June 8, 2015

ATTN: Ag/Trade Leg. Assistant

The Honorable K. Michael Conaway
Chairman, House Agriculture Committee
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member, House Agriculture Committee
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Conaway and Ranking Member Peterson:

The undersigned 283 farm, rural, faith, environmental, labor, farmworker, manufacturer and consumer organizations respectfully urge you to reject the repeal of the Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) law and support commonsense food labeling. Polls show that nine out of ten Americans support COOL. Consumers continue to demand more information about their food and producers want to share that information.

Although the World Trade Organization (WTO) Appellate Body has issued its decision on COOL, the United States has a sovereign right to allow the dispute process to proceed to its completion and then decide how and whether to implement the adverse ruling. Our organizations remain steadfast in their opposition to any efforts to undermine COOL through repeal or any other measures.

It is premature for the Congress to unilaterally surrender to saber-rattling from our trading partners in the midst of a long-standing dispute. COOL opponents have highlighted Mexico and Canada’s threats of retaliation as if their aspiration to seek billions of dollars in penalties were already approved by the WTO. But these unapproved, unrealistically high retaliation claims are merely aggressive litigation tactics designed to frighten the United States — a standard practice in WTO disputes. Congress should not fall for it.

The WTO can only authorize penalties based on the extent to which COOL caused a reduction in the volume and price of livestock imports. But the economic recession was the driving factor behind declining livestock imports, not the application of a simple label.

Cattle imports are higher today than when COOL went into effect and hog imports are rapidly rebounding, even with COOL in place. This straightforward logic is buttressed by a recent economic report from Auburn University that demonstrates that COOL has not impacted the livestock trade and that any harm to our trading partners has in fact been negligible at most.
Moreover, retaliation is only relevant if the United States, Canada and Mexico cannot reach an agreement after the parties have undergone the full WTO arbitration process. In past WTO disputes that the United States has lost, the United States has waited for the process to conclude and then has successfully avoided WTO-authorized trade sanctions by negotiating a settlement with the other country in the dispute.

Finally, the proposed COOL repeal legislation is particularly extreme in that it would roll back commonsense labels that the WTO actually supported or that never even were raised in the WTO dispute. The legislation would repeal COOL for ground beef and ground pork as well as for chicken, but the WTO explicitly ruled that the COOL label on ground meat was WTO-legal, and the dispute never addressed chicken or other covered commodities (including seafood, fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables, goat, venison and some nuts).

COOL is extremely important to our organizations and to the American public. We oppose any legislation that would repeal any portion of the COOL law. We urge Congress to stand up for America’s consumers, farmers and ranchers by rejecting any effort to unilaterally repeal a popular food label even before the WTO process has concluded. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

