



**NATIONAL
FARMERS
UNION**

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April 3, 2001

Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman
United States Department of Agriculture
14th Street and Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

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Dear Ms. Secretary:

On behalf of the 300,000 independent family farmer and rancher members of the National Farmers Union (NFU), I am writing to urge you to support mandatory country-of-origin labeling for meat products, including lamb, beef and pork, and fruit and vegetable products. Specifically, I urge you to reject any voluntary labeling initiatives, especially those that specify that a product of foreign origin can be labeled a U.S. product.

As you know, last year in September certain industry groups petitioned USDA to create a voluntary U.S. beef certification program enabling cattle producers, beef processors and retail grocers to participate in a system to promote "Beef: Made in the USA." According to their proposal, the certification system would allow beef to be labeled "Beef: Made in the USA" if the cattle have been raised and fed in the United States for at least 100 days. This means that cattle raised in a foreign country and then shipped to the U.S. at least 100 days prior to slaughter could receive the USDA "Made in the USA" label. We believe this form of labeling is inadequate and misleading. It not only misinforms consumers, but it is unfair to producers whose cattle are born and raised in the United States. In addition, the proposal is exclusive as it only applies to beef products.

In light of the recent infectious animal diseases, BSE and Foot and Mouth, spreading throughout the world, it is critical that a labeling system accurately reflects the origin of all agricultural products. We must protect the integrity of our domestic livestock industry and truthfully inform consumers. Needless to say, it would be devastating to our livestock industry and consumers' confidence, if an infected animal (or product) entered the U.S. and received the "Made in the USA," label. Therefore, we need to ensure the highest standards for all our agricultural products, and this standard is simply met when products identified as "U.S." originate from an animal or commodity that is born, raised, grown, slaughtered and processed in the U.S.

Clearly, the proposal advocated by the groups who petitioned USDA represents a flawed attempt and will confuse consumers by identifying a product as being of U.S. origin, when in fact it is not. We strenuously urge you to reject the petition and provide a labeling system that truly reflects the origin of agricultural products.

Thank you for your consideration of this concern. We look forward to working with you and the Department in crafting country of origin labeling provisions that benefit both consumers and U.S. producers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Leland Swenson".

Leland Swenson