

## Food names

# Stressed are the cheesemakers

MONROE, WISCONSIN

Europeans want their food names back. Americans are peeved

**I**N 1925 Ron Buholzer's family left Switzerland and settled in lush, green, rural Wisconsin. Here, like so many Wisconsinites, his family started to make cheese. Since then four generations of cheesemakers have worked in the family firm. Their most popular product is feta, a crumbly cheese that goes well in Greek salads. Mr Buholzer worries that he may soon be banned from selling it, because the European Union is trying to "claw back" food names that Americans consider generic but which Europeans believe should only apply to products made in specific bits of their continent. That includes feta, Parmesan and maybe even bologna.

Already Mr Buholzer is barred from exporting his feta to South Korea if he calls it "feta". Also, any new feta products sold in Canada that are not from Greece will soon have to be called "like" or in the "style" of feta—and not use Greek symbols. The EU is demanding protection for 145 food names, including feta, asiago, Gorgonzola, munster and fontina.

American cheesemakers are unwilling to accept this as a feta accompaniment. On the contrary, they are preparing for a food fight. A group has sprung up to fight the European threat: the Consor-

tium for Common Food Names. Negotiations over the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, a proposed free-trade deal between the EU and America, may stumble over the issue. The EU, meanwhile, is leaning on governments everywhere to stamp on foodmakers who purloin European names.

Americans are unimpressed. They see all this as an attempt to erect trade barriers and raise prices by reclaiming words that have long since passed into general use. Many members of Congress have urged Barack Obama's administration to resist the Europeans' demands.

Some will use this as an excuse not to ratify a trade deal unless the EU gives way.

America does offer legal protection for foods from geographic regions under trademark law. For example, Parmigiano Reggiano cannot be called that unless it really comes from the right parts of Italy. Likewise, Americans may call fizzy wine from California "champagne", but that is not what it says on the bottle (though one vineyard won an exception). There is no easy way to determine which names deserve protection. Are French fries safe? Or Italian dressing? Or even that symbol of American pride, the hamburger?

