

# MAYO, WINGS, BUTTER: 'FAKE MILK' THE LATEST FOOD FIGHT

**NEW YORK:** Is "fake milk" spoiling the dairy industry's image? Dairy producers are calling for a crackdown on the almond, soy and rice "milks" they say are masquerading as the real thing and cloud the meaning of milk. A group that advocates for plant-based products, the Good Food Institute, countered this week by asking the Food and Drug Administration to say terms such as "milk" and "sausage" can be used as long as they're modified to make clear what's in them.

It's the latest dispute about what makes a food authentic, many of them stemming from developments in manufacturing practices and specialized diets. DiGiorno's frozen chicken "wyngz" were fodder for comedian Stephen Colbert. An eggless spread provoked the ire of egg producers by calling itself "mayo". And as far back as the 1880s, margarine was dismissed as "counterfeit butter" by a Wisconsin lawmaker. The US actually spells out the required characteristics for a range of products such as French dressing, canned peas and raisin bread. It's these federal standards of identity that often trigger the food fights.

## Cow, nut, bean

Though soy milk and almond milk have become commonplace terms, milk's standard of identity says it is obtained by the "complete milking of one or more healthy cows". That's a point the dairy industry is now emphasizing, with the support of lawmakers who last month introduced legislation calling for the FDA to enforce the guidelines. "Mammals produce milk, plants don't," said Jim Mulhern, president of the National Milk Producers Federation. The federation says it has been trying to get the FDA to enforce the standard since at least 2000, and that the lack of enforcement has led to a proliferation of imitators playing "fast and loose" with dairy terms.

Those products often refer to themselves as "soymilk" or "almondmilk," single words that the dairy industry says is a way to get around the guidelines for "milk". The Plant Based Foods Association, which represents companies like Tofurky and milk alternatives, says standards of identity were created to prevent companies from passing off cheaper ingredients on customers. But the group says that's not what soy, almond and rice milk makers are trying to do. Those companies are charging more money, and consumers are gravitating toward them, said Michele Simon, the group's executive director. The FDA says it takes action "in accordance with public health priorities and agency resources."

## Edible, but eggless

The little-known Association for Dressing



(Left) This photo provided by Nestle USA shows a package containing DiGiorno pizza and boneless "wyngz". (Right) This photo shows Yoplait Greek yogurt on display at a supermarket in Port Chester, New York. — AP

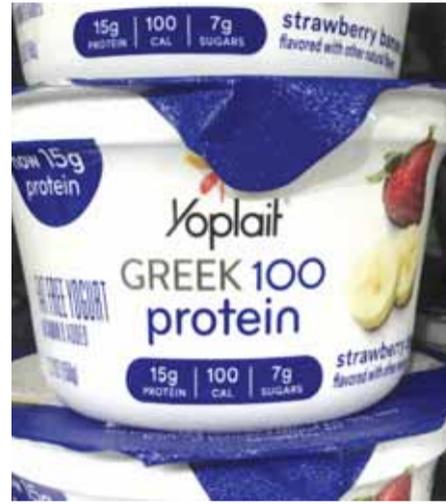
and Sauces showed its might in a 2014 mayonnaise melee. The group repeatedly complained to the FDA that an eggless spread was calling itself Just Mayo, noting that under the federal rules mayonnaise is defined as having eggs. Hellmann's mayonnaise maker Unilever, one of the association's members, had sued Just Mayo's maker citing the same issue. That lawsuit was dropped after the company faced blowback from the vegan spread's supporters.

The dressings and sauces group wasn't the only one upset by Just Mayo's name. The CEO of the American Egg Board, which represents the egg industry, also tried unsuccessfully to get a consultant to stop the sale of Just Mayo at Whole Foods. The revelations led to an investigation by the US Department of Agriculture. Soon after, the egg industry group's CEO retired earlier than expected. As for Just Mayo, the company worked out an agreement with the FDA to keep its name - with some strategic tweaks to its label to make clear it does not contain eggs.

## Straining for yogurt

It was a milk protein concentrate at issue in a lawsuit over Yoplait Greek. That ingredient isn't listed in the FDA's standard of identity for yogurt. What's more, the suit said General Mills relied on the ingredient to thicken its yogurt, rather than straining it the way other Greek yogurts are made. "Not only was it not Greek yogurt, it wasn't yogurt at all," said Brian Gudmundson, the Minnesota lawyer who filed the suit.

The case was ultimately dismissed by the judge, who said the matter would be better handled by the FDA. Gudmundson said he reached out to the agency afterward, but



nothing came of it. Yoplait Greek's maker, General Mills, says it has since made recipe changes to its yogurts and it no longer uses milk protein concentrate in Yoplait Greek. The company had also noted in legal filings that the FDA said during a seminar that milk protein concentrate could be used in yogurt.

