

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

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Global Agricultural Information Network

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### **EU Agriculture Ministers Divided over National COOL Measures**

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**Report Highlights:**

EU ministers were deeply divided over the impact mandatory national Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) rules have on the free movement of goods at the Agriculture & Fisheries Council on July 17, 2017. Several Member States claim that national COOL measures distort the single market while others claim they will improve consumer information and should develop into EU-harmonized rules.

## **EU Agriculture Ministers Divided over National Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) Measures**

### **Belgium Hit by French COOL Project**

At the request of the Belgian delegation, EU ministers discussed the impact of mandatory national COOL rules on the single market at the Agriculture & Fisheries Council meeting on July 17, 2017. The Belgian Agriculture minister, supported by Germany, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and the Czech Republic, raised his concerns about the French pilot project for mandatory COOL for milk and foodstuffs containing milk or meat as an ingredient which came into force on January 1, 2017. Ahead of the Council meeting, Belgium circulated a briefing paper with statistics from the Belgian National Bank showing that Belgian exports of dairy and meat to France have fallen by 17 percent since June 2016, compared to the same period in 2015.

### **Member States Divided**

Belgium invited the Commission to carry out an impact assessment on the impact of national COOL rules on the internal market and free movement of goods by January 1, 2018, i.e. one year after the implementation of the first national COOL initiative. In response to France's claim that the French pilot project is about improving consumer information, the Belgian agriculture minister said that actions taken by certain wholesalers have the opposite effect and restrict consumer choice. The Belgian, Dutch, German, Luxembourg and Czech ministers all agreed that COOL should remain voluntary because the introduction of EU-harmonized mandatory COOL measures would increase production costs and would, as the Belgian figures show, distort the single market. Luxembourg's agriculture minister also blamed the European Commission for not objecting to the French project which then inspired other Member States to follow the French example.

Not surprisingly, Member States with national COOL measures in place or notified to the Commission, defended the French pilot project. France, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Finland and Slovenia support the idea of mandatory EU-harmonized COOL. Their ministers put emphasis on transparency, the right of the consumer to be correctly informed and the growing societal demand to know the origin of food. They see the national COOL initiatives developing into EU-harmonized rules.

### **Commission Reaction**

Health and Food Safety Commission Vytenis Andriukaitis rejected the Belgian request for an impact assessment arguing that the national COOL projects are limited in time and that Member States with national COOL initiatives in place are required to submit a report to the Commission evaluating the impact of their pilot projects. These reports would allow the Commission to assess the impact of mandatory COOL on the internal market. On previous occasions, Commissioner Andriukaitis stated that he had no choice but to clear the national COOL initiatives because it is a legal option provided for by the EU's [Food Information to Consumers \(FIC\) regulation 1169/2011](#).

### **Background**

The recent proliferation of national COOL initiatives is the result of the EU's FIC regulation that provides a way for individual Member States to adopt mandatory COOL measures. Although both the Commission and the Member States concerned argue that the national COOL projects are "trials" and have no effect on trade, other Member States as well as EU industry groups and non-EU countries are concerned about their impact on exports and the confusion that the patchwork nature of different labeling rules will create. So far, eight Member States have decided to introduce mandatory COOL for certain products: France (milk, milk and meat used as an ingredient), Italy (milk and milk used in dairy products, durum wheat and semolina in pasta, rice), Lithuania (milk and milk used in dairy products), Portugal (milk and milk used in dairy products), Romania (milk and dairy products), Greece (milk and milk used in dairy products, rabbit meat), Finland (milk, milk and meat used as an ingredient) and Spain (milk and dairy products).

### **Related Reports**

- [EU Country of Origin Labeling – Member State Initiatives](#)
- [EU-28 FAIRS Report](#)