

Research finds mandatory meat labels economically not worth the fight

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When you pick up a pound of meat from the grocery store, have you noticed the label indicating where the meat originated? According to new research, most shoppers have no idea the label exists—but that little label is causing a big stir among the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

In October 2014, the World Trade Organization ruled in favor of Canada and Mexico, finding that the mandated country-of-origin labels in the U.S. are not trade compliant and hurt business in nearby countries. The U.S. is appealing the decision. However, research from Kansas State University, in collaboration with Oklahoma State University, finds that most consumers aren't willing to pay extra for the label.

"Less than one-third of the participants surveyed know that it is a law to label where the [meat](#) originates," said Glynn Tonsor, associate professor of agricultural economics at Kansas State University. "Effectively, producers lose and consumers lose because we have not observed an aggregate demand increase in response to that origin information."

The labels were implemented in 2009 to provide shoppers more information about the origin of their meat. In 2013, the labels were revised to provide more specifics about the origin, including where the animal was born, raised and slaughtered. Tonsor surveyed consumers in 2009 and in 2013 and found the same results: The majority of shoppers aren't interested in these labels.

"Time and time again, we find that food safety, price, freshness and taste tend to be attributes, regardless of the [meat product](#) we're talking about, that rank highly in importance and drive purchasing decisions," Tonsor said. "Social issues like origin, environmental impact and sustainability matter to consumers, but do not drive purchasing decisions."

A decision on the appeal is expected in early 2015. In the meantime, country-of-origin labels are still being used.

Provided by Kansas State University

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