In 2002, the presence of milk protein concentrate in Kraft Singles was also called out in a warning letter from the FDA, which noted it was not listed as an ingredient in the definition for "pasteurized process cheese food." Kraft now labels the Singles as a "pasteurized prepared cheese product."

## Wyngz, not wings

"Wyngz" scored a high-profile TV appearance not long after DiGiorno launched frozen meals with pizza and the boneless chicken pieces in 2011. "The Colbert Show" called the spelling out as a "government-mandated" way to get around the fact that they're not made of wing meat. Colbert cited a page on the USDA's website that said the odd spelling could be used for a product that is "in the shape of a wing or a bite-size appetizer type product," but not made entirely from wing meat.

"No other misspellings are permitted," the website says. The story behind the USDA declaration remains a bit of a mystery. DiGiorno owner Nestle said it wanted to call the boneless chicken pieces "wings", since it believes people understand that "boneless wings" are not whole wings. The company says the USDA instead proposed "wyngz". Nestle proudly noted that it believes it was the first, and perhaps only, company to approach the USDA with an issue that led to the "wyngz" determination. — AP

## BRITISH ECONOMY'S STRONG GROWTH SINCE BREXIT VOTE SLOWS

**LONDON:** Britain's unexpectedly strong economic growth since last June's Brexit vote may be starting to fade as inflation picks up, according to a major business survey that chimed with notes of caution from several top companies. Slowing consumer spending started to hurt services companies in February, an unpromising signal for the economy ahead of Britain's divorce with the European Union, Friday's Markit/CIPS UK Services Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) showed.

As finance minister Philip Hammond puts the final touches on his first annual budget on March 8, the survey is likely to reinforce his sense that Britain's strong growth since last year's vote to leave the EU will fade this year. The services PMI fell to a five-month low of 53.3 from 54.5 in January and suggested the economy is now expanding at a quarterly pace of around 0.4 percent - much slower than the 0.7 percent expansion during the fourth quarter of 2016.

Sterling slid to a seven-week low against the dollar after the PMI was published, prompting investors to discount further the chance of the Bank of England raising record low interest rates any time soon. Lacklustre reports from major British companies added to the sense of a tougher 2017 for the economy than last year. Advertising giant WPP, the kind of company regarded by analysts as a bellwether for the economy, warned of a tough economic background and its forecast for growth this year came in below analyst forecasts.

Earlier this week, British broadcaster ITV reported the first decline in advertising revenue since 2009. Britain's economy expanded faster than most of its developed world peers in 2016 but economists think rising inflation is starting to weigh on consumers and business profit margins, something corroborated by the PMI survey. "Notwithstanding the disappointment, that is what everyone has been expecting to happen - we just hoped we were wrong," said Alan Clarke, head of European fixed income strategy at Scotiabank, on the PMI.

Data company Markit said some firms in its survey reported cautious spending by British consumers. It highlighted strong inflation pressure with input costs and selling prices in services companies increasing at the fastest rates since mid-2008 when consumer price inflation hit more than 5 percent. "Weaker consumer spending was a key cause of slower service sector growth, suggesting that household budgets are starting to crack under the strain of higher prices and weak wage growth," Chris Williamson, chief business economist at IHS Markit, said.

Despite the inflation pressure, Williamson said the PMI's fall left it around levels more consistent with a further rate cut by the Bank of England than an increase. Last month BoE Governor Mark Carney said he remained convinced that inflation would go above the bank's 2 percent target only temporarily and due entirely to the fall in the value of the pound since the Brexit vote, rather than more deep-seated price pressures.

The pound may have further to fall, a Reuters poll of foreign exchange strategists and economists showed on Thursday. Prime Minister Theresa May intends to trigger the formal process for separating from the EU by the end of this month. Although growth slowed in February, services firms remained confident about their prospects in the next 12 months, with optimism running just below January's eight-month high. — Reuters

## US SERVICES SECTOR SPEEDS UP IN FEB

**WASHINGTON:** The US services sector, the main driver of the economy, saw growth hit its fastest pace 15 months in February, according to industry data released yesterday. The Institute for Supply Management's Non-Manufacturing Index rose a full point from January to 57.6 percent, seasonally adjusted, the highest reading since October of 2015. The index, which surveys activity among all segments of the services industry, has recorded continuous growth for more than seven years. A reading above 50 percent indicates expansion.

Companies in 16 of the 18 sectors surveyed reported growth, with only the real estate and information industries reporting contraction, ISM said. Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics

said the results were "very strong" and likely to keep monthly job creation above 200,000 new positions into early spring at least. "The message here is that underlying spending growth is robust, despite the sharp drop in real consumption in January," he wrote in a client note.

The ISM report's components showed some notable high points: the Business Activity Index hit its highest level since February 2011 at 63.6 percent, and employment rose a half point to 55.2 percent. Comments from respondents were mixed but most had a positive outlook. A construction sector executive reported a tight labor market, financial services noted a pickup in lending and mining saw a strong start to the first quarter. — AFP