

Questions & Answers
on the
New Country of Origin Labeling Program
(Updated September 19, 2008)

- Q. My store recently began labeling some foods with country of origin information. Why?**
- A. A new law requires country of origin labeling information to appear on certain foods that are produced or packaged after September 30, 2008.
- Q. Will all foods be labeled?**
- A. The law applies only to the following foods: beef, pork, lamb, chicken, goat meat, seafood, fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables, pecans, peanuts, macadamia nuts, and ginseng. The law doesn't apply to processed foods or foods that are sold by restaurants, food service establishments, butcher shops, seafood stores, or very small grocery stores. Processed foods include products that are cooked, smoked, cured, roasted or combined with other foods
- Q. Why do you import food?**
- A. Our goal is to provide our customers with the best products all year round. We offer many locally grown and U.S.-based products, based on seasonality and geography. At other times, we take advantage of the growing seasons and availability of items in other parts of the world in order to provide our customers with the fresh products that they want, when they want them.
- Q. Are imported foods safe?**
- A. All foods sold in the United States are required to meet United States food safety standards and regulations no matter where they were produced.
- Q. Will country of origin labeling make my food safer?**
- A. The USDA says, "COOL is a retail labeling program and as such does not provide a basis for addressing food safety. Food products, both imported and domestic, must meet the food safety standards of the Food and Drug Administration and the Food Safety and Inspection Service."
- Q. What does it mean if my meat is labeled "Product of the U.S."?**
- A. Beef, pork, lamb, chicken and goat meat may only be called "Product of the U.S." if the source was born, raised and harvested entirely in the United States.

Q. Why are some meat products labeled “Product of U.S., Canada, Mexico”?

A. Most of the beef and pork products in the United States come from U.S. herds that include animals that may have been born or raised in Canada or Mexico as well as the United States. These meat products benefit from high-quality American agricultural practices and the contributions of U.S. producers. The law’s “Product of US, Canada, Mexico” label reflects this as well as the fact that the livestock may not have been exclusively from the United States. All meat products sold in the United States must meet the same high legal standards for food safety, regardless of where the livestock was born or raised.

Q. Why are some produce bins labeled with more than one country of origin?

A. The retail food industry sources produce from all over the world to ensure a wide variety of the freshest possible product is available in our stores, year-round. All produce in our stores is required to meet the same standards for food safety and quality, regardless of its country of origin. Accordingly, the law permits retailers to combine produce from multiple countries in the same bin.

Q. Where can I get more information on the country of origin labeling requirements?

A. You may visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture website at www.ams.usda.gov/cool/.