# Appeals Court Approves COOL Meat Labeling

MARY CLARE JALONICK, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal appeals court is allowing labels on certain cuts of meat to say where the animals were born, raised and slaughtered.

The appeals court decision issued Friday dismissed an attempt by the meat industry to block the rules, which took effect last year and require packaged steaks, ribs and other cuts of meat to include country of origin labels. The industry has long fought the labels, saying they are costly and provide no health benefits to the consumer.

In court, the meat industry said the rules go beyond what Congress intended and violate First Amendment rights to freedom of speech. The industry argued that the rules violate the U.S. Constitution because they force meat producers to provide information about their products, and that the information is of no real value to the consumer.

Judge Stephen F. Williams of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled those claims were unlikely to succeed in court and refused to block the labeling rules, agreeing with a lower federal court.

Williams wrote that the labeling "enables a consumer to apply patriotic or protectionist criteria in the choice of meat," and "enables one who believes that United States practices and regulation are better at assuring food safety than those of other countries, or indeed the reverse, to act on that premise."

He said those goals are worthy of what he called a "minimal" intrusion on the meat industry's First Amendment rights.

The lawsuit was led by the American Meat Institute, which represents the nation's largest meatpackers, and joined by other meat industry groups. In a statement, the American Meat Institute said it was disappointed by the ruling and disagreed with it. James H. Hodges, interim president and CEO of AMI, said the group is "evaluating our options moving forward."

The meat industry has argued that the paperwork to make the labels possible is burdensome and that it's not practical to keep cattle and hogs from other countries separate from domestic animals.

The labeling rules have support from consumer groups, environmental groups and some farm groups. Cattle ranchers who raise cattle near the northern border and compete with Canadian ranchers have been most supportive of the rules, which Congress first wrote in 2002 and later revised in 2008 after years of haggling with the meat industry.

Under the rules, labels must specify that a meat product was "Born in Mexico,

raised and slaughtered in the United States" or "Born, raised and slaughtered in the United States."

The Agriculture Department has also prohibited meat processors from mixing meat from animals born, raised or slaughtered in other countries with meat from the U.S.

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