

Cheese industry not happy with FDA

By AC Shilton, Outside

As Americans, we're used to certain infringements on our liberty, like having the NSA creep on our phone records and the TSA examine our shoes. But there's a limit to our patience. When the government comes for our cheese, people get pissed.

Earlier this summer, FDA inspectors in New York cited a cheese manufacturer for using wooden boards during the aging process – a common practice among artisanal cheesemakers. Because the New York Department of Agriculture allows cheese to be aged on wood, it contacted the FDA for clarification. In response, it got a terse statement from Monica Metz, the branch chief for the FDA Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition's Dairy and Egg Branch:

The use of wooden shelves, rough or otherwise, for cheese ripening does not conform to GMP [good management practice] requirements, which require that "all plant equipment and utensils shall be so designed and of such material and workmanship as to be adequately cleanable, and shall be properly maintained." 21 CFR 110.40(a). Wooden shelves or boards cannot be adequately cleaned and sanitized.

Wooden shelves have been used for hundreds of years – pretty much every shard of Parmigiano-Reggiano (not including that from-a-tube stuff) was aged on a wooden board. To enforce this rule would change the way most U.S. artisanal cheese is made—and it would stop the import of many European varieties.

When the news broke, people got angry.

A mob of cheesemakers and cheese enthusiasts took to social

media to lambaste the federal agency. Vermont congressman Peter Welch (Dem.) led the fight on Twitter, posting, “We will not back down [#SaveOurCheese](#).”

Surprisingly, it worked.

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