

UNITED STATES VS. EUROPE: *What's in Your Food?*

WHY THE DIFFERENCE?

Rules about food additives are generally stricter in the European Union (EU) versus the United States (US). The US tends to wait until an ingredient is flagged as dangerous before taking action, while the EU tends to be more proactive in banning such ingredients.



A BIG LOOPHOLE

In the US, ingredients that are generally recognized as safe (GRAS) don't go through the official Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval process. Food manufacturers are supposed to tell the FDA if any ingredient they use might be dangerous, which creates a conflict of interest.



US Ingredients Banned in the EU

Potassium Bromate

- Used in bread products to help strengthen the dough and make it rise higher
- The International Agency for Research on Cancer says it's "possibly carcinogenic to humans"
- Also banned in Argentina, Nigeria, South Korea, India and China

Azodicarbonamide

- Used in baking to make dough tougher and bread whiter
- When it breaks down, it creates semicarbazide, which may pose a slight cancer risk

Butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA)

- Used as a food preservative and flavor enhancer
- Often found in fast foods, cereals, drink mixes, gum and snacks
- National Institutes of Health says it is "reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen"

Brominated vegetable oil (BVO)

- Used in soda and citrus-flavored drinks
- Can build up in the body and be passed on to offspring; may cause neurological and developmental issues
- Put on "interim" list by FDA in 1970 - little research has been done since to determine safety in humans

Food Colorings

- Red 40 is banned in the EU and foods with yellow 6 must carry a health warning
- Titanium dioxide was banned by the EU in 2022 amidst concerns it may cause DNA damage
- Center for Science in the Public Interest says “studies of the nine dyes currently approved by the FDA suggest, if not prove, that most of the dyes cause health problems, including cancer, hypersensitivity, or neurotoxicity”

Ractopamine

- Chemical added to pig and cattle feed to boost muscle growth
- Due to lack of safety information, it is banned most places, including China, Russia and Taiwan

Recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH)

- Used to boost milk production in cows
- There is a lack of human safety information, but it may impact animal welfare and the environment

Antibiotics

- Livestock antibiotic use in the US is double that of the EU
- Presence in the US food supply is monitored
- Residues in the body can cause antibiotic resistance and a range of potential health problems

Pesticides

- US farmers are using 72 pesticides banned in the EU
- Pesticide standards in the US are much weaker than the EU
- Growing evidence suggests they may cause endocrine disruptions and harm the gut microbiome

Learn More...

[Environmental Working Group 2025 Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce](#)

[Center for Science in the Public Interest Food Additive Safety Ratings](#)

Apps



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