

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HJM 4000

As Reported by House Committee On:
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Brief Description: Requesting action to reach agreement on a mandatory country-of-origin labeling system for certain foods and commodities.

Sponsors: Representatives Morrell, Kretz, Pettigrew, Hinkle, Kristiansen, Grant, B. Sullivan, Buri, Ahern, Newhouse, Dickerson, Hudgins and Conway.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 2/19/07, 2/26/07 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Memorializes Congress and the Executive Branch of the federal government to implement a mandatory country-of-origin labeling system for certain food products by September 30, 2007.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives B. Sullivan, Chair; Blake, Vice Chair; Kretz, Ranking Minority Member; Warnick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dickerson, Eickmeyer, Grant, Kagi, Lantz, McCoy, Newhouse, Strow and VanDeWege.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Hailey and Orcutt.

Staff: Jasmine Vasavada (786-5793) and Meg Van Schoorl (786-7105).

Background:

The 2002 Farm Act amended the federal Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 to require mandatory country-of-origin labeling (COOL) of food at the retail level. Commodities covered by the law include beef, lamb, and pork; farm-raised and wild fish and shellfish; perishable agricultural commodities such as fresh fruits and vegetables; and peanuts.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The 2002 Farm Act states, with few exceptions, that a retailer may use a United States country-of-origin label if the product is from an animal that was exclusively born, raised, and slaughtered in the United States. To convey country-of-origin information to consumers, retailers may use a label, stamp, mark, placard, or other clear and visible sign on the covered commodity, or on the package, display, holding unit, or bin containing the commodity at the final point of consumption. The law requires the entire supply chain, from the farm to the retail store, to maintain certified records that track and document the origin of covered commodities. Food-service establishments, such as restaurants, bars, food stands, and similar facilities, are exempt.

Under the 2002 Farm Act and the 2002 Federal Supplemental Appropriations Act, the Secretary of Agriculture is directed to develop rules for mandatory COOL. The rule for labeling of fish and shellfish was published in the Federal Register October 5, 2004, and became effective April 4, 2005. However, for other covered commodities, implementation of the COOL program has been twice delayed, most recently as part of the Fiscal Year 2006 Agriculture Appropriations law. Mandatory COOL is now designated to begin September 30, 2008, for these other commodities.

Bills have been introduced in January 2007 in the 110th Congress (S404/HR357) to move up the implementation date of the mandatory COOL program to September 30, 2007.

Summary of Bill:

The joint memorial requests that Congress and the Executive Branch work to reach agreement on a mandatory country-of-origin labeling system covering beef, lamb, pork, poultry, perishable agricultural commodities, and peanuts, to take effect September 30, 2007.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) We support country-of-origin labeling. This is an important marketing provision and can make our cattle worth more money. Consumers are entitled to know where their food is coming from. Right now, beef can be imported from Alberta and only spend a few hours in this country before being processed and still receive the United States Department of Agriculture Choice stamp. There are health and safety issues when perishable commodities are produced outside the United States under different standards than ours. Our fruit is packed to standards, inspected, and labeled already. We believe poultry should also be included.

(With concerns) Although we support country-of-origin labeling, we would prefer a voluntary program.

(Opposed) Country-of-origin labeling is a marketing provision, not a food safety provision. It should be voluntary. The labeling requirements are only feasible with an individual animal identification program in place that allows for verification. If consumers truly want to identify beef from the United States, they have the opportunity to do so through voluntary labels. More than 50 percent of beef producers currently participate in a voluntary, market-driven program.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Morrell, prime sponsor; Rick Nelson, Washington Cattlemen's Association; and Jim Halstrom, Washington State Horticultural Association.

(With concerns) John Krough, Washington Cattlemen's Association.

(Opposed) Ed Field, Washington Cattle Feeders Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: Jack Field and Jim Sizemore, Washington Cattlemen's Association.