



Agricultural Marketing Service

# COOL

## Country of Origin Labeling

### Consumer Information

#### What is COOL?

Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) is a labeling law that requires retailers to provide information to consumers regarding the source of certain foods referred to as “covered commodities.”

#### Who has to follow COOL?

Retail establishments such as full-line grocery stores, supermarkets, and warehouse club stores, who are subject to the licensing requirements under the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act (PACA), are required to provide COOL information to consumers at the point of sale. Retailers who purchase an aggregate of \$230,000 of fruits and vegetables per year are subject to PACA licensing requirements.

COOL provides clear, concise information about certain food products that we consume and purchase for our families. Knowing where our food comes from helps us make informed choices at grocery stores and supermarkets.



#### Who is exempt from COOL?

Hotels, restaurants, bars, taverns, delicatessens, salad bars, farmers markets, or other similar institutions that provide ready-to-eat foods are EXEMPT from the COOL requirements.

#### How do I find COOL information?

The COOL information of a covered commodity can be listed on a placard, store sign, sticker, or on the package itself. You will find the information at the point of sale in your retail location. Flags, country abbreviations, or the terms “local” or “regional” are NOT acceptable COOL designations; however, retailers may use these terms or visuals for marketing purposes.

#### What are COOL covered commodities?

A covered commodity is one that must have COOL information at the point of sale. These include: fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables; wild & farm-raised fish and shellfish; muscle cut and ground chicken, lamb, and goat meat; raw peanuts, pecans, and macadamia nuts; and ginseng.

Foods such as beef, pork, turkey, milk, cheese, wheat, and rice are not subject to COOL requirements. Covered commodities that are required to be labeled at retail with country of origin are specifically stated in the law and regulation. If the commodity is not included in the regulation, it is not subject to COOL. Commodities not covered by COOL may be subject to other laws administered by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the Food & Drug Administration, or USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service.

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**Processed foods are excluded from COOL.**

A processed food item is a covered commodity that has:

1. Undergone a specific process resulting in a change of character (i.e., cooking, curing, smoking, restructuring); or
2. Has been combined with another food component.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- Canned Tuna
- Roasted Peanuts
- Tater Tots
- Teriyaki Flavored Chicken
- Marinated Garlic Shrimp
- Orange Juice

**Labeling Requirements**

**Muscle Cuts of Meat: Chicken, Lamb, & Goat**

The Omnibus Spending Act of 2016 amended the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 by repealing mandatory COOL requirements for beef and pork muscle cuts, ground beef, and ground pork. Requirements for chicken, lamb, and goat did not change.

- For U.S. origin muscle cut chicken, lamb, and goat products, the label must state, "Born/Hatched, Raised, and Slaughtered/Harvested in the U.S."
- Meat derived from animals where production steps occurred in multiple countries including the U.S., must be labeled with production steps at the point of sale. The label may state, "Born in Country X, Raised and Harvested in the U.S." or "Born and Raised in Country X, Harvested in the U.S."

- Country of Origin declarations for imported meat is determined by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. All production steps occur outside of the U.S. and therefore are not required at the retail point of sale. The label may state, "Product of Country X."

**Ground Meat: Chicken, Goat, & Lamb**

COOL requirements for ground meat products must list all possible countries included or that may be reasonably included. If a raw material from a specific origin is in a processor's inventory within the past 60 days, that country is a possible country of origin and must be listed as an origin on the label.

**Perishable Agricultural Commodities: Fruits, Vegetables, Peanuts, Pecans, Macadamia Nuts, & Ginseng**

- The country of origin declaration is the location where the product was harvested.
- State, regional, or distinct locality designations may be used as the country of origin declaration for perishable agricultural commodities.

**Fish & Shellfish**

Fish and shellfish must include country of origin and method of production at the point of sale.

- U.S. origin is derived from farm-raised fish and shellfish that are hatched, raised, harvested, and processed in the United States or from wild fish and shellfish harvested in waters of the United States or by a United States flagged vessel and processed in the United States and that have not undergone substantial transformation outside of the United States.



- Imported fish or shellfish that have undergone substantial transformation in the U.S. should be labeled as "From Country X, Processed in the U.S." or "Product of X, U.S."
- Imported fish or shellfish that has not undergone substantial transformation in the U.S. shall have the country of origin declared by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection upon entry into the U.S.

**What is a method of production?**

The method of production must be listed for fish and shellfish and describes whether the fish or shellfish was farm-raised or wild-caught.

- Farm-Raised: harvested in controlled environments including ocean-ranched, harvested from leased beds that have been subjected to production enhancements.
- Wild-Caught: naturally-born or hatchery-originated released in the wild, and caught, taken, or harvested from non-controlled waters or beds.

**What is substantial transformation?**

Substantial transformation occurs when a new and different article of commerce emerges from a process with a new name, character, or use different from that possessed by the article prior to processing. COOL relies on the U.S. Customs and Border Protection to determine country of origin for fish and shellfish products imported into the U.S.

**COOL Confidence**

The COOL Division conducts surveillance reviews at retail establishments that are subject to COOL each year. Every covered commodity is reviewed for labeling compliance at the point of sale. If you suspect a retail store is in violation of COOL, you may file a complaint by emailing: [coolaudit@ams.usda.gov](mailto:coolaudit@ams.usda.gov).

Consumers may report suspected COOL non-compliances to: [COOL@ams.usda.gov](mailto:COOL@ams.usda.gov)

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