

Industry to Brief USDA on Standardized COOL Affidavit: On Friday, September 5, 2008, representatives from the livestock and meat industries will brief USDA Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Bruce Knight on a standardized affidavit that can be used throughout the cattle marketing chain to verify animals' origin. The affidavit is available online at <http://www.beefusa.org/uDocs/countryoforiginaffidavit453.pdf>.

"Our goal was to create a simple, efficient, and effective means of declaring livestock origin from conception to consumer, and we believe this affidavit does exactly that," said Andy Groseta, Arizona cattle producer and NCBA President. Producers can fill in information specific to their cattle and assert the origin of any animal being sold. Livestock marketers further along the ownership chain can use individual affidavits to create a single, combined affidavit for a group of animals.

"Representatives from every point in the supply chain unanimously agreed to use this standardized affidavit, which will greatly ease the burden that mandatory Country of Origin Labeling places on producers," Groseta explained.

Industry representatives will also discuss the problem of so-called "gap cattle," which are cattle that were in the country prior to July 16, 2008, and thus automatically considered of U.S. origin, but have since changed hands without being accompanied by an affidavit.

Groseta acknowledged the problem, saying, "We are well aware that owners of these animals would be very hard pressed to recreate the paper trail documenting origin." The industry consensus is that owners should be considered to have first-hand knowledge of those cattle and animals should be allowed to move from these premises on that same standard affidavit.

"NCBA will continue to work on behalf of our cattlemen to put in place an effective and accurate labeling system," Groseta stated. "Additionally, we will be leading the effort to educate producers on how to comply with the new rule."

For more information about the industry consensus, please read the stakeholder letter at <http://www.beefusa.org/uDocs/countryoforiginaffidavitcoverletter.pdf>.

The interim final COOL rule was published in the Federal Register on August 1, 2008. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued the rule to allow for industry comment prior to issuing a final rule, while simultaneously meeting the September 30, 2008 COOL implementation deadline. The interim final rule contains definitions, requirements for consumer notification and product marking, and the responsibilities of both retailers and suppliers for covered commodities.

The full rule is available online at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5070926>.