

“Product of Germany” – “Wisconsin Cheese” It’s NOT

by Pete Hardin

No other product so defines a single state in the minds of American consumers as “cheese” conjures up Wisconsin. Wisconsin’s name on cheese boosts products’ value, with the image of higher quality. But ... German Smoked Gouda, English Stilton, French Port du Salud, and Danish Blue — all from Wisconsin???

The farmer-funded Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board (WMMB) wisely devotes the lion’s share of its resources to promoting state-produced cheeses in a wide array of venues. WMMB contracts with cheese marketers wishing to display the “Wisconsin Cheese” logo on their consumer products. The black-and-white “Wisconsin Cheese” logo — a yeoman’s bare forearm holding up a chunk of cheese with a traditional dairy farm in the background — may be only affixed to cheeses produced in Wisconsin. That’s the rule agreed to by contractees using the “Wisconsin Cheese” logo on their cheese products.

Labeling mistakes may happen. But repeated “mistakes” — in which multiple, imported cheese products bearing the “Wisconsin Cheese” logo and descriptors such as “Crafted in Wisconsin” are marketed in Wisconsin — fail the “sniff test” worse than aged Limburger that’s sat in the sunshine too long on a hot July day.

All of the foreign cheeses featured in this report were purchased in the past month at Woodman’s supermarkets in Wisconsin. All of these cheeses bear the “Wisconsin Cheese” logo. All these products bear the “JS” label — distributed by JS Brands of Wisconsin, a firm with the mailing address of P. O. Box 108, Sun Prairie, Wisconsin 53590.

WMMB informed, sought corrections

At World Dairy Expo this year (Sept. 28-Oct. 2), a dairy farmer from the Green Bay area informed James Robson, CEO of WMMB, that imported cheese sold at a Woodman’s store in northeast Wisconsin bore the “Wisconsin Cheese” logo. Robson’s staff hunted down the product and contacted JS Brands. The distributor promised to clean up the mistake. According to Stan Woodworth, WMMB’s VP for cheese marketing, the problem was attributed to an employee running the label-making machine who did not remove the “Wisconsin Cheese” logo from packages of imports.

Completely separate from WMMB’s probe (which was kept internal), in mid-October, *The Milkweed* editor enjoyed the opportunity to study Woodman’s expansive cheese offerings on the west side of Madison. Scrutinizing the cheeses displayed at that store revealed the four imported cheeses bearing the “Wisconsin Cheese” logo. Phone calls to senior staffers at WMMB revealed the board’s background and handling of the matter. Personnel stated surprise that JS Brands’ offending products were (then) still in Woodman’s retail cheese displays. Three weeks later, (November 6), three of the four products were still being sold by Woodman’s.

“Smoked Gouda” is illegally misbranded

For one of the above-cited products, multiple sins extending far beyond mere mistaken misuse of the

Definition of Misbranded Food

Section 402. [343]. Misbranded Food

A food shall be deemed to be misbranded —

(a) If (1) in its labeling is false or misleading in any particular, ...

(b) It is offered for sale under the name of another food.

(c) It is an imitation of another food, unless its label bears, in type of uniform size and prominence, the word “imitation” and, immediately thereafter, the name of the food imitated.

(g) If it purports to be or is presented as a food for which a definition and standard of identity has been prescribed by regulations provided by section 401, unless (1) it conforms to such definition and standard, and (2) its label bears the name of the food specified in the definition and standard and, insofar as may be required by such regulations, the common names of optional ingredients (Other than spices, flavoring, and coloring) present in the food.

—Source: Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act, 21 CFT, Section 343.

Two Sides of the SAME “Cheese”



Front Label



“Product of Germany”

Back Label

“Smoked Gouda Cheese”	Name	“Imported Naturally Smoked Cheese”
“Wisconsin Cheese” “Crafted in Wisconsin”	Nationality	“Product of Germany”
Cheese, Water, Butter Emulsifying Salt E339, 450 R/C	Ingredients	Gouda and/or Maasdamcheese (pasteurized milk, cheese cultures, salt, enzymes), water, butterfat, casein, disodium phosphate and sodium citrate (emulsifying salts), sorbic acid (preservative), natural smoke.
Dist. By: JS Brands of Wisconsin	Source	Imported by: Atalanta Corp.

“Wisconsin Cheese” logo are apparent. The “Smoked Gouda Cheese” is misbranded, in clear violation of federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) rules.

