



NEWS RELEASE



AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE

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RETAIL COUNTRY OF ORIGIN LABELING BECOMES EFFECTIVE APRIL 4

WASHINGTON, March 25, 2005 —The U.S. Department of Agriculture today announced that the mandatory labeling of fish and shellfish covered commodities for country of origin and method of production (i.e., wild or farm-raised) will begin in retail food stores on April 4, 2005.

USDA published the country of origin labeling (COOL) requirements as an Interim Final Rule (IFR) on October 5, 2004, with a request for comments. The effective date of the IFR requirements was held in abeyance for six months to allow time for existing inventories to clear channels of commerce and affected industry members to conform their operations to the requirements. The full text of the IFR can be found at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/cool/coolfr.pdf>.

Based upon a number of inquiries and comments, USDA is also issuing a Notice to the Trade to clarify certain requirements for retailers and the supply chain. The Notice to the Trade will help ensure that accurate information is available to consumers at the lowest possible cost by clarifying the IFR requirements for retailers and their suppliers. The Notice to the Trade can be found at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/cool/recordkeepingnotice.pdf> and contains information related to the documentation and records that retailers and the supply chain must maintain to substantiate country of origin and method of production claims.

AMS is responsible for implementing the mandatory COOL program, which is a provision of the 2002 Farm Bill. The COOL program will permit consumers to make informed decisions on country of origin and method of production for their fish and shellfish purchases.

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