

FDA: Wooden Boards in Cheese Aging Are Unsanitary

Wisconsin State Journal, Madison, Wisconsin



MADISON, Wis. (AP) —

Wooden boards have been an integral part of aging a wide variety of cheeses by producers around the world for more than a century, but the U.S. Food and Drug Administration now says they are unsanitary.

Wisconsin allows cheese operations to use wooden boards if they follow protocol approved by the state Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. DATCP spokesman Jim Dick says officials there are still seeking clarification on the FDA ruling before making any statements.

"Until then, there will be no change in Wisconsin's inspection policy," Dick said.

The Roelli Cheese Haus in Shullsburg uses wooden boards to age 85 percent of its cheeses.

"It's a potential game-changer for the face of artisan cheeses in the United States," owner Chris Roelli told the [Wisconsin State Journal](#) [1]. "I obviously have a lot riding on this because my niche is on cellar-curing cheeses (on wooden boards), so I'm worried about it."

The FDA cited several New York operations, despite state laws that permit wooden boards.

Monica Metz, the branch chief for the FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition's Dairy and Egg Branch, wrote in her analysis to the New York Department of Agriculture & Markets' Division of Milk Control and Dairy Services that the reports showed that the porous structure of wood made it susceptible to the colonization of bacteria on the surface and inside the wood.

FDA: Wooden Boards in Cheese Aging Are Unsanitary

Published on Food Manufacturing (<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com>)

But Metz's analysis, made public by the American Cheese Society, didn't include the entire findings of one of the reports. The University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Dairy Research analysis said that report concluded that while some wood can hide some bad bacteria, it can be eliminated as long as a thorough cleaning procedure is followed.

Unlike manufacturers of fruits, vegetables and meats, dairy producers have had few incidents of listeria outbreaks over the years, said Marianne Smukowski of the UW-Madison Center of Dairy Research. "And none have been traced back to aging cheese on wood boards," she added.

Smukowski said she believes the FDA made its finding partly in response to the enactment of the 2011 FoodSafety Modernization Act, which shifts the focus from responding to contamination crises to preventing them, and that it can create overreactions from the FDA.

The Chalet Cheese Cooperative in Monroe is the only American producer of Limburger cheese. Owner Myron Olson said the bacteria on the wood plays a big role in creating the smell and taste of the cheeses aged on it.

"Without the boards, it will be the end of Limburger cheese made in the United States," he said.

Source URL (retrieved on 04/27/2015 - 5:39am):

<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2014/06/fda-ruling-could-change-cheese-aging-process>

Links:

[1] <http://bit.ly/TEo7Wi>