



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

OCT 31 2001

Mr. Leland Swenson
National Farmers Union
400 North Capitol Street, NW., Suite 790
Washington, D.C. 20001

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Dear Mr. Swenson:

Thank you for your April 3, 2001, letter about a petition to create a voluntary certification program for a "Beef: Made in the USA" label for use by the beef industry and in support of mandatory country-of-origin labeling of meat products and fruits and vegetables.

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) of the Department of Agriculture (USDA) prepared a report to Congress on the subject of country-of-origin labeling. The January 2000 report was in response to a directive from the Conference Report accompanying the Fiscal Year (FY) 1999 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, which was incorporated into P.L. 105-277.

The Conference Report accompanying the FY 2000 Agriculture Appropriations Act, P.L. 106-387, directed the Secretary of Agriculture to determine the best terms to use on labels of beef products to inform consumers that beef products are U.S. products. The Conference Report stated that the lack of clarity regarding the definition of the terms "U.S. cattle" and "U.S. fresh beef products" hinders the ability of U.S. producers, who raise and handle cattle from birth to slaughter, to promote their products.

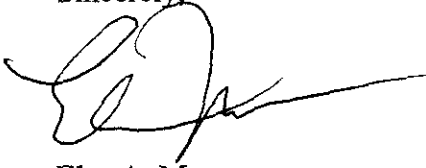
As you may know, FSIS sought public comment and information on an advance notice of proposed rulemaking that would assist the agency in establishing a clear working definition of "United States cattle" and "United States fresh beef products" for labeling purposes. FSIS also requested comments on whether such beef products should bear labeling claims that are different from the claims that are permitted under FSIS' current policy. Your correspondence is being included in the public record of this docket.

With regard to an industry petition submitted last year asking for the creation of a voluntary U.S. beef certification program, USDA has determined that a voluntary certification program does not require a change in present FSIS regulations on the use of terms such as "Product of the U.S.A." or "Made in the USA." As a result, the Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs has directed the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) to begin action on the petition requesting a voluntary, user-fee funded USDA certification program that would allow for a label for beef products. The Under Secretary also has asked AMS to conduct an expeditious review and to ensure that all segments of the industry are aware of this initiative. Such a voluntary certification program would allow the beef industry to develop its marketing programs using USDA certification to verify marketing claims.

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We recognize that these matters are of considerable significance to various segments of the beef industry, and we will do our best in addressing them in a reasonable and comprehensive fashion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elsa A. Murano', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Elsa A. Murano
Under Secretary
Food Safety