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Italy urges the EU to counter a U.S. bid to strip protected status from Gorgonzola and Champagne

Rome says Farm Bill changes and other U.S. initiatives could turn European geographical indications into generic terms abroad

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Italy urged the European Union on Monday, November 23, to mount a coordinated response to U.S. moves that Rome says could weaken legal protections for geographical indications such as Gorgonzola and Champagne, turning names protected

in Europe into generic terms in the United States and other markets.

At a meeting of the EU Agriculture Council in Brussels, Italy presented a paper backed by 16 other member states calling on the European Commission to develop what it described as a broad political strategy to protect and promote geographical indications abroad. According to the document, the strategy should combine legal protection with public outreach, technical cooperation and capacity building, while reinforcing the idea that geographical indications are intellectual property rights tied to specific product names.

Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, France, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain initially supported the Italian initiative. Luxembourg, Romania, Finland, Slovakia and Malta later joined, bringing the total number of supporting countries besides Italy to 16.

The dispute centers on several U.S. initiatives that Italy says would allow the unrestricted use of names that are protected in Europe. In the document presented to EU ministers, Rome pointed in particular to the ongoing revision of the U.S. Farm Bill, which it said aims to recognize European and non-European geographical indications as “common names,” allowing their use by any producer under U.S. law. Italy also cited the Safety Act of 2025 as moving in the same direction.

Italian officials said the issue goes beyond the U.S. domestic market. According to the paper, Washington has included or is seeking to include language in trade agreements with third countries that treats major European geographical indications as generic names. The document names Argentina, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Taiwan and India among the countries involved in signed or ongoing negotiations.

Rome warned that those efforts could complicate existing and future EU trade agreements, because protection of geographical indications is a key part of the bloc’s commercial policy. Italy argued that the U.S. position could undermine agreements already reached with some partners, including in the Mercosur area, and could also affect talks with countries such as India, Thailand and Malaysia, where the status of protected names remains an important negotiating point.

The concern has direct implications for the drinks industry because many of the most valuable geographical indications cover wines and spirits. If names such as Champagne, Cava or Porto are treated more broadly as generic terms in the United States or in third countries through trade deals, European producers could face weaker exclusivity and lower commercial value for labels that are closely tied to origin, reputation and export pricing.

Italy also raised concerns about internet governance. In the paper, it described as a threat a process opened by ICANN, the global body that coordinates the internet domain name system, to assign new generic top-level domains. The Italian document said applications involving names such as .asiago, .gorgonzola, .cava and .porto could create new confusion around protected product names in the digital sphere.

Speaking for Italy during the public session of the council, Ambassador Marco Canaparo said the World Intellectual Property Organization and U.S. authorities had asserted what he described as a supposed right to use names considered common terms, even when those names are protected as geographical indications. Italy told EU partners that such steps put at risk the stability of the international system for geographical indications and require closer monitoring as well as a coherent, coordinated response from EU institutions and member states.

EU Agriculture Commissioner Christophe Hansen told ministers that the Commission would work to negotiate legal protection for geographical indications, cooperate with international organizations and push back against the misuse of European geographical names abroad.

The issue is significant for the EU food and beverage sector because geographical indications cover a broad range of products and represent an important export asset. According to the EU’s eAmbrosia database, the bloc has more than 3,900 registered geographical indications across wines, spirits and food products. Italy has about 900 registered denominations, the highest total in the EU, ahead of France with about 800.

The latest additions to the EU register were made about 10 days before the council meeting and included Fior di latte molisano, a protected designation of origin cheese, and Cicoria puntarella molfettese, a protected geographical indication vegetable

product. Those new registrations added to a system that Italy says now needs stronger defense as disputes over the use of place-based names spread from store shelves to trade negotiations and internet domains.