AFL-CIO
AFL-CIO of Nebraska
Alabama Contract Poultry Growers Association
Alabama State Association of Cooperatives
Alaska Farmers Union
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas
Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO) (MT)
American Agriculture Movement
American Corn Growers Institute for Public Policy
American Federation of Government Employees (AFL-CIO),
Local 3354, USDA-St. Louis
American Federation of State, County and Municipal
Employees Local 2748 (WI)
American Grassfed Association
American Indian Mothers, Inc. (NC)
American Raw Milk Producers Pricing Association
Angelec Organics Learning Center and Farm (IL)
Arkansas Farmers Union
Ashtabula, Geauga, Lake County (OH) Farmers' Union
Berks (PA) Gas Truth
Berkshire Organics (MA)
BioRegional Strategies
Bold Nebraska
Boots on the Ground, LLC
Boston Food & Farm PBC (MA)
Buckeye Quality Beef Association (OH)
Buffalo Mountain Coop (VT)
California Dairy Campaign
California Farmers Union
Campaign for Contract Agriculture Reform
Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment
Caney Fork Headwaters Association (TN)
Carbon County Resource Council (MT)
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (NC)
Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri-Social Services Office/Diocese of Jefferson City
National Catholic Rural Life Conference
Cattle Producers of Louisiana
Cattle Producers of Washington
Center for Earth Spirituality and Rural Ministry (MN)
Center for Family Farm Development (GA)
Center for Food Safety
Center for Foodborne Illness Research & Prevention
Center for Media and Democracy's Food Rights Network
Center for Rural Affairs
Central Co-op (WA)
Chicago Consumer Coalition
Church Women United in New York State
Citizen Action Coalition of Indiana
Citizens for Sanity.Com, Inc. (FL)
City Market Onion River Co-op (VT)
Cleanwater Action Council of Northeast Wisconsin
Coalition for a Prosperous America
Colorado Independent Cattle Growers Association
Communication Workers of America
Communication Workers of America Nebraska State Council
Community Alliance for Global Justice (WA)
Community Farm Alliance (KY)
Community Food and Justice Coalition (CA)
Connecticut Families Against Chemical Trespass
Consumer Action
Consumer Assistance Council, Inc.
Consumer Federation of America
Consumer Federation of California
Consumers Union
Contract Poultry Growers Association of the Virginias
Cooperative Grocer Network
The Cornucopia Institute
Cornucopia Network NJ/TN Chapter
Cottonwood Resource Council (MT)
Crawford Stewardship Project (WI)
Cumberland Countians for Ecojustice (TN)
Dakota Resource Council
Dakota Rural Action of SD
Dawson Resource Council (MT)
Detroit Coalition Against Tar Sands
East New York Farms!/United Community Centers
EcoHermanas
Ecological Farming Association (CA)
The Ecology Center (CA)
The Ecology Party of Florida
Endangered Habitats League (CA)
Equal Exchange
Fair World Project (OR)
Family Farm Defenders (WI)
Farm Aid
Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance
Farmworker Association of Florida
Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund
Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Rural Training and Research Center (AL)
Fiddleheads Natural Food Cooperative (CT)
Florida Alliance for Consumer Protection
Food & Water Watch
Food Chain Workers Alliance
Food Democracy Now!
Food for Maine's Future
Friends of the Earth U.S.
Global Justice Ecology Project
GMO Free New Jersey
GMO Free Pennsylvania
GMO-Free Florida
Grand Forks County Citizens Coalition (ND)
Grassroots International
Grow Youngstown (OH)
Hanover Consumer Cooperative Society, Inc. (NH)
Hawaii Farmers Union United
Hmong National Development, Inc.
Hunger Action Los Angeles
Idaho Organization of Resource Councils
Illinois Farmers Union
Illinois Stewardship Alliance
Independent Beef Association of North Dakota (I-BAND)
Independent Cattlemen of Nebraska
Independent Cattlemen of Wyoming
Independent Cattlemen's Association of Texas
Indian Nations Conservation Alliance
Indiana Farmers Union
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Institute for Rural America (IA)
Nebraska Wildlife Federation
Nebraska Women Involved in Farm Economics
Nebraskans for Peace
Neighboring Food Co-op Association (MA)
Network for Environmental & Economic Responsibility of United Church of Christ
Nebraska Live Stock Association
New England Farmers Union (CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT)
New York National Farmers Organization
New York Women Involved in Farm Economics
NH Right to Know GMO
North Carolina Consumers Council
North Dakota AFL-CIO
North Dakota Farmers Union
Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance
Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. - MA
Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. - NH
Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. - NJ
Northeast Organic Farming Assoc. - NY
Northern New Mexico Stockman's Association
Northern Plains Resource Council (MT)
Northern Wisconsin Beef Producers Assoc.
Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance (MA)
Northwest Farmers Union
Oglala Sioux Livestock and Land Owners Association (SD)
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
Ohio Environmental Council
Ohio Environmental Stewardship Alliance
Ohio Farmers Union
Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project
Operation Spring Plant, Inc. (NC)
Oregon Rural Action
Oregon Rural Action Blue Mountain Chapter Food & Ag Policy Team
Oregonians for Safe Farms and Families
Organic Consumers Association
Organic Farmers' Agency for Relationship Marketing (OFARM)
Organic Seed Alliance
Organic Seed Growers & Trade Association (OSGATA)
Organizacion en California de Lideres Campesinas, Inc.
Organization for Competitive Markets
PCC Natural Markets (WA)
Peach Bottom Concerned Citizens Group (PBCCG) (PA)
Pennsylvania Farmers Union
Pennypack Farm and Education Center (PA)
Pesticide Action Network North America
Powder River Basin Resource Council (WY)
Progressive Agriculture Organization (PA)
Provender Alliance (OR)
Public Citizen
R-CALF United Stockgrowers of America
Raritan Headwaters Association (NJ)
Real Food Challenge (MA)
Real Food for Kids - Montgomery (MD)
Real Pickles Cooperative, Inc. (MA)
Right to Know Minnesota
River Valley Market (MA)
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union
Roots of Change (CA)
Rosebud Protective Association (MT)
Rural & Agricultural Council of America
Rural Advancement Foundation International - USA (RAFI-USA)
Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural
Rural Development Leadership Network (NY)
Rural Vermont
Rutland Area Food Co-op (VT)
Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op (CA)
Seacoast Eat Local (NH)
Slow Food Nebraska
Slow Food USA
Small Planet Institute
Socially Responsible Agricultural Project
Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace, IFPTE Local 2001 (WA, KS)
South Agassiz Resource Council (ND)
The South County Food Co-op (RI)
South Dakota Farmers Union
South Dakota Livestock Auction Markets Association
South Dakota Stockgrowers Association
South Dakota Women Involved in Farm Economics
Southwest Nebraska Women Involved in Farm Economics
Springfield Food Co-op (VT)
Stone Valley Coop & Café (VT)
Texas Farmers Union
Tilth Producers of Washington
Tooling, Manufacturing and Technologies Assoc. (MI)
Toxics Information Project
U.S. Cattlemen's Association
U.S. Public Interest Research Group (USPIRG)
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries
United Steel Workers Local 1188 (ME)
United Steel Workers Local 900 (ME)
Vermont National Farmers Organization
Virginia Association for Biological Farming
Virginia Citizens Consumer Council
Walter's Signs (NJ)
Waterkeeper Alliance
Western Colorado Congress
Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC)
Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Western Wisconsin AFL-CIO
Wild Oats Market (MA)
Willimantic Food Coop (CT)
Wisconsin Fair Trade Coalition
Wisconsin Farmers Union
Women Involved in Farm Economics
Women's Environmental Institute
World Farmers
Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council (MT)