

Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling



Congress first enacted Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (MCOOL) in the 2002 Farm Bill, requiring retailers to clearly label certain food products with their country of origin. Surveys show that the overwhelming majority of US consumers continue to support country of origin labeling.

MCOOL requirements support market transparency for farmers and ranchers while instilling confidence by consumers in the food products they purchase.

In 2015, the World Trade Organization made a controversial ruling against the United States on behalf of Canada and Mexico,

challenging US MCOOL requirements for beef and pork. Rather than face billions of dollars in retaliatory tariffs, Congress opted to repeal MCOOL requirements for beef and pork.

Under the Biden administration, the USDA has made progress on Country of Origin Labeling, including a rule requiring all meat, poultry, dairy and egg products using the voluntary “Product of the USA” label to come from animals born, raised, slaughtered and processed in the US. This rule, which requires compliance by January 1, 2026, closes a previous loophole taken advantage of by multinational meatpacking companies, which allowed the label for products imported from abroad and simply processed in the US, confusing consumers and undermining independent US producers. **Without swift legislative action, however, this USDA rule is vulnerable to be struck down by a future administration. Legislative action is also still needed to reinstate and strengthen MCOOL, as the “Product of the USA” label remains voluntary for many products.**

43 - 48%

of consumers reported that they always or most of the time look for the “Product of USA” label when buying meat products.

Only 16% of consumers identified the correct definition for the “Product of USA” claim.

63% gave an incorrect definition, with most thinking the claim means that all production steps take place in the US.

Source: USDA Survey, 2022

Consumers deserve to know where their food comes from, want to support their local food producers, and should be able to trust that food labels provide accurate information. Farmers and ranchers, in turn, should have opportunities to market their products without unfair competition from multinational agribusinesses. **Legislation that strengthens MCOOL is an opportunity to achieve these goals!**

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Expanding and clarifying MCOOL regulations will restore market integrity and fair competition for US producers, while allowing consumers to make fully informed purchasing decisions. **The following bills provide additional regulatory support for MCOOL.**

American Beef Labeling Act (S.52) & Country of Origin Labeling Enforcement Act (HR.5081)

The bipartisan American Beef Labeling Act (S.52) reinstates MCOOL for beef, and stipulates that all beef marked as a Product of the United States must come from cattle born, raised, and slaughtered in the US. The bill also requires the Office of the US Trade Representative to develop a means of reinstating MCOOL that complies with all WTO rules.



Farm System Reform Act (S.271)/(HR.797)

Title III of the Farm System Reform Act reinstates MCOOL for beef and pork, and includes dairy products (milk, cheese, butter, etc.) as covered commodities. The Act also requires that meat products labeled "Product of the USA" are born, raised, and slaughtered within the US.



Improving Agriculture, Research, Cultivation, Timber, and Indigenous Commodities (ARCTIC) Act (S.2354)

Like meat processors, multinational seafood companies often domestically process their foreign-caught seafood so that it can be labeled "Product of the USA", undermining market viability for local US fishermen. The Improving ARCTIC Act helps to close this loophole by including cooked crab as a covered commodity under MCOOL, and stipulating that seafood labeled as "Wild USA Seafood" must be caught in US waters.



Photo by Kenneth J. Gill