

No Farm Bill Without COOL

This is the year to reinstate Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) for beef. Actually, last year was the year to reinstate COOL - along with all of the other priorities that are supposed to be re-authorized in the Farm Bill. If Congress does not address COOL now, it will be five years before the next Farm Bill comes around.

This Congress is quite obviously feckless, ridiculous, and a laughing stock but unfortunately, we still depend on them because they are the only Congress we have. Their job is to pay the bills, which includes programs vital to America's farmers and ranchers. Furthermore, it is Congress's responsibility to reauthorize COOL, restore competition in the cattle markets, and fix the corrupt beef checkoff tax.

They are not doing their work because a small number of extremists delight in throwing monkey wrenches into the gears. Personal fame and notoriety are more important to them than doing the hard work necessary to negotiate by-partisan consensus to govern our nation.

Country of Origin Labeling for beef was specifically removed by Congress in 2015, so clearly Congress has been building towards this current level of spectacular dysfunction for a while. Their action in 2015 was purely transactional. The only beneficiaries, besides themselves, in flooding the market with imported beef and denying beef consumers the right to know is the international cartel of beef packers.

Congress's corrupt fecklessness has cost Montana's ranchers and Montana's economy about a billion dollars a year for each of the past seven years. Fortunately, calf prices have recovered this past year but this is because drought devastated the herds. Ranchers got a good price but only because they had fewer calves to sell. Montana's economy and ranchers continues to suffer as a result of Congress's corrupt vote on COOL.

It is no secret that the beef packing cartel is rapidly vertically integrating feedlots into their tentacles. Independent feeders are throwing in the towel and no one can blame them. They can't keep losing money year after year. Meanwhile the seven largest corporate feedlots are growing because they apparently get sweetheart deals. This is all illegal under the Packers and Stockyards Act, so Congress needs to find the courage that their colleagues in 1921 had. Competition must be restored to the cattle market.

It has been thirty-six years that we have been paying the beef checkoff tax with no accountability and falling beef consumption. It is long past time to reform the beef checkoff and the Opportunities for Fairness Act (OFF) is a bipartisan opportunity to do just that. Again, it is dysfunction and grandstanding that is blocking this needed reform.

All three of these measures -COOL, Competition, and Checkoff Reform – are supported by the majority of cattle producers and consumers. Opposition comes from the beef packers and their paid lackeys. These people have no loyalty to this country and to the millions of hard-working

taxpayers. Congress has a chance to do what is right by just doing the job that we elected them for. Call them and tell them to get the lead out. (Rep Rosendale 202 225-3211; Rep Zinke 202 225-5628; Sen Daines 202 224-2651; Sen Tester 202 224-8594).

“Kicking the can down the road” is not acceptable.

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