

POLITICO Pro Morning Agri and Food: What's in the CAP? — Agri market makeover — Food quality hurdles

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BRUSSELS FACES MAJOR HURDLES AS NGOs PUSH FOR ACTION ON DUAL QUALITY FOODS: Consumer groups want Brussels to get more involved in battling so-called dual quality foods — when products are marketed under the same brands but with different ingredients in different countries. But doing so could bring major regulatory headaches, experts warned at a [webinar](#) Tuesday hosted by SAFE Food Europe.

Refresher: Critics of dual quality foods complain that consumers in Central and Eastern Europe, in particular, are getting inferior goods compared to those in the West, while others counter that it's merely a matter of companies catering to different national tastes. Rules finalized in 2019 sought to address the matter, but some [MEPs and NGOs felt it didn't go far enough](#). The Commission has been working to gather data on the issue, which has [pitted](#) consumer groups and MEPs against industry. An [EU study earlier this year](#) found major differences between products could be detected by taste, but more subtle ones could fly under the radar.

Problems galore: Cesare Varallo, an Italian food lawyer, told the webinar the key problem boiled down to the basics: “We don't have any definition of quality in EU law and I guess we'll never have it, because it's too complex,” he said, adding that this makes it difficult to come up with the harmonized EU rules that regulators need.

Business woes: This has led to another issue, which is how to both assess and prove whether a company is breaching the rules or whether there is a “legitimate and objective reason” for differences in a given recipe, Varallo said.

And remember consumers? Addressing this also raises the thorny issue of food affordability. “We have to face the reality that the average income, for example in the Netherlands, is probably four times that of Romania,” he said. “So if we want to stay on the market with the exact same food, we have to find a compromise.”

What's next? Green MEP Francisco Guerreiro said a push from some lawmakers to tackle this issue via the Farm to Fork strategy fell through when it did not get support at the committee level. Guerreiro said the ball is now in the Commission's court to “assess through which files this question can be worked on.”