

The Hagstrom Report

Agriculture News As It Happens



The Hagstrom Report

Thursday, April 23, 2015 | Volume 5, Number 69

GI advocates at Italian Embassy say GIs add to sustainability

As the ninth round of Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations took place in New York City this week, advocates for including geographical indication provisions in an agreement between the United States and the European Union said that GI provisions would add to the sustainability of agriculture and create long-term jobs.

A forum and luncheon sponsored by the Organization for an International Geographical Indications Network (OriGIn), the American Origin Products Association (AOPA), and the Italian Association of GI Consortia (AICIG) were held at the Italian Embassy on Tuesday.

Italian Ambassador to the United States Claudio Bisogniero, host of the event, said, “The T-TIP is an opportunity for a dialogue between the EU and the U.S. on appropriate and pragmatic solutions.”

The GI advocates want T-TIP to include a system to grant legal protections for food products based on their location of origin, forbidding producers in other places to use geographical food names covered under the system.

The U.S. dairy industry says it supports GI protection for specific products produced in specific places, but opposes the adoption of a GI system for cheeses that have been produced in many places for many years.

The Consortium for Common Food Names, a group supported by the dairy industry and others, maintains that words such as “parmesan” and “feta” are generic because



Ivan Butina, Washington representative of Geneva-based OriGIn, tries Idaho potatoes.

(Jerry Hagstrom/The Hagstrom Report)

those cheeses have been produced in many places for many years. The consortium says that geographical indications should include the name of the region or sub-region where the product is produced, and a second term that describes the product, such as “Camembert de Normandie” or “Idaho potatoes.”

European producers are the most vigorous advocates of GIs, but some American groups, including the Idaho Potato Commission, have joined the campaign.

At the Italian Embassy session, GI advocates said that GI systems boost sustainable agriculture and create long-term jobs as well as providing “truthful” information to consumers.



The Ginseng & Herb Cooperative of Wisconsin displayed boxes of ginseng that is tested to assure quality and purity and can be directly linked to the producer who grew it. (Jerry Hagstrom/The Hagstrom Report)

Idaho Potato Commission Vice President Patrick Kole said, “Product differentiation is an essential part of creating value, without which there is no sustainability. Protecting unique products through fair and balanced intellectual property systems must be part of trade agreements moving forward.”

AOPA President Butch Weege, who represents the Wisconsin ginseng industry, said, “Producers in the U.S. stand to gain by reaching an agreement with the EU on GIs. Our producers need protection, just like producers in the EU.”

AICIG Secretary General Pier Maria Saccani said that the GI system of protection, certification, and controls has benefited Italian agriculture, particularly in terms of sustainability. “From the point of view of Italian GI consortia, it’s essential to protect producers’ know-how and investments,” Saccani said.

Massimo Vittori, managing director of OriGIn, has said that the GI provisions in the free trade agreement between Canada and the European Union completed last September present a model for agreements, although it contains some exceptions that OriGIn does not consider “fully satisfactory.”

The Canadian-EU agreement, OriGIn has said, provides “a high and ambitious level of protection, as well as enforcement mechanisms, for a comprehensive list of GIs. Such lists,

which is open to all categories of food products' names falling within the internationally recognized definition of GIs, can be extended in the future. The agreement contains elements of flexibility, such as possibility of coexistence between existing trademarks and GIs as a limited exception to the rights conferred by trademarks.”



The OriGIn luncheon at the Italian Embassy included Asiago, Idaho potatoes, Parmigiano Reggiano, Pecorino Romano, Prosciutto di Parma and Speck Alto Adige. Attendees were offered a range of GI wines and spirits, including 12 types of Chianti Classico, Napa Valley wines, Prosecco and Tequila. (Jerry Hagstrom/The Hagstrom Report)