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WTO Dispute Panellists Appointed on U.S. Country-of-Origin Labelling

Ottawa, Ont. [May 13, 2010] The Canadian Pork Council, which represents Canada's 8,000 pork producers, welcomes the appointment of a distinguished three-member panel to review onerous and illegal labelling requirements imposed in September, 2008 on certain agricultural products by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

On April 30, both Canada and Mexico asked the WTO to appoint panellists to look into whether these new U.S. labelling requirements were a violation of international trade laws because they restrict market access and constitute a technical barrier, including to the movement of live swine into the U.S. market.

"The North American pork market is highly integrated," said Jurgen Preugschas, chair of the Canadian Pork Council. "Forcing U.S. pork processors to segregate Canadian animals and meat imposes unnecessary costs in an already difficult market with little benefit to the American consumer."

Almost two years ago, the U.S. Department of Agriculture went ahead with previously announced plans to expand its country-of-origin labelling requirements beyond fish and shellfish.

The new law requires retailers, such as full-line grocery stores, supermarkets, and club warehouse stores, to notify their customers through labelling the source of certain food products that include muscle cut and ground meats from beef, veal, pork, lamb, goat, and chicken; wild and farm-raised fish and shellfish; ginseng; fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables; peanuts, pecans, and macadamia nuts.

Mr. Preugschas, who farms in Mayerthorpe, Alberta, noted the Canadian government gave the U.S. ample opportunity to amend the COOL requirements to reflect the highly integrated nature of the swine and pork industry in North America. "The Canadian Government asked for the panel because it believes, as we do, that this is an unacceptable barrier to trade," he said.

The WTO appointed Christian Haerberli as Chair and panellists Manzoor Ahmad and Joao Magalhaes. All three have extensive experience in international trade matters. Hearings are expected to begin later this year.

The Canadian Pork Council (CPC) represents a federation of nine provincial pork industry associations and 8,000 hog producers. Exports are a key component in the Canadian pork industry with over 60% of production being exported to over 100 countries, including the United States.

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