

# NEW YORK POST

## Beware — the Europeans are coming for your cheese

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March 3, 2016

Have you ever heard that “real Champagne” only comes from the Champagne region of France? It’s a great thing to say at a party if you want to sound sophisticated and insufferable.

In Europe, it’s also the law.

It may soon be the law in the United States, too, if European trade negotiators get their way. They want to use a potential trade agreement between the United States and the European Union to ban the sale of any wines, cheeses or other food products named after places in Europe — unless, of course, those products are actually made in Europe.

This would affect not only wines like Champagne, port and sherry but also cheeses like parmesan, gouda and feta. These and dozens of other common food names would simply disappear from most American grocery store shelves.

There are many reasons why the United States shouldn’t acquiesce to Europe’s demands. The European system of protecting geographical food names is protectionist. It encourages people not to innovate. And it props up traditional producers at the expense of economic growth.

But the main reason we shouldn’t let Europeans dictate the names Americans use for common food items is that it would harm American consumers.

Most Americans don’t care whether their cheese actually comes from the place the cheese is named after, because they don’t even know those places exist. Gorgonzola, asiago and mozzarella are all cheeses with Italian-sounding names. Only two of them are named after towns in Italy. Do you know which ones?

It might be good for Americans to learn more about foreign geography, but forcing us to rename our cheeses and wines isn’t the way to do it.

The Europeans claim that adopting their system will help Americans by making it clearer where our food comes from. But the truth is, Europe’s scheme of protecting food names is a confusing mess.

There are some food names that Europeans want us to ban even though they're not actual places. In Europe, feta cheese has to be made in Greece, but feta isn't a place in Greece. It's just a name for a kind of cheese traditionally made there. The rule may help Greek cheesemakers, but requiring that foods only ever be made in the places where they were invented just keeps prices high and reduces variety for consumers.

There are also times when the name on the product doesn't match with where it's made. Stilton cheese can be made in any of three counties near Stilton, England, but not in the town of Stilton itself. How, exactly, would that help consumers?

Then there's the fact that it rarely truly matters where things are made. Certainly some climates are better for growing certain crops, and connoisseurs know that wine made from the same kind of grape will taste different when grown in a different place.

But none of that applies to cheeses, liquor or processed meat.

For example, parmesan cheese made in Parma, Italy, is different from what you find in green Kraft bottles because they use different methods, not because one of them is made by Italians. The idea that some people are better at making cheese because of where they live is archaic and, frankly, an absurd way to make policy in the 21st century.

The only American consumers who would actually benefit from adopting European rules are people like your pedantic Champagne-loving friend. For them, the confusing nature of geography-based naming is actually a good thing, because it enables them to have special knowledge the uninitiated can't decipher.

What's better for regular consumers — those of us who don't have a wine cellar or favorite cheese shop — is to let us keep using the common food names we do already.

That way, we can go to the grocery store and get what we want without bringing an atlas and a lawyer.

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