that the U.S. is bound by a constitution rather than world law. KCA provided recommendations so that the U.S. would move forward with COOL, and KCA also encouraged improvement in the labeling to include a more predominant label on packaging.

In the 2012 Farm Bill drafts, COOL is once again a force to contend with. As Congress moved through the Farm Bill process, KCA continued to encourage legislators to maintain COOL within the Farm Bill. The Senate version does maintain COOL, while the House of Representatives asked USDA to define how it intends to create implementation structure for the program. And, although the 2012 Farm Bill is not yet in place, KCA has maintained its coalitions with both agriculture and consumer groups to not only maintain COOL but improve labeling standards. KCA has been in contact with, not just the Kansas delegation, but other legislators and is working with national organizations to stress the imperativeness of country of origin labeling. Although opponents of COOL may attempt to distract from the support in Congress, COOL has legislative champions, including Senators, Mike Enzi, Tim Johnson, Claire McCaskill and Mike Bennett. Moreover, KCA is encouraged by the support of the administration and specifically USDA Secretary Vilsack's commitment, according to one of his recent letters, to ensuring information of origin is provided to consumers.

Today, COOL is still in effect. Muscle cuts can be found with a "Product of USA" label on many, while labeling of ground beef remains vague, with no definite single origin labeling. However, COOL has come the distance since 2002 when it was first introduced, and KCA is working to keep improving it. While it is still found on meat packages in the largest U.S. grocery chains, Hyvee, Price Choppers, Whole Foods, and Apple Market retail grocers all showcase country of origin labels. KCA continues to support COOL and consistently works on promoting and improving the program for both the benefit of producers and consumers.