



Brussels, 09/09/2020

OPEN LETTER

Meat and Dairy denominations: Let's "call a spade a spade"

Plant-based imitations and their denominations raise fundamental questions about consumer information, our cultural heritage and the power of modern marketing, which blithely mixes big business interests and values. As European livestock representative organisations, we acknowledge and recognize the wish of a segment of European consumers for an increase of such products on the market. However we expect a fair and consistent marketing that respects both consumers and the work carried out by generations of farmers and butchers across Europe!

With the involvement of the growing number of multinational companies on the vegan market these last years, there has been a push for denominations such as 'steak', 'burger', 'sausage' etc. on plant-based dairy and meat imitations. Such marketing of dairy and non-meat products can clearly mislead the EU consumers in thinking that these imitations are an 'equal' substitute to originals. Substitution is a powerful marketing concept that can reassure consumers that they are simply replacing a product with another. However, while agreeing that plant based products can constitute a source of protein they cannot guarantee the same nutritional intake as the animal products they are trying to imitate! In addition we cannot accept the representation of these ultra-processed products as healthier options given that they are often high in additives, salt, sugar and fat. In that direction, meat and dairy imitation producers are in fact pushing for a marketing bias that values form over substance.

Meat denominations are deeply rooted in our cultural heritage. Bacon, Ham, Carpaccio, Steak, Filet, Chops and Salami are all traditional denominations that have been shaped over time by the hard work of farmers and butchers with quite great differences between regions, making them so unique. No one today needs to explain what these products are or what to expect when buying them! This is also why these denominations have never needed protection up until now. If we protected our local and regional heritage with Protected Geographical Indications (PGIs) and Protected Designations of Origin (PDOs) we should be consistent and also protect the denominations of more common goods which are also a result of our heritage. With the boom in the marketing of similar products, this common heritage is at stake. The imitation industry has taken advantage of a European loophole to hijack these powerful common denominations in its favour.

The plant-based sector is claiming to be creative and innovative but it should also be fair. They have, especially in the current climate, an opportunity to create new products with new denominations, to gain consumer's recognition and to achieve financial success. How can the plant-based lobby claim that it is not misleading the consumers if it points out that they need meat denominations to convey information about their own product's texture and taste? If a product claims to be different from another than it should have its own name or denomination. An industry striving to become mainstream does not need to build its glory by focusing their marketing on existing products and on a fight against them!

For the European livestock sector this is not a fight against, but a call for the rightful acknowledgement and respect for the work of millions of European farmers and livestock sector workers. They keep our rural areas alive while providing our citizens with quality dairy and meat products, enjoyed and consumed by all generations as part of the European culinary heritage and balanced diet. The legal framework protecting the denominations in the dairy sector has created a vibrant environment and has led to certainty in the consumer relations. That is why we not only want that this is safeguarded but that also the same level of protection is extended to all other livestock products. For the following reasons, the European livestock chain representatives urge MEPs to defend the original amendment as adopted in April 2019 and not to accept any compromise on this. We can't compromise on the consumers' right to have reliable information on the characteristics and nutritional aspects of the products they are purchasing.

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