

How Do I Know Where My Meat Comes From?

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We are in the age of consumer's right-to-know. And, as a farmer, I get that. They want to know where their meat and other food comes from. Consumers are a little nervous about what happened recently in Washington, D.C.

Last week, the omnibus spending bill was passed by congress and the President signed it. It is now law. This bill contained the provision to repeal COOL (country of origin labeling). COOL allows consumers to know where their meat is born, raised and harvested. Information is good, right? And I don't disagree with that. So why would congress pass a bill that repeals the right for consumers to know where their meat comes from?

No, there are no conspiracy theories. No, the provision was not secretly put into the bill. No, congress isn't try to pull the wool over consumer's eyes. No, this is not about Monsanto. It comes down to *retaliation*. Retaliation from two of our most important trading partners.

Here is why.

The reason COOL was repealed is because the U.S. is part of the WTO (world trade organization) and the countries of Canada and Mexico both felt the labeling requirement of pork and beef was discriminatory towards their countries. Why? Because when animals are transported into the U.S. for processing, the packing plants need to keep the animals segregated so they can label them appropriately. Both Canada and Mexico felt the additional cost of keeping the animals segregated was discriminatory towards them, resulting in an unfair competitive advantage for the U.S.

And the WTO agreed.

Four times, the WTO agreed with Canada and Mexico and gave them permission to retaliate to the tune of \$1,000,000,000 in tariffs. As a pig farmer, the talk was Canada was going to put 100% tariffs on U.S. pork. *And that is a very big deal*. Canada and Mexico are our #2 and #3 export markets. The U.S. exports approximately 25% of our pork. Currently, the price of pork is below what it costs to produce it. Imagine having your #2 and #3 export markets being hit significantly on top of low prices. *The retaliatory tariffs would be devastating for the pork industry.*

Because the repeal is now law, there are a number of questions about how consumers will know where their meat comes from. And as a farmer, I understand consumer's reaction. Here are a few things to keep in mind as we go forward.

- Retail companies can still voluntarily put country of origin labeling information on their meat packages.

- Your meat is still *safe*. Both meat produced in the U.S. and abroad are required to follow USDA standards. COOL was never about food safety - it was only information about where the animals were born, raised and harvested.
- China will **NOT** be exporting meat into the U.S. China is not an approved meat export to the U.S. In fact, only 27 countries can export meat to the U.S., which includes Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Honduras, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Northern Ireland, Poland, San Marino, Spain and Uruguay. These countries also need to follow the same rigorous inspection standards as the U.S.
- If meat comes in already packaged retail packs from other countries, these must be marked with country-of-origin. The repeal of COOL does not pertain to prepackaged meat from other countries.

So what if you still want to know where your meat comes from?

Per NAMI (North America Meat Institute), "All meat processed to be sold commercially in the U.S. (i.e. meat not directly imported in retail ready packs and labeled as such) must pass through a USDA inspected establishment and meet all USDA regulations for meat produced in the U.S. All meat products sold on store shelves have borne this mark of inspection with a [federally inspected establishment number](#), which tells you exactly where the meat was processed."

Personally, I am not the least bit concerned about the COOL repeal as far as quality and safety because it was *never about food safety*. The U.S. has some of the highest food safety requirements in the world.

The repeal of COOL will help pig farmers significantly by not reducing and/or eliminating our markets. Markets are extremely important to farmers. Other non-ag markets would have been affected also by the tariffs. Tariffs would have been placed on furniture, mattress makers, jewelry, baked goods and maple syrup processors.

And, by the way, if you see this meme in your newsfeed, please don't share it. David Avocado Wolfe is anti-ag and he "sucks" you in with his other benign and "feel good" memes. Here is the meme he used for the repeal of COOL and let me just say this has absolutely *NOTHING* to do with Monsanto, but notice how he pulls in their name? Terrible.



Here are other sources of information about the repeal of COOL:

[Cooling Down the COOL Rhetoric - NAMI](#)

[USDA - County of Origin Labeling \(COOL\)](#)

[House Votes to Repeal COOL](#)

[COOL Law hurts Beef Industry](#)

Congress Repeals 'COOL' Meat Labeling Provision

I would love to answer any other questions you may have about the repeal of COOL.