

## **Curd, blue fungus and salted hog**

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Aficionados of Australian gorgonzola cheese, served with slices of prosciutto, may soon find themselves dining instead on milk curd with blue fungus served with year-old salted hog.

If the European Union gets its way, these foods may have to drop their fancy names, and perhaps use descriptive names.

European food producers, whose regional names of origin have become worldwide generic product descriptions, are trying to force restrictive new branding rules through the World Trade Organisation.

If the European demands are met, specific regional names may be used only for produce which actually comes from the geographic location.

In effect, something like Europe's Appellation Controlee system for wine labelling will be generalised throughout the food and groceries trade. Gourmet diners who previously enjoyed Australian Feta cheese may have to make do with sheep's milk cheese in brine with their salad.

The exclusionary European drive may hit a large slice of Australian small and medium enterprises in small goods, dairy foods, meat processing and other products. They face extensive repackaging and relabelling charges, particularly in key export markets.

Some years ago, the French wine industry succeeded in having French regional names associated with wine categories, such as champagne or burgundy, reserved exclusively for wineries inside the geographical limits of Champagne and Burgundy.

The threat, said **ANU law researcher Michael Handler**, was that only producers in Feta, Greece, could use the label feta cheese, and only cheese from Parma, Italy, could be called parmesan.

"First they took away our champagne and our burgundy," he said. "Now the Europeans want to take away our feta, parmesan and our parma ham. If the EU is successful in the World Trade Organisation, the landscape of every supermarket in the country is going to have to change. Australian feta and parmesan cheeses will disappear.

"Only those producers in a small region of northern Italy will be allowed to use the name parma ham. Australians will have to find other ways of naming such goods."

Assuming Australian marketers can invent new brand names, rather than falling back on unappetising literal descriptions, conditioning consumers and export markets to swallow unfamiliar labelling will be a huge problem.

"Australian producers export approximately \$1 billion in cheese throughout the world," Mr Handler said.