



MICA

protecting the interest of the meat industry for more than 40 years

In 1992, when the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) first proposed labeling of imported food products, the Meat Importers Council of America (MICA) was there to question why and how labeling would be implemented and how it would impact the meat imports industry. Today, MICA continues to lobby to protect the interests of the meat import industry.

The Country Of Origin Labeling (COOL) is currently a voluntary procedure, but in 2004 it may become mandatory. If it does, it would impose administrative costs that could ultimately be passed on to the consumer. Those in the meat industry know that MICA is monitoring the USDA's legislative activity around this issue.

With the legislation stemming from a provision in Farm Bill 2002, Americans might expect to pay a little more for hamburger due to packaging costs. Usually, ground beef products contain some imported lean beef to meet market demands.

"Mandating COOL for this product would mean that production runs must be stopped to change packaging materials whenever there is a change in the country of source," commented Laurie Bryant of MICA. "What is essentially the same product would be required to carry different labels," he explained. The majority of frozen, boneless meat imports to the U.S. come from New Zealand and Australia—and much of it through the

Port of Wilmington utilizing its Cold Chain Distribution Services warehouse facility.

Historically, MICA has been abreast of such legislative decisions. MICA was formed in 1962 as the Meat Importers' Council, Inc., to represent importers and exporters of meats in the U.S. Its members include anyone involved in the importation or exportation of meat, such as shippers, warehouses, processors, port authorities, truckers, and customs brokers. It's mission as a nonprofit, national trade association is to foster the trade, commerce and interests of importers and exporters of fresh, frozen, cured, cooked, and canned meats. In 1969, the organization officially became the Meat Importers Council of America.

In recent years, MICA has worked in cooperation with the USDA's Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to monitor imports for instances of E. coli contamination, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, or "Mad Cow Disease"), and Foot and Mouth Disease. MICA has also worked with U.S. Customs to foster safe foreign meat trade by producing an industry security plan to document and monitor cargo.

These measures have become especially important in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. In fact, MICA was recently accepted as the first organization to the Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (CTPAT) program.

MICA has been in contact with food safety authorities in South American countries, too — Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil — in cooperation with their respective trade and export organizations with the intention of developing appropriate security procedures for importing and exporting their meat cargo. MICA has received favorable feedback.

MICA's main objective today is to promote free trade of imported meat in the U.S. by increasing U.S. quotas and lowering tariffs in opposition to existing regulations under the Meat Import Acts of 1964 and 1979. MICA views these regulations as stifling to the meat import industry and incompatible with the U.S. demand for leaner meat.

In 1995, the Meat Import Act of 1979 was officially repealed and replaced by a tariff rate quota. According to MICA, the quota allows for an annual base amount of 697,000 metric tons of "in-quota" beef imports. MICA argues that the eradication of quotas would actually benefit U.S. meat processors and cattlemen and that the elimination of tariffs would benefit consumers.

According to MICA, only seven percent of beef products consumed in the U.S. come from imports of frozen boneless beef. MICA has made it a priority to improve communication with the domestic meat industry to dispel myths and educate it about the role of imported meat in the U.S. market, where the focus

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