

AGRICULTURE COMMISSIONER  
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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
State of North Dakota  
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Bismarck, ND 58505-0020

October 5, 2001

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FSIS Docket Clerk, Docket #00-036A,  
USDA, FSIS  
Room 102 Cotton Annex Building  
300 12th Street SW  
Washington, DC 20250-3700

Dear Sir/Madam:

I have reviewed the information contained in the advance notice of proposed rulemaking (ANPR) regarding the definitions and labeling of "United States cattle" and "United States fresh beef products," dated August 7, 2001. You have requested comments on the proposed rulemaking, and I would, therefore, like to share my views.

I have been very supportive of efforts to enact country of origin legislation on both the state and federal levels. Country of origin labels provide consumers with the information they need to make informed choices and purchases. Consumers are not the only beneficiaries. Farmers and ranchers will benefit as they will be rewarded by consumers in the marketplace for their high quality commodities and food products.

The current FSIS labeling terms such as "U.S.A Beef" or "Fresh American Beef" can only be used on products derived from cattle born, raised, slaughtered, and processed in the United States. However, other labeling terms such as "Product of the U.S.A." are allowed on product that has only been *prepared* in the United States. Current labeling terms that do not have the same meaning do not allow consumers to differentiate between products. These terms are confusing and misleading. Furthermore, this is false advertising and creates an unfair advantage for imported product.

Cattle raised and slaughtered in another country should not be considered U.S. products. Cattle finished in the United States, but born and raised for a period of time in another country should not be considered U.S. products. In addition to unfair marketing advantages for foreign products, there are animal health and food safety concerns. Foreign animal diseases such as Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy are of particular concern. American consumers deserve to have accurate labeling information concerning the origin of their meat products in order to make

informed choices. Livestock that is not born, raised, slaughtered and processed in the United States is not a "Product of the U.S.A." and should not be labeled as such.

Any of the current terms, such as those listed above, could be suitable terminology that would convey that cattle and fresh beef products are products of the U.S.A. The most important consideration is that these terms are used consistently. Presently, existing similar phrases convey something entirely different (such as what now exists with the "Product of U.S.A." label). This is confusing to consumers reading the labels and to processors using the labels. It also diminishes the significance of labels such as "'U.S.A. Beef" that are true and accurate.

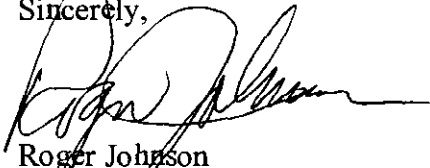
The cost involved with changing and enforcing new labeling rules will be significant. The changes will benefit many groups including consumers, cattle producers and meat processors. Therefore, the costs should be shared among these entities or covered by the government. Because these costs and efforts will be quite significant, attention also needs to be placed on marketing the new label so it has real meaning to the consumer.

Country of origin labeling and the use of labeling terminology that is accurate, consistent and well enforced will provide consumers with the information they need to make informed choices about the products they buy for their families. It will also allow our farmers and ranchers to differentiate their high quality products in the marketplace.

If you have any further question, you may contact Dr. Andrea Grondahl at (701) 328-4762.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roger Johnson', written over a horizontal line.

Roger Johnson  
Agriculture Commissioner

RJ:ag