



USDA Photo

Country of Origin Labeling for Meat and Chicken

The Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) program is neither a food safety or traceability program but rather a consumer information program. Food products, both imported and domestic, must meet the food safety standards of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Food safety and traceability are not the stated intent of the rule, and the COOL program does not replace any other established regulatory programs that related to food safety or traceability. The COOL law requires retailers to notify their customers of the country of origin for all commodities covered under this law. Read on for some common questions and answers about COOL.

What government agencies enforce the COOL law?

The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture enforces country of origin labeling regulations for all foods covered under this law.

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) enforces the labeling requirements for labeling of meat, poultry, and egg products, including covered commodities.

Which foods are covered under the COOL law?

Foods that must be labeled with their country of origin are:

- Muscle cuts of beef (including veal), lamb, pork, goat, and chicken;
- Ground beef, ground lamb, ground pork, ground goat, and ground chicken;
- Farm raised fish and shellfish;
- Wild fish and shellfish;
- Perishable agricultural commodities;
- Peanuts, pecans and macadamia nuts;
- Ginseng.

What are the country of origin labeling categories for muscle cuts of meat?

There are four country of origin labeling categories depending on where the animal was born, raised and slaughtered. They are:

1. **Product of the U.S.** – meat from animals born, raised, and slaughtered in the United States or from animals present in the United States on or prior to July 15, 2008.
2. **Product of the U.S., Country X, Country Y**, if applicable - meat from animals born in Country X or (as applicable) Country Y, raised and slaughtered in the United States and were not derived from animals imported for immediate slaughter.
3. **Product of Country X, U.S.** - meat from animals imported into the United States for immediate slaughter, and
4. **Product of Country X**- foreign meat imported into the United States.

Must ground beef have a country of origin label?

Ground meat covered commodities must have a country of origin label listing all countries contained therein or that may be reasonably contained therein. "Reasonable" means when any raw material from a specific origin is not in a processors inventory for more than 60 days, that country should not be included in the string of countries listed in the declaration.

Can foods have a “United States” country of origin designation?

Yes. The law outlines the requirements that must be met for a commodity covered under this law to bear a “United States” country of origin designation.

For beef, pork, lamb, chicken, and goat, meat must be derived from animals exclusively born, raised, and slaughtered in the United States; from animals born and raised in Alaska or Hawaii and transported for a period of not more than 60 days through Canada to the United States and slaughtered in the United States; or from animals present in the United States on or before July 15, 2008, and once present in the United States, remained continuously in the United States.

For covered perishable agricultural commodities, peanuts, pecans, and macadamia nuts, the product must be grown in the United States to bear a U.S. origin claim. Domestic and imported perishable agricultural commodities, peanuts, pecans, macadamia nuts, and ginseng may use State, regional, or locality designations in lieu of country of origin labeling.

Must processed food products have a country of origin label?

Processed food products (such as hot dogs) do not require country of origin labeling (COOL). As an

example, processed food means a retail item derived from a commodity covered under this law that

1. has undergone specific processing resulting in a change of character (for example, cooking, curing, smoking, restructuring) or
2. has been combined with another food component.

Examples of processed meat items not required to bear COOL are: teriyaki flavored pork loin, breaded chicken tenders, or fish sticks. However, many imported items are still required to be marked with country of origin information. Meat items, such as marinated lamb loins, that are imported in consumer-ready packages must be labeled with country of origin information because both Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and FSIS regulations require meat that is imported in consumer-ready packages to be labeled with origin information on the package.

Are meat markets or butcher shops required to follow the COOL law?

No, only those retailers licensed under the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act are subject to the COOL regulation.

For additional information, visit <http://www.ams.usda.gov> and click on Country of Origin Labeling (COOL).

Food Safety Questions?

Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline

If you have a question about meat, poultry, or egg products, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline toll free at

1-888-MPHotline
(1-888-674-6854);

TTY: 1-800-256-7072.



The hotline is open year-round Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

ET (English or Spanish). Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day. Check out the FSIS Web site at www.fsis.usda.gov.

Send E-mail questions to MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov.

Ask Karen!

FSIS' automated response system can provide food safety information 24/7 and a live chat during Hotline hours.



AskKaren.gov