

Statement of
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On behalf of
International Dairy Foods Association
Cheese Industry Segment Board Member

Before the
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Health

United States House of Representatives

Healthier America: Legislative Proposals on the Regulation and Oversight of Food

H.R. 1394 Codifying Useful Regulatory Definitions (CURD) Act

April 29, 2026

Introduction

Thank you, Committee Chairman Guthrie, Ranking Member Pallone, Subcommittee Chairman Griffith and Ranking Member DeGette. I appreciate the invitation to testify at today's hearing, *Healthier America: Legislative Proposals on the Regulation and Oversight of Food*, in support of H.R. 1394, the Codifying Useful Regulatory Definitions Act or CURD Act.

I am honored to testify on behalf of the International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA) and its Cheese Industry Segment Board. I previously served on the IDFA Committee that developed the CURD Act in 2015 and have worked on this issue for more than a decade. IDFA represents the nation's dairy manufacturing and marketing industry, which supports more than 3 million jobs that generate \$52 billion in direct wages and \$779 billion in overall economic impact. IDFA's diverse membership ranges from multinational organizations to single-plant companies, from dairy companies and cooperatives to food retailers and suppliers, all on the forefront of innovation and sustainable business practices. Together, they represent most of the milk, cheese, ice cream, yogurt and cultured products, and dairy ingredients produced and marketed in the United States and sold throughout the world.

The Justification for the CURD Act

U.S. cheesemakers have long used the term "natural cheese" to differentiate cheeses made using a simple process that has been trusted by traditional cheesemakers for thousands of years versus "process cheeses" that are made by blending, heating, and emulsifying the original

natural cheese. In everyday practice, consumers generally understand that a natural cheese—Cheddar or Havarti, for example—is appropriate for a charcuterie board, while process cheese is more commonly used for foods like grilled cheese sandwiches or shelf stable macaroni and cheese.

Despite this common understanding, the distinction is not clearly reflected in statute. While process cheese is defined in regulation, “natural cheese” is not. This lack of symmetry creates confusion and inconsistency in federal policy and in the marketplace.

The term “natural cheese” has been used for decades by industry and government to describe traditionally produced cheese, as described below, yet it has never been formally defined in law. The CURD Act addresses this gap by codifying a long-standing, commonly understood category.

History of Use by the Federal Government

The absence of a statutory definition is notable given how consistently the term “natural cheese” is already used across the federal government. Federal agencies like the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Congress, and the courts have repeatedly used “natural cheese” to refer to a distinct category of cheeses.

This includes:

- USDA uses the term consistently including in [its Food Buying Guide](#) for Child Nutrition Programs which recommends serving “natural cheese.”
- USDA also requires warehouses to report stocks of “natural cheese” while excluding “processed cheese” from that reporting.
- EPA regulates facilities that produce “natural cheese” for environmental compliance; and,
- EPA also considers a category of “natural cheeses” in their regulatory processes, it’s another example of an agency utilizing a term that is undefined.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate a consistent pattern: federal agencies already rely on the concept of “natural cheese” in program administration, data reporting, and regulatory frameworks, but without a single, authoritative definition in statute.

This need for clarity is particularly timely given the recently updated Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which emphasize nutrient-dense and minimally processed foods, including full-fat dairy products. These guidelines inform federal nutrition programs and are widely relied upon by schools, healthcare providers, and consumers. Without a clear definition of “natural cheese,” stakeholders may face uncertainty when applying these recommendations in practice.

The CURD Act is also consistent with prior congressional action and established precedent to define food terms in statute. The Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act already defines terms

such as “butter” and “nonfat dry milk,” and Congress has previously amended the Act to add definitions for foods like “ginseng” and “catfish.” In addition, the CURD Act supports efforts of transparency and eliminating redundancy by establishing a clear category of cheeses instead of complicating individual Standards of Identity.

Overview of the CURD Act

The CURD Act defines “natural cheese” by specifying permitted basic ingredients and traditional processing methods, recognizing existing standards of identity, and excepting those process cheeses already defined by regulation. Consistent with long-standing governmental and industry usage, the CURD Act permits the use of the term “natural cheese” if one of two conditions are satisfied:

- It is a cheese identified by an existing FDA standard of identity (for example, Cheddar, Swiss, or Mozzarella); or
- It is a cheese not defined by FDA regulation (for example, feta) that nonetheless conforms generally to the Codex Standard for Cheese, an internationally recognized industry benchmark.

Importantly, the definition expressly excludes cheeses that are defined in the Code of Federal Regulations as something other than “natural cheese.” These include process cheese, process cheese food, process cheese spread, cold-pack cheese, and grated American cheese food. The CURD Act also clarifies that “natural cheese” is a factual descriptor of a cheese category and

may not be used in a way that conflicts with regulations, guidance, or policy issued by the Secretary of Health and Human Services. Finally, the bill expressly preempts any non-federal definitions of “natural cheese.”

Dairy Industry Support for the CURD Act

The CURD Act has the support of IDFA and all IDFA cheese company members, including those that manufacture process cheese products. It is also supported by the National Milk Producers Federation, which represents U.S. dairy farmers and the dairy cooperatives they own. In addition, several state and regional dairy organizations have expressed strong support, including the Dairy Institute of California, the Northeast Dairy Foods Association, the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association, and the Wisconsin Dairy Products Association.

This alignment across processors, cooperatives, farmers, and state organizations reflects a shared understanding that establishing a clear definition of “natural cheese” benefits consumers, regulators, and industry alike.

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding The Curd Act

The CURD Act aims to promote clear, consistent labeling so consumers can readily distinguish natural cheeses from process cheeses in retail stores. IDFA appreciates the opportunity to clarify the bill’s bipartisan, limited, and targeted impact.

First, the CURD Act does not alter FDA policy on “natural” or “all natural” product claims. The bill simply codifies “natural cheese” as a category of cheese; it does not redefine “natural” for labeling claims. As noted above, subsection (b) of Section 3 makes clear that any cheese marketed as “100% natural” or “all natural” must continue to comply with FDA’s existing and future regulations, guidance, and policy on those terms.

Importantly, the CURD Act does not change which ingredients may be used in standardized or non-standardized cheeses. The bill does not override FDA’s regulatory definition of milk for standardized cheeses: any ingredient legally permitted before enactment remains permitted afterward, and any ingredient previously disallowed remains disallowed. Separately, FDA has begun the process to address, under its existing authority, how the term “cheese” applies to plant-based products (e.g., soy- or almond-based cheese analogs).

Conclusion

The CURD Act is a straightforward, bipartisan solution to a long-standing gap in federal food law. By codifying a commonly accepted and widely used category of cheese, it will provide greater clarity and consistency for consumers, policymakers, and industry. It aligns federal policy with decades of existing usage across agencies, supports transparency in the marketplace, and reinforces a shared understanding already relied upon in federal programs and regulations.

On behalf of the Cheese Industry Segment Board of the International Dairy Foods Association, I thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing. I welcome the Subcommittee's questions.