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CCFN Urges Mexico and Japan to Reject EU Attempts to Confiscate Generic Meat, Cheese, Wine Names on EU Geographical Indications Lists

Mozzarella, Feta, Bologna and Salami Among Generic Terms at Risk

(Washington D.C., October 12, 2017) The Consortium for Common Food Names (CCFN) this week insisted that Mexico and Japan protect the interests of its consumers and producers, and maintain a competitive marketplace, by striking several generic names from the lists of geographical indications (GIs) for which the European Union is seeking approval in trade negotiations. CCFN also pursued clarification on how some terms will be protected within the EU's agreement with the two nations, in order to safeguard the food's common name.

"When only one set of producers is allowed to use a generic name for a product, the result is less competition, higher prices and less consumer choice," said CCFN Executive Director Jaime Castaneda. "It would force existing producers to re-label their products to eliminate the generic term, which confuses consumers – and which has no relationship to product quality or value."

In both Mexico and Japan, the EU is seeking sole ownership of such common cheese names as "feta", "asiago", and "gorgonzola". CCFN commented that the EU should only be permitted to protect legitimate specialty names used in full – usually compound names that contain a geographic region, such as "Mortadella Bologna", "Prosciutto Toscano", "Mozzarella di Bufala Campana" or "Gouda Holland". This approach could work for other GIs, too, such as through protection of "Greek Feta".

"Mexico and Japan have shown leadership in providing review protocols and asking for comments on these proposed GI lists," he added. "We encourage them now to maintain healthy trade and

competition within their markets, which benefits their consumers, retailers and producers, and maintains fair trade with their trading partners.”

CCFN’s comments also supported the filings of the Wine Institute, which objects to the creation of restrictions on various common wine terms and seeks clarification regarding specific terms such as “sherry”, “chablis”, and “port”. The Wine Institute’s Japan filing for instance noted, “Wine Institute has long advocated for the importance of place, grape and descriptive names and recognizes the need for accurate representation of the origins of wines.... While reasonable rules to protect terms of geographic significance have important benefits, the EU attempts to claim exclusive use of generic, descriptive and other common names in both the EU and other countries ... in violation of the EU's national treatment and most-favored nation obligations. Over time, EU rules have developed into a complex regulatory scheme that establishes inappropriate GIs, restricts competition and consumer choice, and confiscates private property rights for the benefit of a limited number of EU producers.”

“For generations parmesan, bologna and other common names have been used in Europe and elsewhere. Only in the past 20 years did the EU begin to push its GI agenda of confiscating common food names,” said Castaneda. “This anti-competitive, anti-trade policy must be stopped; we cannot allow New World food manufacturers and others in the value chain to go out of business, and consumers to be faced with less choice and competition, in order to bestow unearned rewards on a handful of European companies that are unwilling to compete head-to-head with products made around the world.

“If Japan and Mexico follow common sense and the rules of trade, then common names will be safeguarded for all to use,” he said.

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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.