Mr. William T. Hawks
Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Dear Under Secretary Hawks,

My name is April N. Eaton and I am a concerned mother writing to urge you to come up with simple, effective guidelines for the mandatory country of origin labeling program, such as those recommended by the Americans for Country of Origin Labeling coalition.

Consumers deserve more information about the food we feed to our families, and where it was produced. This seems even more urgent now, as food safety and disease outbreaks have occurred with disturbing regularity around the world in recent years. Without country of origin labeling, I cannot make an informed decision about what I am buying, and I cannot use my purchasing power to support domestic farmers and producers. I understand that there is much controversy about how to implement mandatory country of origin labeling, and I urge you to keep several points in mind as you develop the rules.

Retailers and packers have already signaled their intent to put a greater burden on suppliers than is required by the Farm Bill. For example, some packers are demanding that producers obtain a third-party certification of origin. This is unnecessary and unfair to small producers who already face enough obstacles. Any labeling program should place a record-keeping burden only on processors/packers, and instructing processors and retailers to add country of origin information to existing paperwork transactions.

In addition, USDA should maximize the number of foods that will be labeled. Enhancing a covered product by adding water, flavoring, salt, or other seasoning should not exclude it from the labeling requirements, nor should cooking, curing, or roasting.

In summary, I urge you to make sure that the rules for mandatory country of origin labeling live up to their potential, and allow me to know where my food is produced, just as I know where other consumer goods like clothing are produced. I already pay extra money for quality foods that are grown organically and on locally grown foods, I would be happy to know where more of my food comes from so that I can continue to support local and organic farmers. Thank you.

Sincerely,

April N. Eaton

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