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## **Canada asks WTO to rule on COOL**

**By Stewart Doan**

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The Canadian government asked the World Trade Organization Wednesday to rule on the legality of the U.S. country-of-origin labeling (COOL) law.

“The U.S. COOL requirements are so onerous that they affect the ability of our cattle and hog exporters to compete fairly in the U.S. market,” said Stockwell Day, Canada’s Minister of International Trade. “That is why our government has no choice but to request a WTO panel.”

Written into the 2008 Farm Bill, the mandatory U.S. labeling measure requires firms to track and notify customers of the country of origin of meat and other agricultural products at each major stage of production, including at the retail level. The provisions, implemented on Sept. 30, 2008, impose unfair and unnecessary costs on integrated North American supply chains, according to Canadian officials, and have created confusion and uncertainty for livestock industries on both sides of the border.

“Canadian farmers and ranchers produce top-quality food, and they are facing unfair discrimination because of COOL legislation,” said Minister of Agriculture Gerry Ritz.

The U.S. and Canada are each other’s largest agricultural trading partners, with two-way trade in 2008 totaling approximately \$37 billion.

Canada’s request for a WTO dispute settlement panel comes after formal consultations with the Obama administration failed to resolve its concerns over COOL.

In Washington, U.S. officials argued that the labeling program provides information to consumers in a manner consistent with U.S. international trade obligations.

“Countries have agreed since long before the existence of the WTO that country of origin labeling is a legitimate policy. It is common for other countries to require that goods be

labeled as to their origin,” Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk said in a joint statement.

It normally takes up to nine months from the establishment of a dispute settlement panel for its final report to be released to WTO members.

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