

Agriculture by Marcia Merry

Uniform food for 'Europe 1992'

The European Community is preparing the way for the food cartel to downgrade food quality.

A series of bureaucratic European Community actions in Brussels and decisions by the European Court have paved the way for an unappetizing array of uniform foods for the "Europe 1992" free trade zone. Apart from the many undesirable features of boring food, the main threat posed is that of tampering with the content of foods in a way that undermines the existence of the farmer—without whom, there is no ample and varied food supply—and undermines the quality of foods overall.

The most famous recent decision is the sausage scandal. On Feb. 3, European Court Attorney General Marco Darman ruled that national laws which tightly regulate the meat content of German sausages constitute an unfair barrier to the import into West Germany of sausages from other EC nations, under Article 30 of the Treaty of Rome that founded the European Community. This decision must be formally offered up to Bonn this spring, but if upheld, it helps clinch a recent series of similar decisions about many of the most dear-to-heart national foods.

A court judgment has been won by the EC Commission to prevent Italy from maintaining its standards for the ratio of hard wheat content in pasta. Italians must now accept higher percentages of regular wheat.

The court also overthrew the 470-year-old *Reinheitsgebot*, which protected the quality of German beer. And, the court has ordered the French government to accept Edam cheese with a fat content of less than the 40% prescribed under national law. Meanwhile, there has been a raging battle

in Paris and Bonn to prevent Brussels from dictating the legality of non-dairy cream toppings, and other imitation milk products.

The European Court is holding fast to its principle that national food laws should not in any way be elevated above the dictates of the Common Agriculture Program (CAP). This principle is not some longstanding consensus, but a new arrogation of power, in the name of the impending Europe 1992 Single Market. It was given impetus by an EC *Internal Market White Paper* in 1985.

In the early days of the EC, the prevailing concept was that a specific new EC law should be agreed upon each time the contents of a major food item was to be changed. In 1969, the EC started to draw up a program for the main food groups, with suggested contents. This was revised in 1973. The program proposed directives on 50 sectors, including ice cream, bread, pasta, and soups.

But the EC free market radicals superseded all this with their 1985 *White Paper*. Its argument is that food should freely cross borders, as long as it is labeled clearly. The European Community expert on food policy, Paul Gray, uses all the new jargon: "The purpose of the new EC food law now is essentially to define the social contract between the buyer and the seller—to make sure that the buyer knows what he is buying"—even if it's hogwash, as long as he knows it to be so.

Gray ridicules the old fogies who take pride in their national foods. He talks of the "vicious triangle"—Italy's ban on German pasta, France's

ban on a type of Italian salami, and Germany's ban on France's beer.

The real issue is the very existence of wholesome, plentiful food. The European Community is making way for the handful of food cartel firms to dictate the quality of food you eat, or whether you eat any at all. Ersatz cheese, diluted wine and beer, and low-grade spaghetti are what you will get, if you are lucky.

Since the mid-1980s, the output potential of European farms has been rapidly reduced, after decades of post-war productivity-development under the Common Agriculture Program. Farmers are being financially squeezed out of existence. There is a milk-reduction quota program, which fines farmers for "overmarketing" milk above their assigned quota. There are dozens of new restrictive laws in the name of the environment that inhibit or stop farming altogether.

The famed "surplus" butter mountain of a few years ago has melted down. The famous "sea" of milk powder has dried up. This year, for the first time ever, mandatory cropland set-aside is being imposed in 11 of 12 EC member-nations, including tiny Luxembourg. Brussels officials insist that this is essential to prevent food "surpluses" and save the environment. Close to 1 million hectares may come out of production—or 2.47 million acres.

In reality, there is a desperate need for more food production in Europe, for domestic consumption and export. In France, in just one year, the soup kitchens, called "restaurants of the heart," have doubled in number in many provinces, because of poverty.

Therefore, the arrogant maneuvers by Brussels EC officials to try to overturn national laws on food contents is really a preparation for the food cartel companies to downgrade food quality and quantity for all.