GROCERY OUTLET
Bargains Only!™

April 8, 2003

The Honorable Ann Veneman
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
Country of Origin Labeling Program
Agricultural Marketing Service
Stop 0249 Room 2092-S
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-0249

Re: Comments on Guidelines for Voluntary Country of Origin Labeling Program

Dear Secretary Veneman:

We are writing in response to your request for comments on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) "Guidelines for the Interim Voluntary Country of Origin Labeling of Beef, Lamb, Pork, Fish, Perishable Agricultural Commodities, and Peanuts."

As an independent food retailer of a Grocery Outlet store, the law holds me responsible for informing consumers of the country of origin of all non-processed beef, pork, lamb, fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables, fresh and frozen seafood (for which we must also identify the method of production), and peanuts that are sold in our retail stores. Only my suppliers know the country of origin of these products. I cannot look at a hand of bananas and know whether it is from Costa Rica or Guatemala; I cannot look at a pound of shrimp and know whether it was farm-raised or wild-caught. **USDA must issue regulations that will hold suppliers responsible for giving me complete, accurate and verifiable information.**

Moreover, the requirement to keep two years of records in my store on the country of origin of every covered commodity would be extremely difficult to say the least. Most of these perishable products are sold and consumed within a few days. As a relatively small retailer, I simply do not have the physical or electronic storage capacity to keep two years worth of records on the country of origin of every covered commodity in my store.

Please issue clear and reasonable regulations quickly that will allow me to comply with the law without putting me out of business or limiting my ability to continue to provide consumers with a fresh and abundant supply of food products.

Sincerely,

Steve & Debbie Bickley

Steve & Debbie Bickley
Pleasant Hill Grocery Outlet
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Pleasant Hill, CA 94523