

EU lacks appetite for British 'traffic light' food labels

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The EU ordered Britain Wednesday to answer complaints about its "traffic light" anti-obesity food label system, which Mediterranean countries say is unfair towards products such as cheese and ham.

The labelling is supposed to alert consumers with green, yellow and red indicators but many southern European nations say it fails to distinguish between [junk food](#) and traditional products with naturally high levels of fat.

Miguel Sagredo, a spokesman on industry and entrepreneurship, said the European commission, the EU's executive arm, has sent a "letter of formal notice" to Britain that requires a reply within two months.

"The commission will seek information from the UK authorities on how this system will negatively affect the marketing of several products," Sagredo told a news briefing.

"The concern that we have is that the system is likely to make the marketing of some products more difficult and therefore hinder or impede trade between EU countries," he said.

"The simplistic character of the [traffic light system](#) might in certain instances create a misconception on the consumers," he said.

In February, the European Commission started an infringement procedure to examine whether Britain's [traffic light](#) system is compatible

with EU rules on the free movement of goods.

The case could end up in European courts.

Britain argues that the scheme—which classifies food as red, amber or green according to the fat, salt and sugar content—is voluntary and "fully legally compliant with EU food law," while BEUC, the European Consumers' Organisation, wants the system extended throughout the European Union.

Food producers from Mediterranean countries—in particular Spain, Italy and France—have objected to the labelling system, with many southern European traditional foods, including cheese, ham and olive oil, attracting a "red light" because of their [high fat content](#).

Italian food producers in particular claim the system fails to take into account southern culinary traditions that use high-fat foods sparingly and as part of a balanced diet.

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