



01-12-09

NFU: USDA ignored congressional intent for COOL

By Agri-Pulse Staff

© Copyright Agri-Pulse Communications, Inc.

National Farmers Union (NFU) President Tom Buis reacted with “disappointment” to the Agriculture Department’s release Monday of USDA’s final rule for mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (COOL).

NFU has been a long-time proponent of the labeling law but Buis said that in USDA’s interpretation which will be published in the Federal Register on January 15, “Despite the strong support from Congress, and demands from consumers and producers alike, USDA has chosen to implement COOL in a manner that does not meet Congress’ clear intent, leaving loopholes in place for those willing to circumvent the law. . . COOL is a vital marketing tool and it is imperative it be implemented properly.”

Buis said that “The final rule still contains a loophole that would allow meat packers to use a multiple countries, or NAFTA label, rather than labeling U.S. products as products of the United States. This is misleading to consumers. The intent was to provide country of origin labeling, not trade agreement origin of labeling. If a product is exclusively born, raised and processed in the United States it should be labeled as such.”

Buis also pointed out that “USDA takes great liberty with the definition of ‘processed products,’ effectively leaving several food products without labels and denying consumers the knowledge of their food’s country of origin.”

On the positive side, Buis said “The department recognizes acceptance of producer affidavits to verify compliance, which I am pleased to see.”

Buis made it clear that NFU will continue to press for improvements. He said “COOL was effective Sept. 30, 2008 and NFU had urged the department to withhold final judgment until COOL’s six month trial period had concluded. We will continue to monitor the implementation of COOL and if not implemented properly will not hesitate to go to Congress for changes until COOL is implemented in the best interest of consumers, farmers and ranchers.” For more on the USDA’s final rule for COOL, click: <http://www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/20090112H4.pdf>