

# The Hagstrom Report

Agriculture News As It Happens



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## GI supporters express puzzlement at U.S. dairy position

Leaders of European cheese groups and OriGIn, the global coalition of groups that support geographical indications, say they are puzzled at the National Milk Producers Federation's recent criticism of the European Union's attempts to include legal protections for the labeling of certain cheeses in the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

The Europeans have proposed that only the cheeses made where the cheeses originated could bear their place names while the U.S. dairy industry says those same cheeses have been made in the United States and other places in the New World for generations and should be allowed to continue to use those names.

"European producers are very puzzled about the position of the U.S. dairy industry as to the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations and the protection of geographical indications," the cheese leaders said in an email to *The Hagstrom Report*.

“As a matter of fact, accusing the European Union position on geographical indications of being protectionist seems far away both from legal considerations as well as the U.S. market situation,” the groups said.

“In the large majority of cases, U.S. dairy industry concerns regarding names considered at risk are absolutely not founded, as those names are [specifically] deemed as generic in the European Union,” the groups continued.

“On the other hand, we do not understand how it may be affirmed that some names have become generic in the U.S., where they are often used together with references (words, flag, symbols, landscapes, etc.) to the relevant European Union country of origin (Italy, France, Greece, Spain etc.). Consumers’ protection is at risk !”

The European cheese makers added, “The primary goal of T-TIP should be the consumer’s protection against any risk of being misled as to the origin of the product, in line with the spirit of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

“Just to name a few examples, there are around 50,000 people involved in the production chain of Parmigiano Reggiano, about 10,000 people in the production chain of Gorgonzola, some 8,000 people in the production chain of Comté, 8,000 people in the production chain of Asiago and over 5,000 people in the production chain of Manchego here in rural areas of Europe.”

The Europeans noted that they were “joined” in the statement by “many U.S. operators involved in the import, distribution and selling activity of our GI products in the U.S. market, all of which shall be guaranteed against unfair competition acts in the U.S. market. We want more competition, in any country, but our producers, as well as U.S. operators, need fair competition: authenticity, traceability and food information transparency are a must!”

The statement was signed by the following cheese group directors:

- Riccardo Deserti, Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano-Reggiano
- Sébastien Breton, Conseil National des Appellations d’Origine Laitières (CNAOL);
- Stefano Fontana, Consorzio Perla Tutela del Formaggio Gorgonzola;
- Santiago Altares, Fundación CRDOP Queso Manchego,
- and Flavio Innocenzi, Consorzio Tutela Formaggio Asiago.

“All of us are very grateful to Christopher Columbus, of course, as he brought from the Old World to the New World a lot of well-skilled cheese makers, but not its

‘terroir,’ geographical environments, neither the names of those specific places nor the products originating in the same,” the group added.

Separately, OriGIn, the Geneva-based global coalition groups supporting the use of geographical indications said in an email that T-TIP is “a tremendous opportunity to ensure GIs from both sides of the Atlantic are fully recognized and properly protected in these two key markets.”

OriGIn pointed out that its 350 member associations worldwide include producer groups in the United States.

“Opening up markets is crucial for business opportunities, but the non-respect or the unfair limitation of intellectual property rights would seriously undermine such efforts,” said Massimo Vittori, managing director of OriGIn.



*Massimo Vittori*

“As internationally recognized intellectual property, GIs serve the interests of both American and European consumers, more and more demanding in terms of information about the origin and characteristics of the products they wish to purchase,” Vittori said.

“Meanwhile, agricultural producers and transformers in both markets – the large majority composed of small and medium companies who play a key role in the economic and social dynamism of their respective areas and communities – expect a fair return from their efforts to ensure a high quality of their production and need to safeguard their investments.”

“In challenging times, where creating stable jobs and rethinking business models in light of sustainability concerns are crucial for the future of our economies and societies, GIs have a crucial role to play on both sides of the Atlantic. So we have been encouraging the negotiators (and will continue to do so!) to look at the GI chapter in the T-TIP as an opportunity in terms of jobs, growth and sustainable development for vibrant rural communities,” said Vittori.

The European cheese makers and OriGIn were referring to remarks by National Milk Producers Federation CEO Jim Mulhern to his members at a recent national convention.

“The European defense strategy includes an outrageous focus on bastardizing the concept of geographical indicators in an attempt to claw back, for their own protectionist use, the names of many common foods,” Mulhern told his members.



*Jim Mulhern*

“These foods include many cheeses that we’ve been making for decades – products like Parmesan and Gorgonzola, feta and Camembert and Asiago,” he said. “Many of these cheeses were made popular in the U.S., by U.S. companies, not imports ... but European companies are now trying to claim them for their exclusive use.”

“Christopher Columbus’s relatives in the Old World can keep their Parmigiano-Reggiano. But those of us in the New World, the one Columbus discovered many years ago, have every right to make and market award-winning Parmesan, for the use and enjoyment of folks here and, ultimately, around the world,” Mulhern concluded in his comments on the topic.

- [OriGIn – Organization for an International Geographical Indications Network](#)
  - [National Milk Producers Federation – Geographic Indicators](#)
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