

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 22, 2009

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
200-A Jamie L. Whitten Building
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

First and foremost, congratulations to you on your nomination and recent confirmation as United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary. Given your extensive background and knowledge of the agricultural sector and our rural communities, we are tremendously encouraged that our home state farmers, ranchers and consumers will have an advocate as USDA Secretary who understands their needs.

We write to discuss with you an issue of paramount importance in our states and for farmers, ranchers and consumers across America. Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) is a program on which we have worked for many years in a bipartisan fashion, with organizations across every sector of agriculture and with groups dedicated to providing consumers with reliable, easily accessible information about the food they feed their families. We appreciate the decision to reexamine the final rule for mandatory COOL, published in the Federal Register on January 15, 2009, allowing for a 60 day review period of that rule. President Obama's support of our September 25, 2008 letter regarding the interim final rule for COOL was greatly encouraging, and we appreciate your recent and swift action on this front.

Ensuring that consumers throughout America have the opportunity to identify "U.S. origin" exclusive product is a priority, and we are very pleased to see this discussed by the Administration as a Rural Agenda item. We look forward to working with you in the upcoming months and continuing to work with farmers and ranchers to ensure the program is implemented properly and as Congress intended.

Sincerely,



Tim Johnson
United States Senate



Mike Enzi
United States Senate