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National sausage loses its skin

The future of Switzerland's favourite sausage is hanging on, quite literally, by the skin of its teeth after an import ban of a key ingredient from Brazil.

Cervelat is as familiar to Swiss cuisine as Gruyère cheese or Röstli, and can be eaten both raw and cooked. But its versatility depends on the skin made from the now-banned Brazilian cow intestines.

Switzerland joined a European Union block on imports of certain Brazilian beef products on April 1 last

year as the South American country failed to meet strict conditions safeguarding against BSE.

The search to find an alternative ingredient for the Cervelat's skin have so far drawn a blank and existing stocks will run out in September.

The exact consistency and other characteristics of the skin are vital. Swiss sausage lovers expect Cervelat to curve pleasantly and remain intact when grilled and to have a skin that is easy to peel away when eaten raw.

Argentine cow intestines are too fatty, Uruguayan skins make the Cervelat too crooked when cooked, while pig intestines are too difficult to peel and man-made alternatives are too costly.

The problem has cooked up alarm in Switzerland with some newspapers at the weekend virtually prophesying the end of the sausage as the Swiss know it.

National icon

One sausage maker volunteered the option of making two kinds of Cervelat, one to be eaten raw and



another cooked, but this did not go down well with supermarkets.

"It has become clear how deeply Cervelat is embedded in the soul of the people," declared Balz Horber, president of the Swiss Meat Association. "That should alarm all people concerned and make them do everything to open the delivery channels again. For us the delivery problem is no joke but a real worry." The Swiss Veterinary Office has rejected calls to ease the ban on Brazilian cow intestine imports and insists that another solution needs to be found.

"One possibility is that Switzerland imports beef intestines from a country with a negligible BSE risk such as Australia, Argentina, Paraguay or New Zealand," spokesman Marcel Falk told swissinfo.

Paraguayan beef intestines both pass EU BSE standards and appear to be suitable for Cervelat production. But as yet there is no company in Paraguay with a licence to export such products to the EU or Switzerland.

Cervelat to stay

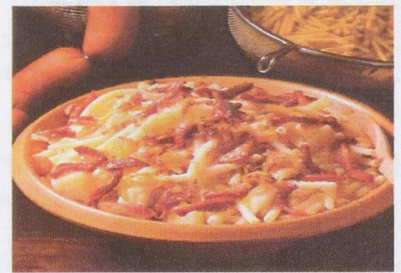
However, Falk remains optimistic. "I am convinced that Switzerland will not run out of Cervelat. There are several possibilities still open and it is economically too important for the meat industry," he said.

In the meantime, it is safe to eat Cervelat with Brazilian cow intestines while stocks last in Switzerland, Falk added.

"This is a special regulation for the EU and Switzerland that goes beyond international standards. No real danger has ever been found and it is only a precaution," he said.

swissinfo, Matthew Allen

Äplermagrone mit Cervelats



250g Kartoffeln
3 1/2 l Wasser
350g Makkaroni
100g Reibkase

Cervelats-Zwiebelschwitze:

3 EL Butter
3 Zwiebeln
3-4 Cervelats

Kartoffeln schälen, in Würfel schneiden und im Wasser 5 Min kochen. Makkaroni dazugeben, al dente kochen, mit dem Käse vermischen, auf eine grosse Platte anrichten.

Die fein gestreiften Zwiebeln in der heissen Butter hellbraun braten. Cervelats in feine Streifen schneiden und dazugeben, Hitze erhöhen und kurz braten, dann über die Makkaroni anrichten.

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