

March 11, 2026

The Honorable Jamieson Greer  
United States Trade Representative  
Office of the United States Trade Representative  
600 17th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20508

Dear Ambassador Greer,

The current review of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) presents an important opportunity to address problems in agricultural markets in North America. Improving transparency, especially through mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) for meat, should be a priority for the review. Increased transparency would contribute to fairer prices for producers and allow consumers to make informed choices about their purchases.

A broad coalition of consumer, farmer, rancher, commodity, faith-based and rural groups worked for years to advocate for mandatory COOL for fruits and vegetables, seafood, meat, and poultry. In 2008, Congress passed a Farm Bill that required mandatory COOL for fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables, seafood, certain nuts, and meat and poultry sold in grocery stores. But in 2015, Congress repealed mandatory labeling for beef and pork, after the World Trade Organization (WTO) ruled against the United States in a challenge to COOL regulations for meat brought by Canada and Mexico. The short window of mandatory labeling requirements showed that labeling can benefit U.S. producers: the adoption of mandatory COOL led to a steady price increase for U.S. cattle, and the repeal of mandatory COOL for beef triggered a price drop.

COOL is broadly supported by the public. A 2017 Consumer Federation of America survey found that 89 percent of consumers support country of origin labeling. Moreover, a 2022 poll found that 77 percent of respondents said it is important that the beef they purchase be born, raised, and harvested in the United States. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) assessed consumer interest in meat origin labeling in 2024 as it updated the rules for voluntary "Product of USA" labels on meat. A study commissioned by the USDA found that "eligible consumers were willing to pay more for meat products bearing the 'Product of USA' claim versus products without this claim" and that "eligible consumers were willing to pay a premium for meat products where more production steps take place in the United States over meat products that were just processed in the United States."

With rising imports and market concentration, COOL is more critical than ever. As the U.S. cattle herd continues to contract, due to drought and unsustainable market conditions, multinational meatpackers are importing beef at record levels, with about 16 percent of U.S. consumption coming from imports. The recent announcement that the United States will allow more imports of Argentinian beef, supposedly as a response to high beef prices at retail, offers a clear example of the impact on U.S. producers. While it is unlikely this will affect the prices consumers pay for beef, futures prices for feeder cattle fell in the month following the

announcement. And without mandatory COOL, U.S. consumers have no way to express any preference or disapproval of these imports because they are largely invisible in the retail marketplace.

Trade policy should not prevent common sense popular measures like COOL that help markets function properly and facilitate competition. Mandatory COOL facilitates fair competition by providing accurate information in the marketplace. With mandatory COOL, U.S. producers can communicate their products' attributes, including being produced under U.S. rules for safety, quality and environmental impact. And consumers can make informed decisions based on their priorities, like supporting U.S. producers or reducing food miles. Without mandatory COOL, the market is operating with incomplete information.

The USMCA review process presents an important opportunity to negotiate a new solution to this ongoing problem. This could be accomplished through the inclusion of an annex on Transparency in Food Labeling to the USMCA Chapter on Technical Barriers to Trade in which the three countries agree not to bring challenges to COOL and related food labeling issues to the WTO, followed by ongoing negotiations to permanently carve out measures related to transparency in food labeling from trade disputes.

We urge you to ensure that trade policy is no longer an impediment to market transparency and consumer choice. As you negotiate with Canada and Mexico, focus on the path towards restoring mandatory COOL and ensuring that global trade rules are not used as an excuse for preventing this crucial information from being provided in the marketplace.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment

Citizens Trade Campaign

Coalition for a Prosperous America

Consumer Federation of America

Family Farm Defenders

Farm Action

Farm Action Fund

Farm Aid

Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance

Food & Water Watch

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

National Consumers League

National Family Farm Coalition

National Farmers Union

North American Marine Alliance

Public Citizen

R-CALF USA

RAFI

United Food & Commercial Workers International Union

United States Cattlemen's Association

Western Organization of Resource Councils

Women, Food, and Agriculture Network

State/Regional Organizations

Ashtabula, Geauga, Lake Counties Farmers Union (Ohio)

Buckeye Quality Beef Association

Dakota Rural Action

Dakota Resource Council

Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement

Land Stewardship Project

Missouri Rural Crisis Center

NFO Montana

North Carolina Association of Black Farmers Land Loss Prevention Project

Northeast Organic Farming Association-Interstate Council

Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Hampshire

Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey

Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

Northern Plains Resource Council

Ohio Farmers Union

Powder River Basin Resource Council