

## FOR THE COOL – CONGRESS REPEALS COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN LABELING RULE FOR BEEF AND PORK

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On Friday, December 18, Congress repealed the country-of-origin labeling rule (“COOL”) for beef and pork with a measure added to the omnibus budget bill, which President Barack Obama signed into law the same day. With the repeal of COOL for muscle cut and ground beef and pork, consumers will be hard-pressed to figure out whether the steaks, hamburgers, and pork chops on their plates were raised and slaughtered in the United States or abroad.

COOL is a labeling law that requires suppliers and retailers to provide country of origin and, in some instances, method of production information to consumers regarding the source of certain foods referred to as “covered commodities.” Food products covered by the law include, among other items, muscle cut and ground meats; lamb, goat, and chicken; wild and farm-raised fish and shellfish; fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables; peanuts, pecans, and macadamia nuts; and ginseng.

The decision to repeal COOL comes on the heels of a ruling from the World Trade Organization (“WTO”) finding the labels discriminate against meat raised and slaughtered in countries other than the U.S. Earlier this month, the WTO allowed Mexico and Canada—America’s second and third largest agricultural export markets—to impose more than \$1 billion in retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods if the labels were not removed. A wide range of industries lobbied Congress to remove the labeling requirement out of fear that the tariffs would extend to U.S. exports other than meat, including jewelry, furniture, frozen orange juice, and mattresses. Opponents of the repeal, however, argued that the U.S. could also see an influx of cattle and hog imports from Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, and Japan. Small ranchers fear a flood of cattle imports will depress prices and make it difficult for them to survive.

The USDA plans to amend COOL regulations as expeditiously as possible to reflect the repeal of the pork and beef provisions. Indeed, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack already released a statement regarding the repeal of COOL, making it clear that “[e]ffective immediately, the USDA will no longer enforce the COOL requirements for muscle cuts of beef and pork, and ground beef and pork.” All meat, however, will still undergo inspection by the USDA before it heads into grocery stores, supermarkets, and club warehouses.

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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