vinetur

EU Mercosur Deal Shields Italian Food Names

Trade pact set to take effect May 1 expands protection for more than 350 European geographical indications in South America

Tuesday, April 28, 2026



The European Union’s trade agreement with Mercosur is set to begin provisional application on May 1, 2026, giving legal force to a long-negotiated framework that will expand protection for hundreds of European geographical indications, including more than 50 Italian names tied to food and wine.

The interim trade agreement, part of a broader two-tier structure that also includes a partnership accord, was formally signed in Asunción on Jan. 17, 2026, after the political agreement was reached on Dec. 6, 2024. The European Commission has moved ahead

with provisional application even as the European Parliament has referred the deal to the Court of Justice of the European Union for a legality review.

For wine producers and food exporters, the most immediate effect is stronger protection for geographical indications, or GIs, in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. The agreement recognizes and protects more than 350 European GIs in Mercosur markets and more than 220 Mercosur indications in the European Union. Among the European names covered are Asti, Barolo, Prosecco, Chianti, Brunello di Montalcino and Franciacorta, along with cheeses, cured meats and other regional products.

The deal is being presented in Europe as a major step against “Italian sounding,” the practice of using names or packaging that evoke Italian products without being made in Italy. The agreement bars imitation of protected denominations and says a recognized GI cannot be treated as a common name. It also limits the registration of trademarks identical to or containing a protected GI, except for applications filed in good faith before the agreement takes effect.

The list of protected Italian names is unusually broad. It includes wines such as Barbaresco, Barbera d’Alba, Barbera d’Asti, Bardolino, Barolo, Brachetto d’Acqui, Chianti Classico, Conegliano-Prosecco Valdobbiadene-Prosecco, Lambrusco di Sorbara, Marsala, Montepulciano d’Abruzzo, Soave and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano. It also covers spirits such as Grappa. On the food side, it includes Aceto Balsamico di Modena, Asiago, Bresaola della Valtellina, Culatello di Zibello, Fontina, Gorgonzola, Grana Padano, Mozzarella di Bufala Campana, Parmigiano Reggiano and Prosciutto di Parma.

The agreement creates a committee on geographical indications made up of representatives from national authorities and foreign ministries to oversee implementation. That body will be responsible for handling disputes over recognition and enforcement as the treaty begins to operate in practice.

The timing matters because the Mercosur deal arrives as another transatlantic agreement is moving in a different direction. In February 2026, the United States and Argentina signed an Agreement on Reciprocal Trade and Investment that takes a far looser view of certain food names. Under that pact, Argentina must allow some cheese

and meat terms to be used by U.S. products if those terms are treated as generic or lack proof of a special reputation tied to geography.

That approach directly conflicts with the European model. In EU law, protection for a PDO or PGI extends beyond exact copying and can cover imitation or evocation even when the true origin is stated. The Court of Justice has previously held that “Parmesan” evokes “Parmigiano Reggiano,” showing how broadly European law can protect these names.

By contrast, the U.S.-Argentina agreement reflects the common-name doctrine used in American trade policy for many food terms. Names such as Asiago, Fontina, Gorgonzola and Parmesan may be treated as generic in that framework rather than as protected geographical indications.

That legal split could create problems for Argentina once the Mercosur deal starts applying provisionally. The country will be bound by one treaty that strengthens GI protection with Europe and another that gives wider room for generic use by U.S. exporters. Lawyers say that tension could lead to years of litigation over which obligation prevails in Argentine law and how customs officials and courts should apply competing commitments.

For European producers, especially in Italy’s wine and food sectors, the Mercosur agreement offers new commercial leverage at a time when imitation remains widespread in overseas markets. But its practical value will depend on enforcement inside Mercosur countries and on whether local authorities are willing to block labels and trademarks that resemble protected European names once the treaty enters into force next month.