April 2, 2013

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC  20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

The undersigned 229 farm, rural, faith, environmental and consumer organization write in strong support of a regulatory change to the Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) requirements for meat that will provide consumers with additional and more accurate information about the source of their food. The information age has touched nearly every part of daily life in the United States. Americans want to know more about just about everything they own or consume, and that includes knowing the origins of their food.

More than 20 state legislatures are considering bills that demand more information about how food is produced and gets passed along to the consumer through labeling. These legislative efforts as well as enthusiasm for local food systems are clear indications that consumers want more information about their food, especially where it was produced.

In 2002, after years of effort by consumers and farmers, mandatory country-of-origin labels for meats, poultry, vegetables, fruits, and some nuts were included in the Farm Bill, which were then expanded in 2008. A recent ruling at the World Trade Organization (WTO) required the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to change the regulations that implement COOL in order to comply with the WTO restrictions.

The only acceptable way to respond to the WTO challenge is to make labels more informative for consumers, not water them down. U.S. farmers and ranchers are proud of what they produce and should be allowed to promote their products. Consumers deserve clear, direct, and informative labels. Providing more accurate labels with more information is a win-win situation for producers and consumers alike.

Our organizations urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture to strengthen the rules for COOL, which will allow farmers and ranchers to take pride in their products and allow the American public to know the origins of their food and make more informed food purchasing decisions.

Sincerely,

Organizations

350 Berks & Lehigh Valley Climate Action (PA)  Ambler Environmental Advisory Council
Abby's Health and Nutrition (FL)  Ambler Food Coop (PA)
Adams Farm Slaughterhouse (MA)  American Agriculture Movement
Agricultural Missions, Inc. (NY)  American Corn Growers Institute for Public Policy
Alabama Contract Poultry Growers Association  American Federation of Government Employees
Alaska Farmers Union  (AFL-CIO), Local 3354, USDA-St. Louis
Alliance for a Sustainable Future (PA)  American Grassfed Association
Montana Farmers Union
Murray County (OK) Independent Cattlemen's Association
Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative (OK)
National Association of Counties
National Association of Farm Animal Welfare
National Catholic Rural Life Conference
National Consumers League
National Cooperative Grocers Association (NCGA)
National Family Farm Coalition
National Farmers Organization
National Farmers Union
National Grange
National Hmong American Farmers, Inc.
National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association
National Organic Coalition
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Wildlife Federation
National Women Involved in Farm Economics
Nature Abounds (PA)
Nebraska Farmers Union
Nebraska State Grange
Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society
Nebraska Wildlife Federation
Nebraska Women Involved in Farm Economics (NE WIFE)
New England Farmers Union
New Entry Sustainable Farming Project
North Dakota Farmers Union
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance
Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. - CT
Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. - NH
Northeast Organic Farming Association, Interstate Council (NOFA-IC)
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Northern Plains Resource Council (MT)
Northern Wisconsin Beef Producers
Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance (MA)
Oglala Sioux Livestock and Land Owners Association (SD)
Ohio Environmental Stewardship Alliance
Ohio Farmers Union
Oregon Farmers Union
Oregon Rural Action
Organic Consumers Association
Organic Farmers' Agency for Relationship Marketing (OFARM)
Organic Seed Alliance
Organic Seed Growers and Trade Association (OSGATA)
Organic Valley
Organically Grown Company (OR)
Organization for Competitive Markets
Partnership for Earth Spirituality
Peach Bottom Concerned Citizens Group (PBCCG) (PA)
Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture
Pennsylvania Farmers Union
Pennypack Farm and Education Center (PA)
Pesticide Action Network North America
Plan it 4 Planet (MI)
Powder River Basin Resource Council (WY)
Progress Ohio
Progressive Agriculture Organization (PA)
ProgressNow New Mexico
Public Citizen
R-CALF United Stockgrowers of America
Rainbow Natural Grocery (MS)
Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Western American Province
Religious Sisters of Charity
The Resilience Hub/Portland Maine Permaculture
Revisional International (CO)
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union
Rosebud Protective Association (MT)
Rural Advancement Foundation International - USA (RAFI-USA)
Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural
Rural Development Leadership Network (NY)
Rural Vermont
The Second Chance Foundation
Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia (PA)
Slow Food Nebraska
Small Planet Institute
South Dakota Farmers Union
South Dakota Stockgrowers Association
South Dakota Stockgrowers Association
Southwest Environmental Center (NM)
Sustain LA
Sustainable Food Center (TX)
Sustainable Living Systems
Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Assoc.
Tooling, Manufacturing and Technologies Assoc.
Trappe Landing Farm & Native Sanctuary
U.S. Cattlemen's Association
U.S. Public Interest Research Group (USPIRG)
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries
UrbiCulture Community Farms (CO)
Utah Farmers Union
Virginia Association for Biological Farming
Virginia Citizens Consumer Council
Washington Biotechnology Action Council
Washington Farmers Union
Weiser River Resource Council (ID)
Western Colorado Congress
Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC)
Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
WhyHunger
Willimantic Food Cooperative (CT)
Winter Garden Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (TX)
Wisconsin Farmers Union
Wisconsin State AFL-CIO
Women Involved in Farm Economics (WIFE)
Women, Food and Agriculture Network