

by
Pettus Read**Read All About It**

During a recent visit to the local grocery store, I heard a young mother give her toddler some advice that I had not heard since my children were small. It was the same advice that mothers have been using since Eve had to deal with Cain and Abel and is just as important today as it has been through the ages.

As with all toddlers, anything that they may find that is not tied down will sooner or later end up in their mouths. This little guy I was watching was no different and as he prepared to put a discarded grape in his mouth his mother immediately gave that age-old advice, "Don't put that in your mouth, you don't know where it has been." Those words spoken by a true mother echoed in my ears and brought back the memories of my own mother telling me the same thing many years ago. Just like the rest of you who heard those words of advice as you grew up (as well as the threat that went along with it and all of you also know what I mean) they still are a part of our conscience as adults.

However, I wonder if we

really do question everything we put in our mouths as our mothers taught us. Do you ever wonder just exactly where the food you are eating

was produced or where it came from? Did that T-bone steak you enjoyed so much last night come from Tennessee, California or did it even originate in the USA?

Thanks to our U.S. Congress, as of the first of October last year, you may have noticed country-of-origin information now appearing on meat product labels or on signs in the meat department to indicate the country or countries where an animal may have been born, raised and processed. The Country of Origin Labeling program, known to many as COOL,

started back in 2002 after consumer groups approached congress demanding its implication. They presented numerous surveys proving their point that most of us want to know where our food comes from just as our mothers have always insisted in many cases after we had already put something disgusting in our mouths. Their surveys said that 56 percent of consumers think that produce grown in the United States is safer than imported produce. They also said if price and appearance were equal, 61 percent of consumers would select U.S.-grown meat.

Now that COOL is implemented, have you been checking your meat purchases lately and making those early surveys come true? If you have, then you have also noticed something else about the COOL

labeling. That is, that some labels list more than one country. I have noticed in some stores that you will see a label that says, "Product of the U.S., Canada and Mexico." With a label like that you have to wonder if maybe that ground chuck you are about to consume may have been created by three cows at an international rally or something.

But, there is a simple answer. A label with multiple countries of origin listed is from an animal that was born and/or raised in a different country or countries and then slaughtered in the U.S. Covered commodities in this category would have to identify all the relevant countries. Not often, but there are times when young cattle are imported from

Mexico or Canada and are subsequently raised and processed in the U.S. For a meat product to have the label "Product of the United States" it has to be derived "exclusively from an animal that is exclusively born, raised

stock and meat in plants. Of course, that cost may be passed on to the consumer and spread out across meat products, but how is still yet to be determined.

Good advice like what your mama gave you is always important to remember and it looks like the American consumers are getting what they wanted from their policymakers. But, many mamas have also told their children there is no such thing as a free lunch. That is something to also remember, when you ask the U.S. government for something.

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