



**Resolution on Advancing Food Safety Education
through Supporting Country of Origin Labeling**

Approved by the Board of Trustees – 3/5/08

Whereas, food borne disease is caused by consuming contaminated foods or beverages that contain disease-causing pathogens, such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites. Poisonous chemicals, or other harmful substances, can also cause food borne diseases when contained within food products. More than 250 different food borne diseases have been identified and described as resulting from pathogens and toxins alike¹; and

Whereas, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that each year 76 million cases of gastrointestinal diseases, more than 325,000 are hospitalized, and approximately 5,000 die as a result of food borne illnesses². The incidence of microbial food borne illness is an important public health issue as a sizeable proportion of these illnesses are preventable; and

Whereas, there are many opportunities through which our food supply may be tampered while it is produced and prepared¹. Recent changes in food production and distribution systems and lack of support for public health resources and infrastructure have led to the emergence of novel as well as traditional food borne diseases⁴; and

Whereas, public health officials speculate that food borne illnesses may worsen due to new pathogens, an increasingly global food supply, and an increase in the number of immune-deficient Americans². In 2005, this concern was addressed through the inclusion of food safety in the new Dietary Guidelines for Americans⁵; and

Whereas, a number of countries have very weak food safety policies and procedures, because food safety has not been a priority⁵;

Whereas, the United States is increasingly dependent on foreign food products. Over the past decade, the food import industry has roughly doubled, to \$65.3 billion in 2006⁶; and China, where poorly regulated food and drug safety standards have been a problem for years, is reeling from health scandals⁷; and

Whereas, revised manufacturing policies and practices can reduce the spread of microbes among animals and prevent the contamination of foods. Careful review of whole food production processes can identify the principal hazards, and the control points where contamination can be prevented, limited, or eliminated¹; and

Whereas, on May 13, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, more commonly known as the 2002 Farm Bill. One of its many initiatives requires country of origin labeling (COOL) for beef, lamb, pork, fish, perishable agricultural commodities and peanuts, via a label, stamp, mark, placard or other clear and visible sign on the covered commodity. As described in the legislation, program implementation is the responsibility of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Marketing Service⁸; and

Whereas, on April 4, 2005, the provisions of the Interim Final Rule for the mandatory country of origin labeling of fish and shellfish covered commodities became effective⁹. The Interim Final Rule was published in the Federal Register on October 5, 2004, and requires designated retailers to label fish and shellfish covered commodities for country of origin and method of production (i.e., wild and

farm raised). No such ruling was made requiring COOL for meat products, as Public Laws 108-199 and 109-97 delayed implementation of this facet of the law until 2006 and 2008 respectively¹⁰; and

Whereas, since the passage of the Farm Bill, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) and corporate agribusiness have been trying to delay and ultimately kill Country of Origin Labeling¹¹. Despite practical suggestions from small farmers and ranchers for streamlining the COOL process, the USDA instead has been taking its lead from the NCBA and agribusiness, who claim that logistical and monetary considerations renders COOL impractical¹²; and

Whereas, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) recommends that the USDA collaborate with meat industry representatives to identify alternatives for adhering to COOL record keeping requirements. Furthermore, the GAO has refuted the assumptions underlying USDA's cost estimates and has characterized these projections as questionable and unreasonable¹²; and

Whereas, Public Law 109-97 delays the implementation for all covered commodities except wild and farm-raised shellfish until September 30, 2008⁹. In response to this appropriations act, House Bill 357 was introduced on January 9, 2007, requesting implementation of all other meat commodities by September 30, 2007¹³. This bill is still being investigated and revised by the Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry; and

Whereas, In 2006, 470 audits (41% of all audits completed) showed violations of what are still voluntary COOL requirements for meat products¹⁴. Thirty-four percent of these audits found no country of origin labeling, and 13% revealed a mislabeling of the product's true country of origin; and¹⁵

Whereas, over 75% of shoppers believe food-related illness is a serious threat to their health¹⁶; and

Whereas, findings from a 2007 telephone poll, of 1,004 interviews, revealed that 92% of Americans wanted to know which country produced the foods they are buying and consuming¹⁷; and

Whereas, on August 3, 2007, the Committee on Energy and Commerce released draft legislation that would strengthen our country's system for ensuring the safety of imported foods. The proposed legislation would create a user fee on imported food shipments. The funds generated from this fee would be used to hire additional personnel at both the U.S. border and FDA labs to increase food inspections. Funds would also be used to test import samples and research new testing techniques. In addition, the legislation would prevent the Secretary of Health and Human Services from closing or consolidating any of the current 13 FDA field laboratories, while granting the agency new authorities to require country of origin labeling and perform other activities necessary for ensuring the safety of our food supply¹⁸;

Now, Therefore, be it:

RESOLVED, that SOPHE advocate for effective food safety policies, including, but not limited to federal funding for food safety; and

RESOLVED, that SOPHE advocate in favor of country of origin labeling to amend the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act with respect to the safety of foods imported into the United States; and

RESOLVED, that SOPHE collaborate with groups and coalitions, such as Americans for Country of Origin Labeling, to increase awareness of the public health importance of COOL implementation; and

RESOLVED, that SOPHE monitor the Food and Drug Administration's attempts to close its already understaffed laboratories responsible for ensuring the safety of our nation's food supply; and

RESOLVED, SOPHE promote involvement of a high-level government panel to ensure the safety of food and other products coming into the United States; and

RESOLVED, that SOPHE educate public and professional chapter members on the importance of accurate food labeling and related food safety education considerations; and

RESOLVED, that SOPHE distribute this resolution broadly to members of the Coalition of National Health Education Organizations (CHNEO).

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