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France Plans to ban Titanium Dioxide in Food Products

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SP2 - Prevent or Resolve Barriers to Trade that Hinder U.S. Food and Agricultural Exports
Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

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Report Highlights:

France's National Assembly passed an amendment banning the use, import and marketing of any food product containing titanium dioxide (TiO₂) as a food additive as a component of France's farm and food bill currently under debate. A 2017 French scientific study highlighted the potential carcinogen risks of nanoparticles of TiO₂. However, EFSA stated in 2016 that TiO₂ poses no health concerns. Analysts believe the final vote of the law scheduled for mid-summer 2018 will endorse the TiO₂ ban.

Titanium dioxide, also known as titanium (IV) oxide or titania, is the naturally occurring oxide of titanium with the chemical formula TiO₂. When used as a pigment, it is also called titanium white or E171 (and indicated as such on the product's ingredient list). Titanium dioxide (TiO₂) is the most widely used white pigment because of its brightness. In food, TiO₂ is used as a white pigment in confectioneries such as M&Ms, cakes, and sugarcoated almonds. It is also widely used in cosmetics for sunblock, as well as in toothpastes and medicines. The French branch of the organization OpenFoodFact published a [list of food](#) items containing TiO₂.

In April 2018, the French parliament started the discussion on the French farm and food bill. One of the amendments that passed the National Assembly under this law is a ban on the import and marketing of any food product containing titanium dioxide as a food additive by 2020. This amendment is not final, as the French Senate still must debate the law. However, most food analysts believe that this amendment will become law.

In January 2017, the French Agricultural Research Institute (INRA) published a [study](#) on the food additive E171. It highlighted the development of non-malignant, pre-tumorous damages in the colon of rats fed with TiO₂ nanoparticles. The French Food safety agency (ANSES) was tasked by the French Ministries of Health, Consumption and Agriculture to [evaluate INRA study](#) and make recommendations about [the potential danger of TiO₂](#). It confirmed that INRA study highlighted previously unassessed carcinogen impacts of nanoparticles of TiO₂ and that further research should be undertaken. ANSES has therefore proposed that ECHA (European Chemicals Agency) classify TiO₂ as probably carcinogenic through inhalation. ANSES has also launched in 2018 a risk evaluation within the [REACH \(Registration, Evaluation, Authorization and Restriction of Chemicals\) framework](#).

Large companies such as [Mars Chocolat France](#), the French confectionary subsidiary of [Mars Inc.](#), confirmed that they would be ready to phase out the use of TiO₂ in their products by 2020 to [alleviate consumers concerns](#). However, for smaller confectioners, especially the artisan makers of sugarcoated almonds, the challenge will be greater.

In its June 2016 [Re-evaluation of titanium dioxide \(E 171\) as a food additive](#), the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) said that, while TiO₂ poses no health concerns, data gaps should be assessed by more studies. In February 2018, France asked the European Commission to suspend the authorization of TiO₂ and reassess its impacts on health. EFSA has been asked by the Commission to give its opinion on four scientific studies that highlighted the risks linked to TiO₂ and to indicate if those studies merit reopening of the 2016 opinion.

This French decision on TiO₂ could be another challenge to the the EU single market principle with France setting its own sanitary standards stricter than European ones, under a potential safeguard clause. The ban is not based on a body of recognized scientific results but on single study by a French public research institute that highlights the potential carcinogenic risk. If France implements the ban, it would mean that U.S. confectioneries (\$2.6 million in sales in 2017) and pastries (\$1.6 million in sales in 2017) imported into France would have to be TiO₂ free by 2020.

