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CCFN Advises Food Companies on Protecting Common Meat, Cheese and Wine Terms from European Efforts to Claim Their Exclusive Use

Chicago, June 23, 2016 — At a well-attended seminar, the Consortium for Common Food Names advised U.S. food and beverage companies how to preserve use of common meat, cheese, and wine terms long considered generic in this and many other countries. Officials from the Department of Commerce’s U.S. Patent and Trademark Office raised awareness of the problem of overprotection of geographical indications in U.S. export markets and how this protection might impact the use of common names.

More than 70 food company representatives, intellectual property attorneys and others attended the day-long, June 21 seminar. Speakers and panelists stressed that there are ways to protect the threatened names, including seeking guidance from CCFN.

Examples of the names at risk are numerous, but most alarming was the clear message that geographical indication over-reach by the European Union appears to be a never-ending proposition that could include numerous terms and images that are not directly threatened today.

“Protecting the right to use these common food terms, whether they are parmesan cheese or valencia oranges or chateau or bologna, is vital for the growth of the U.S. food and beverage industries in the United States,” said Jaime Castaneda, executive director of the consortium, an international alliance dedicated to preserving rights to use common food names. “The seminar explained the tools available to companies to help protect the names they have long relied on.”

Seminar attendees learned the major considerations the Patent and Trademark Office and other intellectual property authorities use in awarding trademarks and geographical indications, as well as the extent to which generic use is a factor. Individually, USPTO representatives provided information to interested companies about export considerations, including seeking protection for trademarks in overseas markets.

In addition to CCFN and USPTO, seminar speakers included representatives of the Wine Institute, North

American Meat Institute, Cato Institute, U.S. Dairy Export Council, International Dairy Foods Association, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, and the law firms of Covington & Burling and Godfrey & Kahn.

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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.