

# THE DAILY CALLER

## FDA Rules Against Centuries Old Cheese-Making Process

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A new interpretation of a 2011 law by the Food and Drug Administration would prohibit cheese artisans from aging their cheese on wooden boards, a practice that has been in place for thousands of years.

The practice of wood-aging cheese is unsanitary, an official within the agency claims in a new written interpretation of the Food Safety Modernization Act.

“The use of wooden shelves, rough or otherwise, for cheese ripening does not conform to [Current Good Manufacturing Practices] requirements, which require that ‘all plant equipment and utensils shall be so designed and of such material and workmanship as to be adequately cleanable, and shall be properly maintained,’” wrote Monica Metz, a branch chief at the FDA’s Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, [according to the blog Cheese Underground](#).

Metz wrote the interpretation after New York’s agriculture regulatory agency, a division of the state’s Milk Control and Dairy Services, sought clarification from the FDA.

Metz, who heads the FDA’s Dairy and Egg branch replied, saying that wooden boards “could be a potential source of pathogenic microorganisms in the finished products.”

“Wooden shelves or boards cannot be adequately cleaned and sanitized,” Metz wrote, adding that “the porous structure of wood enables it to absorb and retain bacteria.”

Metz is interpreting the Food Safety Modernization Act, which took effect in Jan. 2011. The law proposed a shift in the way the FDA works, requiring it to actively seek to prevent contamination rather than merely respond to it.

This has led to regulatory overreach, according to one scholar.

“It’s just the latest in a pattern under [the Food Safety Modernization Act],” Walter Olson, senior fellow at the Cato Institute’s Center for Constitutional Studies, told The Daily Caller.

“When Congress passed the Food Safety Modernization Act three and a half years ago, libertarians and others warned again and again that the law would put traditional, local and artisanal food and farm methods at risk, and instead promote mass industrial food,”

He said that consumer groups and many progressives dismissed those concerns as alarmist.

“Now they’re coming true,” he said.

The FDA is mostly concerned with contamination from the bacteria *Listeria monocytogenes*. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [reported](#) 1,100 illnesses annually from the bacteria, resulting in 260 deaths.

But the Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research found that the benefits of the wood-aging process for cheese outweighs the risks.

“Considering the beneficial effects of wood boards on cheese ripening and rind formation, the use of wood boards does not seem to present any danger of contamination by pathogenic bacteria as long as a thorough cleaning procedure is followed,” [reads a report from the Center](#).

A number of prize-winning cheeses are cured on wooden boards. The practice has been used in the cheese-making process for thousands of years, as artisans and consumers alike believe that the wooden boards add flavor to the product.

Chris Roelli, a cheesemaker from Wisconsin, called the FDA’s clarified stance a “potentially devastating development” for U.S. cheesemakers, many of whom have invested years of labor and capital in the wood-aging process.

“The very pillar that we built our niche business on is the ability to age our cheese on wood planks, an art that has been practiced in Europe for thousands of years,” Roelli told Cheese Underground.

“This is a major game changer for the dairy industry in Wisconsin, and many other states,” he said, pointing out that prohibiting American cheesemakers from using the wood-aging technique will put them “at a global disadvantage,” especially against French producers.

Cato’s Olson called the new interpretation an “assault on culture.”

“Can we please get Congress to repeal or amend the Food Safety Modernization Act before we completely lose the agricultural wisdom of centuries past — and before the nation’s leading chefs are reduced to putting out a jar of Cheez Whiz for their guests?”