

Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) – Final Rule

The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) has issued a final rule for the mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) program required by the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills. The final rule is published in the [January 15, 2009 Federal Register](#) and is effective on March 16, 2009. It contains definitions, requirements for consumer notification and product marking, and recordkeeping responsibilities of both retailers and suppliers of covered commodities.

The rule covers muscle cuts and ground beef, lamb, chicken, goat, and pork; wild and farm-raised fish and shellfish; perishable agricultural commodities (specifically, fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables); macadamia nuts; pecans; ginseng; and peanuts. A commodity covered under COOL must be labeled at retail to indicate its country of origin. For fish and shellfish, the method of production—wild or farm-raised—must be specified.

Excluded from COOL labeling are items derived from a covered commodity that has undergone a physical or chemical change—such as cooking, curing, or smoking—or that has been combined with other covered commodities or other substantive food components such as chocolate, breadings, and tomato sauce. Also exempt are food service establishments, such as restaurants, lunchrooms, cafeterias, food stands, bars, lounges, and similar enterprises.

The final rule outlines the requirements for labeling covered commodities and the recordkeeping requirements for retailers and suppliers. The rule prescribes specific criteria that must be met for a covered commodity to bear a “United States country of origin” declaration. In addition, the rule also contains provisions for labeling covered commodities of foreign origin, meat products from multiple origins, ground meat products, as well as commingled covered commodities.

The USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) will continue a period of informed compliance for this regulation by conducting an active industry education and outreach program concerning the provisions of the final rule through March 2009. The AMS will begin audits of firms that supply retailers with covered commodities in July 2009.

[COOL Regulation and Guidance Documents, Including Frequently Asked Questions](#)

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