

When farm to table means crossing international borders

August 3 2015

With Congress currently debating the repeal of mandatory country-of-origin labeling (COOL) for meat and poultry - federal law in the US since 2002 - new research from the Sam W. Walton College of Business at the University of Arkansas shines a spotlight on how COOL labeling affects consumers' purchase decisions.

In "A COOL Effect: The Direct and Indirect Impact of Country-of-Origin Disclosures on Purchase Intentions for Retail Food Products," appearing in the September issue of the *Journal of Retailing*, Marketing Professors Elizabeth Howlett and Scot Burton, along with doctoral candidates Christopher Berry and Amaradri Mukherjeeshow, show that consumers are more likely to buy [meat](#) that is identified as a US product.

However, in experiments that identified meat as Mexican in origin, study participants found COOL labeling more acceptable if they were assured that standards for handling meat in Mexico are equivalent to those in the US. According to Professor Howlett, "Given consumers' limited knowledge of meat processing procedures and systems, [meat products](#) labeled as having been born, raised, and slaughtered in the US are perceived to be safer, tastier, and fresher than products from Mexico,"

The authors suggest that retailers could utilize this information to design promotional programs, either to boost sales of meat sourced in the US or to inform consumers that another country's standards are equivalent to those in the US.

They also point out that if the goal of the COOL legislation is to benefit consumers, then it is only partially meeting that objective: "If the USDA is truly striving to help consumers make more informed decisions, they should consider education [consumers](#) about the outcomes of their international processing system audits," either through more information on packaging or public service announcements.

Provided by Journal of Retailing at New York University

Citation: When farm to table means crossing international borders (2015, August 3) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-08-farm-table-international-borders.html>

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