

“Vegan Schnitzel” stays “vegan Schnitzel”. Big loss for German Federal Minister Schmidt

Despite calls by the German Food Minister and national farmers' and butchers' associations, a ban on “vegan schnitzel” and “vegetarian bratwurst” in Germany is unlikely to happen. The German Food Code Commission has submitted a draft for feedback which allows the use of certain “meaty names” on vegetarian and vegan meat alternatives. EVU's German affiliate ProVeg (former VEBU) was part of the Commission's negotiations and worked hard to bring about consumer-friendly labelling.

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“Vegan Schnitzel” still to be legal

“Schnitzel”, “Bratwurst”, and “Meatball”. The draft states that these and similar terms can still be used for labelling vegetarian and vegan meat alternatives on the German market. Till Strecker, Head of EVU Public Affairs, states: “The preliminary decision of the German Food Code Commission (DLMBK) is a success for the efforts of the vegetarian movement in the name of the consumers”. The German Minister of Food and Agriculture, Christian Schmidt, had publicly announced that he wants to legally forbid any ‘meaty names’ for labels on vegan and vegetarian meat alternatives. The DLMBK* denied this request which means that terms like “vegan Schnitzel” or “vegan Bratwurst” can still be used to label vegan and vegetarian products. This is perfectly reasonable since terms that are normally used for products with animal based ingredients inform the consumer about typical characteristics of the vegan and vegetarian alternatives.

Questionable details

While generic terms are still allowed other, more specific terms that describe parts of an animal (e.g. “steak” or “bacon”) or terms that describe whole animals (e.g. “chicken” or “cattle”) cannot be used for the labelling of vegetarian meat alternatives according to the DLMBK's draft. For example, a product that is nowadays marketed under the designation “vegan Salami” would need to be relabelled as “vegan tofu-sausage Salami-style”. “This is a major intervention and the reasoning behind this decision is not based on any comprehensible logic. The distinction between different product categories concerning sales denominations and the usage of complicated language on the packaging is arbitrary. The Commission was not able to produce, any empirical evidence suggesting the need to intervene in such a major way. The proposal is not in the interest of consumers or producers of vegan and vegetarian meat alternatives”, said Strecker.

Final decision postponed due to widespread criticism

The participation process has yielded widespread criticism. Among other players, EVU's German affiliate ProVeg has submitted a clear statement highlighting the flaws of the proposal. Because of the unexpectedly fundamental nature of many statements, the DLMBK has changed their plans. Instead of finalising the guidelines later this year, this is not expected to happen before early 2018. In any case, the EVU will continue to work hard towards consumer friendly labelling for meat alternatives at European level and in Member States

*The DLMBK describes the characteristics and labelling of food products. The "Lebensmittelbuch" offers an important focal point for the food industry and for legal discussions about food related questions.