In Section 402. [343] (Misbranded Food) of the Federal Food Drug and Cosmetic Act, the FDA defines “Misbranded Food.” (See accompanying sidebar for full language.) Simply stated, FDA considers a food to be misbranded if the label is false or misleading; if a product is sold under the name of another food, and if a food purports to be for a food with a standard of identity but does not fully conform to that standard.

The JS Brands of Wisconsin “Smoked Gouda Cheese” is misbranded for the following reasons: 1) the product is NOT Gouda cheese, 2) the ingredients label seems in serious error, 3) the product appears to be a processed cheese product or processed cheese food product — not cheese, and 4) whatever else ... the “stuff” (for lack of a four-letter word) is NOT worthy of the “Wisconsin Cheese” logo.

Two names/labels/ingredients lists?

Strangely, the JS Brands of Wisconsin “Smoked Gouda Cheese” has conflicting dual identities: TWO brand names, TWO labels, and TWO ingredients lists. (See accompanying photographs and descriptions of texts on package.)

The apparent “front side” of the Smoked Gouda Cheese package — JS Brands of Wisconsin — claims the product is Smoked Gouda Cheese. On the backside, however, the product is called “Dutch Mill Dance,” an “Imported Naturally Smoked Cheese.” The package claims to be a “Product of Germany.” Further, in teeny-tiny print at the bottom of the package, appear the words: “Imported by Atalanta Corp. Elizabeth — NJ 07206 www.atalanta.com”

What JS Brands of Wisconsin has done is merely slap its label on the backside of another firm’s previously-labeled product, without removing the prior label.

Proof that the JS Brands of Wisconsin product is not cheese may be found in the original ingredients list for the “Dutch Mill Dance” product that’s described on the backside as “Imported Naturally Smoked Cheese.”

Compare the two ingredients lists: front — JS Brands of Wisconsin — and back — Atalanta Corp.’s “Dutch Mill Dance”:

* JS Brands of Wisconsin lists the following ingredients for its “Smoked Gouda Cheese” — Cheese, Water, Butter, Emulsifying Salt E339, 450 A/C.”

Water is not added to the vat in producing standard cheeses. Efforts by JS Brands of Wisconsin to create a list of ingredients for the “Smoked

Gouda Cheese” selectively copy-catted the “backside” label of ingredients, sort of, up to the point where casein, the sodium derivatives and preservatives were added. After all, in Wisconsin, a lot of folks know that casein is not a legal ingredient in natural cheese ... right, CHEESEHEADS???

* Meanwhile, Atalanta Corp. lists the following ingredients for this same cheese: Gouda and/or Maasdam cheese (pasteurized milk, cheese cultures, salt, enzymes), water, butterfat, **casein**, disodium phosphates and sodium citrate (emulsifying salts), sorbic acid (preservative), natural smoke.” (Bold-face emphasis added.) This product’s *original* list of ingredients (that is, for Atalanta Corp.’s “Dutch Mill Dance”) does not fit the description for Gouda, a cheese for which the FDA has a standard of identity. Items such as water and casein are not allowed in standardized cheeses. IN FACT: THE ORIGINAL (ATALANTA CORP.) PRODUCT IS A PROCESSED PRODUCT, NOT CHEESE.

JS Brands “Smoked Gouda” way off base ...

Further, where the “Dutch Mill Dance” label describes the ingredients as “Gouda and/or Maasdam cheese” ... “and/or” simply doesn’t work for specific FDA standards of identity. Further, FDA has no standard of identity for Maasdam. To comply with FDA standards of identity, Gouda cheese cannot be “Gouda and/or Maasdam cheese.” Gouda is Gouda. Technically, the “Dutch Mill Dance” product should carry a descriptor that it’s a “processed cheese product” or “processed cheese food.”

If the JS Brands of Wisconsin’s “Smoked Gouda” were not completely off base, it would be easier to swallow the business about the firm’s widespread inclusion of the “Wisconsin Cheese” logo on numerous imported products.

Maybe the “Wisconsin Cheese” logo was a mistake. But the “Smoked Gouda Cheese” isn’t Gouda, it isn’t cheese, and it surely isn’t *Wisconsin* cheese. Three strikes ... OUT!

Stricter WMMB oversight of firms using the “Wisconsin Cheese” logo is in order. Issues involving obvious misbranding of the “Smoked Gouda Cheese” need to go to higher authorities. The good fortunes and positive image of Wisconsin’s dairy industry are not furthered by the labeling and marketing of such “stuff” (for lack of a four-letter word) as “Wisconsin Cheese.”

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