
**Agriculture & Natural Resources
Committee**

HJM 4000

Brief Description: Requesting action to reach agreement on a mandatory country-of-origin labeling system for certain foods and commodities.

Sponsors: Representatives Morrell, Kretz, Pettigrew, Hinkle, Kristiansen, Grant, B. Sullivan, Buri, Ahern, Newhouse, Dickerson, Hudgins and Conway.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Memorializes Congress and the Executive Branch of the federal government to implement a mandatory country-of-origin labeling system for certain food products by September 30, 2007.

Hearing Date: 2/19/07

Staff: Jasmine Vasavada (786-5793).

Background:

The 2002 Farm Act amended the federal Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 to require mandatory country of origin labeling (COOL) of food at the retail level. Commodities covered by the law include beef, lamb, and pork; farm-raised and wild fish and shellfish; perishable agricultural commodities such as fresh fruits and vegetables; and peanuts.

The 2002 Act states, with few exceptions, that a retailer may use a "United States country of origin" label if the product is from an animal that was exclusively born, raised, and slaughtered in the United States. To convey country-of-origin information to consumers, retailers may use a label, stamp, mark, placard, or other clear and visible sign on the covered commodity, or on the package, display, holding unit, or bin containing the commodity at the final point of consumption. The law requires the entire supply chain, from the farm to the retail store, to maintain certified records that track and document the origin of covered commodities. Food-service establishments, such as restaurants, bars, food stands, and similar facilities, are exempt.

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Under the 2002 Farm Act and the 2002 federal Supplemental Appropriations Act, the Secretary of Agriculture is directed to develop rules for mandatory COOL. The rule for labeling of fish and shellfish was published in the Federal Register October 5, 2004, and became effective April 4, 2005. However, for other covered commodities, implementation of the COOL program has been twice delayed, most recently as part of the Fiscal Year 2006 Agriculture Appropriations law. Mandatory COOL is now designated to begin September 30, 2008 for these other commodities.

Bills have been introduced in January 2007 in the 110th Congress (S404/HR357) to move up the implementation date of the mandatory COOL program to September 30, 2007. In the 109th Congress, a coalition of food industry associations and companies supported legislation that would replace the mandatory labeling requirement with a voluntary one. This "Food Promotion Act," has not yet been reintroduced in the 110th Congress.

Summary of Bill:

The joint memorial requests that Congress and the Executive Branch work to reach agreement on a mandatory country-of-origin labeling system covering beef, lamb, pork, poultry, perishable agricultural commodities, and peanuts, to take effect September 30, 2007.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.