



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
Wednesday, April 25, 2018

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## **Mexico Fails its Consumers, Trading Partners by Giving Away Common Cheese Names in EU Deal on Geographical Indications**

**(Washington, D.C.)** – Mexico appears poised to enact new restrictions on the use of common cheese names such as “parmesan,” “munster” and “feta” for products sold in Mexico, a development that runs counter to existing trade agreements with the United States, according to preliminary reports on the European Union (EU)-Mexico free trade agreement. Full details of the agreement have not yet been released, but early information indicates Mexico will force cheese marketers from Mexico and the United States to phase out the use of some generic names, yielding to the EU’s desire to monopolize those cheese markets.

“We are deeply disappointed that Mexico has limited U.S. access by restricting the use of common food names that have been used in the Mexican market for years. This undermines the rule of law and the value of the market access terms the U.S. has long had in place with Mexico,” said Secretary Tom Vilsack, president and CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council (USDEC). “While we are pleased that Mexico did not go so far as to grant full market access to the EU for dairy products, Mexico is essentially back-tracking on its mantra of ‘doing no harm’ in the NAFTA context. We hope as the details are hammered out that Mexico carefully weighs the impact of its remaining decisions pertaining to geographical indications (GIs) and common names.”

It appears that while Mexico preserved the rights of some common food names users, many key terms were put on the trading block. Generic terms such as parmesan, feta, munster, gorgonzola, asiago, fontina and neufchatel appear to be slated for future restrictions despite long-standing generic use—and familiarity with consumers—of many of these names in Mexico.

Preliminary information on the agreement signals that the U.S. government needs to do even more to ensure that “a bad situation doesn’t become even worse as the final details of the agreement are ironed out,” said Jim Mulhern, president and CEO of the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF).

“It is deeply frustrating for U.S. farmers and food manufacturers that the U.S. government has not been able to persuade our closest allies—those in the NAFTA region—to simply honor their existing trade commitments to us,” Mulhern said. “This means that our exporters now face fewer opportunities for their products, and trading partners are emboldened to see how much further they can push the boundaries of creating nontariff trade barriers.”

The EU obtained exclusive rights for 340 GIs in the Mexico trade agreement.

“CCFN is committed to using all legal avenues to continue its work to combat the market restricting impacts of the EU’s efforts,” said Jaime Castaneda, executive director of the Consortium for Common Food Names. “We are hopeful that the Mexican Congress recognizes that this rogue approach to GIs policy is bad for consumers and ultimately benefits a handful of European producers at the expense of Mexico’s own industry.”

Mulhern added, “There have been no new U.S. agreements initiated that allow us to be the ones shaping the rules of trade. This latest blow is a very hard one for our industry. It makes it absolutely essential that the U.S. Administration deliver on our industry’s NAFTA priorities by providing new dairy market access and eliminating trade-distorting dairy pricing classes such as Canada’s Class 7.”

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The Consortium for Common Food Names (CCFN) is an independent, international non-profit alliance whose goal is to work with leaders in agriculture, trade and intellectual property rights to foster the adoption of high standards and model geographical indication guidelines throughout the world. Those interested in joining can find information at [www.CommonFoodNames.com](http://www.CommonFoodNames.com).

The National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), based in Arlington, Virginia, develops and carries out policies that advance the well-being of dairy producers and the cooperatives they own. The members of NMPF’s cooperatives produce the majority of the U.S. milk supply, making NMPF the voice of dairy producers on Capitol Hill and with government agencies. For more on NMPF’s activities, visit our website at [www.nmpf.org](http://www.nmpf.org).

The U.S. Dairy Export Council (USDEC) is a non-profit, independent membership organization that represents the global trade interests of U.S. dairy producers, proprietary processors and cooperatives, ingredient suppliers and export traders. Its mission is to enhance U.S. global competitiveness and assist the U.S. industry to increase its global dairy ingredient sales and exports of U.S. dairy products. USDEC accomplishes this through programs in market development that build global demand for U.S. dairy products, resolve market access barriers and advance industry trade policy goals. USDEC is supported by staff across the United States and overseas in Mexico, South America, Asia, Middle East and Europe.