**Wisconsin cheese makers think naming idea cheesy**

***Dispute over right to use 13 names, such as feta***

WASHINGTON - They're cheesed off in [Wisconsin](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2003-09-07/business/0309060398_1_cheese-names-cheesemakers-feta) over a European scheme to ban foreigners from using popular cheese names such as feta, Parmesan and Gorgonzola.

Europeans claim that certain products are part of their heritage, and they are preparing to ask world trade officials this week for exclusive rights to 13 cheese names. Wisconsin, America's No. 1 cheese-making state, has come out swinging against the idea, however. "We see it as a serious threat to our ability to market cheeses that we've been making for decades," said John Umhoefer with the Wisconsin Cheesemakers Association." People will still ask for feta cheese, but if you have to call it 'Mediterranean white cheese,' you're going to confuse the consumer."

And it's not just cheese. Europeans want to require any wine called "Bordeaux" to come from the Bordeaux region of France, or it must be called something else. Same with Chianti, Champagne, Beaujolais and Parma ham.

Europeans have argued to the World Trade Organization that they are tired of foreign products "[free](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2003-09-07/business/0309060398_1_cheese-names-cheesemakers-feta) riding on the reputation" of European originals. When world trade ministers meet next week in [Cancun](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2003-09-07/business/0309060398_1_cheese-names-cheesemakers-feta), Mexico, Europeans will ask for exclusive rights to 41 such names. If Europe is forced to scale back its generous farm subsidies, the rights could become a bargaining chip.

But Wisconsin cheese-lovers are uniting against the threat. They see protectionism at work, not homeland pride. Sen. Russell D. Feingold, a Wisconsin Democrat, mocked the European claim in a letter he sent Thursday to the U.S. trade representative." Residents of a certain German city have no claim to the word 'hamburger,' for example, any more than those who live in the Belgian capital could sue over use of the term 'Brussels sprouts,'" Feingold said. "The [success](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2003-09-07/business/0309060398_1_cheese-names-cheesemakers-feta) of immigrant cheesemakers in the U.S. has turned names like 'feta' and 'Swiss' into generic names that indicate product characteristics rather than geographic origin."

Cheesemaking is a $7 billion-a-year [business](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2003-09-07/business/0309060398_1_cheese-names-cheesemakers-feta) in Wisconsin, so the dispute could have significant consequences. Also, U.S. cheesemakers think they deserve credit for popularizing European cheeses in America, not bad-mouthing as pirates and freeloaders. "If anything, our cheese plants have built the United States feta market and Parmesan market," Umhoefer said. "Imports have only been a small percentage." In 2001, Wisconsin alone produced seven times as much hard cheese as Italy exported to the United States. So U.S. cheesemakers think something stinks about all this, and it ain't the Limburger.



"They're trying to reach into our nation and affect what we do," Umhoefer said. "It's not as if we're going to Italy with Parmesan and rubbing their noses in it."

September 07, 2003|By KNIGHT RIDDER/TRIBUNE

A more recent headline same topic:

**Congress defends naming rights for U.S. cheeses**

Fifty-five members of the House Dairy Farmer Caucus (DFC) wrote today to U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk to urge a robust defense of America’s dairy industry against efforts by the European Union to claw back for its countries’ sole use several generic cheese names such as parmesan, provolone and feta, as well as other names of importance to the U.S. dairy industry…

September 29, 2010|By A DAIRY HERD news source

1. What competitive advantages would European cheese makers receive if they were granted the naming rights to their cheeses?
2. What are the United States’ main arguments against granting naming rights to the European producers?
3. Why are the European producers going to the WTO asking for exclusive naming rights?
4. Who do you think should hold the naming rights for these European products? Why?
5. If naming rights were given to the European producers, then the rest of the world would have to come up with different names for many products. If you were in charge of renaming Parmesan cheese, what would you name it?