



COOL and the WTO

Shirts, suits, dresses, undergarments, and numerous other items we purchase carry a little tag that tells where they were produced. “Made in China” appears on many. If not China, then Vietnam, Bangladesh, Japan, Taiwan, Pakistan, or some other foreign nation.

Clothing, of course, is not the only category of foreign-made products filling our stores. Many of the automobiles, scooters, tools, bicycles, electronics, and more are also foreign made. Sometimes, finding a particular product not imported presents an unsolvable problem, frequently great enough to have many Americans simply give up and settle for foreign-made goods.



What about food? In 2002, Congress enacted a law that came to be known as COOL (Country of Origin Labeling). It required retailers to provide country of origin information for beef, pork, and lamb. In 2008, Congress expanded that requirement to include fresh fruits, nuts, and vegetables. But in late 2015, Congress repealed COOL as part of the omnibus budget bill. There is no longer any requirement for labeling the origin of what we eat.

Five months after the cancellation of COOL, a new report tells us that 47 million pounds of frozen chicken and meat products mixed with vegetables had to be recalled because of worries about listeria monocytogenes. Consuming them could cause listeriosis, an infection that can lead to fever, muscle aches, headaches, confusion, loss of balance, diarrhea and more. The products being recalled carry such brand names as Simmering Samurai, Tai Pei, InnovASIAN, Yakitori, Casa Solano Southwest, etc. They are not made in America.

The recall of these products came out of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. It turns out that there’s no need for COOL if these agencies are doing their jobs. In fact, reliance on them and other U.S. safeguards already in place is what led the majority in Congress to repeal COOL as an unnecessary and costly requirement. The vote to repeal was 300 to 131 in the House.

But there’s another reason why Congress voted to cancel COOL. Canadian and Mexican meat producers, both affected by COOL’s past requirements, [complained to the World Trade Organization](#) (WTO). That UN agency has four times ruled against the United States and our COOL mandate. Our two neighboring nations were given authority by WTO to impose tariffs totaling several against the U.S.

Here we have the United Nations making decisions about the food we Americans eat. We won’t know if the beef we consume came from Canada, where mad-cow disease had been detected a few years back, or from Mexico, whose cleanliness and butchering processes don’t match requirements imposed by



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USDA and FDA.

But let's not give these agencies any constitutional legitimacy. Since these powers have not been delegated to the federal government according to the Constitution, the states reserve the power to make these decisions — and definitely not the UN. So having the United Nations making decisions regarding our food supply is a very unsettling development. If the WTO can force its will regarding food, it has gained a truly significant power. This situation brings to mind the attitude of one of the 20th century's worst tyrants. As leader of the USSR, Joseph Stalin is reputed to have said that controlling the people's food is the way to gain control of their nation. Enter the [Holodomor](#).

The main point of these comments, therefore, isn't so much about the food we consume. It's much more about whether we will always have food to eat. Considering the power already possessed by the WTO presents another excellent reason to [break away from the United Nations](#).

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