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Public Citizen Applauds Obama Administration's Efforts to Defend Consumer Country of Origin Meat Labeling; Appeal of WTO Ruling Necessary First Step

Statement of Todd Tucker, Research Director, Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch

Public Citizen commends the Obama administration for taking the necessary step of appealing the harmful World Trade Organization (WTO) ruling against U.S. consumer labeling. In November 2011, a WTO panel ruled that the U.S. country of origin labels on meats (COOL) violated the organization's rules.

The implications for this ruling are dire, especially in the context of a decades-long battle to ensure that consumers know the source of their meat. After overcoming countless obstacles, from presidential vetoes to adverse Supreme Court rulings in cases brought by food processors, it was only in 2009 that a meaningful country of origin labeling regime was finally implemented.

The legitimacy of the WTO is likely to be further undermined if the organization's Appellate Body upholds the lower panel ruling. Such an outcome would provide evidence to consumer groups that the WTO allows anti-consumer forces a second (or third) bite at the apple, even when these interests do not succeed in their efforts to undermine consumer safeguards through purely domestic legal and political means."

The Obama administration is considering expanding some of these anti-consumer rules in the first trade deal it is negotiating – the nine-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement. The WTO ruling (and two others in 2011 against dolphin-safe labels on tuna and anti-smoking measures) shows that a new approach to trade agreements is needed – one that puts consumers, the environment and communities first.

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Public Citizen is a national, nonprofit consumer advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C. For more information, please visit www.citizen.org.