

[FOOD ORIGINS]

PASSPORT, PLEASE

Have you noticed how easy it is to identify what country the fish at your market came from? In 2005, retailers began labeling seafood to comply with a Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) law passed with the 2002 Farm Bill. As soon as next fall, you could start seeing such labels (e.g., “product of Chile”) on meat, produce and peanuts too.

According to a Consumer Reports poll, 92 percent of Americans want to know where their food comes from and, in fact, the COOL regulations, as originally conceived, were to apply to meat, fruits, vegetables and peanuts. But legislative battles and political wrangling derailed full implementation of COOL. For example, groups like the National Farmers Union—a coalition of family farmers and ranchers—fought

for COOL labeling, believing Americans would support locally grown and raised products. But alliances of food processors and meat packers, such as the American Meat Institute and National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, balked at the burden and expense of complying with such compulsory labeling.

This past summer, however, the House passed new compromise legislation that will make COOL mandatory. At press time, full implementation was scheduled for September 2008. —*Cheryl Sternman Rule*

