Store Support Center
750 West Center Street
West Bridgewater, MA 02379

Mail: P.O. Box 600
East Bridgewater MA 02333

April 8, 2003

The Honorable Ann Veneman
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

RE: Country of Origin Labeling Program

Dear Secretary Veneman:

I am writing to urge you to hold suppliers – not just retailers – responsible for accurately determining the country of origin of meat, fish and produce, as required by the Farm Bill. I am a Floral Buyer for Shaw's Supermarkets, Inc. Shaw's Supermarkets is headquartered in West Bridgewater, Massachusetts and operates 185 stores throughout New England.

Suppliers are the only ones who can determine a product's country of origin accurately. We can't tell by looking at bananas whether they were grown in Honduras or Costa Rica or by looking at beef whether it was born, raised and slaughtered in the U.S. If the USDA truly wants to implement a program to provide consumers with accurate country of origin information on fresh products, the USDA must require suppliers to provide information to retailers - preferably directly on the products - and the USDA must hold suppliers accountable for the accuracy of the country of origin determinations that they make. Requiring retailers to audit their suppliers for the accuracy of their country of origin determinations would be extremely unfair.

Shaw's Supermarkets fully intends to comply with the law when country of origin labeling becomes mandatory on September 30, 2004 and we would like to institute a voluntary program before then. But, rest assured, we certainly will not label voluntarily if we have to audit our suppliers for the accuracy of what they tell us and then be liable for their errors.

Sincerely,

Valerie Johnson

Valerie Johnson
Buyer

cc: USDA AMS Docket
Room 2085-S
Mail Stop 0299
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250-0299