

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0609

September 14, 2021

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

Thank you for beginning the process to promote transparency in the “Product of the USA” labeling of FSIS regulated products. I am fully supportive of ensuring that meat labels are clear and accurate for consumers.

To me, it is clear that the current ‘Product of the USA’ label for beef does not convey accurate information to consumers and fails to help American ranchers distinguish their product in the meat case. As you begin your top-to-bottom review I would like to provide you with my perspective on the issue. I believe multiple new voluntary labels such as ‘Processed in the USA,’ ‘Raised and Processed in the USA,’ and ‘Born, Raised, and Processed in the USA’ should be developed. Not only are descriptive labels more accurate but they will help U.S. ranchers differentiate the wholesome, safe, and nutritious beef they raise.

It is preeminently important that meat labels are clear and accurate in a way that leaves little question in a consumer’s mind. I would venture to guess that if you surveyed consumers regarding the Product of the USA label asking if that label meant the meat was processed in the United States; raised and processed in the United States; or born, raised, and processed in the United States that you would get a wide range of answers. That is the inherent drawback with using the “Product of the United States” label - in the consumer’s eyes it could mean almost anything. With this in mind I suggest scraping the current label and its definition and moving towards more descriptive terms in the meat-case. I encourage the USDA to pair several new labels with definitions that are plainly more accurate.

Several descriptive and voluntary labels could also help bolster small and medium sized packer’s profitability as they are in the best position to take on an operational inefficiency if that means they can distinguish their product and get a better price in the case. The larger meat packers are incredible at fabricating beef, but they are less likely to take on the operational inefficiency of breaking the processing line to adopt different voluntary labels. Because the return on investment and plant operations are different depending on the packer and their respective facilities it is important there are multiple voluntary labels for them to use.

Again, I thank you for your attention to these important issues, and hope to work closely with you and your office to ensure increased opportunity for our farmers and ranchers.

Sincerely,



Roger Marshall, M.D.
United States Senator