

European Parliamentary Committee Rejects Proposed Lower Limits for Nitrite and Nitrite additives; Favors Total Ban

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- On June 27, 2023, the European Parliament's Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee (ENVI) narrowly [voted against a proposal](#) to lower the maximum permitted limits for the food additives sodium and potassium nitrites (E 249-250) and sodium and potassium nitrates (E 251-252) because the proposed limits did not go far enough. Instead, a motion has been proposed that would ban the use of nitrites and nitrates in the EU following a four-year phase out period.
- Nitrates and nitrites are widely used as preservatives in cured meat products such as bacon, ham, cold cuts, charcuterie, and some cheeses. Those in favor of a reduction and not a ban argued that nitrate/nitrite-free products are more expensive and therefore less accessible to some consumers. In contrast, those in favor of a total ban cited the health concerns raised by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)'s January 2023 [risk assessment](#) on N-nitrosamines in food. N-nitrosamines are reaction products of nitrates and nitrites in certain food processing conditions. Many N-nitrosamines are genotoxic and carcinogenic and are associated with increased incidence of colorectal cancer. However, the report also highlighted many uncertainties, including the levels at which N-nitrosamines are found in food products.
- The use of nitrates and nitrites as food additives has been restricted in certain EU member states such as in Denmark. In the United States, nitrates are subject to a number of clearances, subject to certain limitations. See e.g. [9 CFR 424.21\(c\)](#) and 21 CFR 172.160, 172.170, and 172.175.

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