

DEBUNKING THE U.S.-EU "ADDITIVE" DIVIDE: 10,000 FALSEHOODS

A common refrain in the press has been that there are 10,000 food additives used in the U.S. and only 400 in Europe. This statement is false. EU permits virtually all of the same food additives and inputs as the U.S. The “10,000” number is based on a publication that included everything that could touch food, including pesticide residues, packaging, and processing aids.

	
~5,010 Substances Permitted for Direct Addition to Food (Total)	~4,493+ Substances Permitted for Direct Addition to Food (Total)
553 Direct Food Additives	352 Additives with “E” Numbers (Includes 44 Colors with “E” numbers)
3926 GRAS Listed, Affirmed, Notified, Prior Sanctioned Food Substances (including enzymes, flavorings, and flavoring preparations)	200 Novel Foods 305 Enzymes 2,549 Flavorings >600 Flavoring Preparations (no authorization required)
~500 Self-Determined Direct GRAS Food Substances (Estimate)	Grandfathered/Pre-1997 “Not Novel” Foods– >487 (total unknown as authorization / assessment not required)
31 Colors	Colors derived from Foods– Unknown (as no authorization required)

The “400” number reflects a regulatory designed class of food additives in the EU used for specific product needs, like adding color, antioxidants, and thickener purposes, that have an associated code called an “E Number” (short for European number). Numbered additives in the EU reflect only a fraction (less than 10%) of the total substances permitted for use in food in Europe.

Does the EU really use fewer ingredients and food additives than the U.S.?

The discrepancy arises from differences in regulations. E-numbers in the EU don't include packaging materials, flavorings, processing aids, novel foods, or grandfathered ingredients, which are counted in the U.S. numbers. Thus, a simple count of E-numbers isn't a direct comparison to the U.S. regulations.

Are There Other Differences?

The EU doesn't require regulatory approval for foods that had been “consumed to a significant degree” in the EU before 1997, when the novel food regulation came into force. The EU also requires no review or approval for flavoring preparations derived from foods, or colors derived from foods—both of which undergo approvals in the United States.

Facts Matter:

The U.S. boasts the most comprehensive food additive regulatory review system in the world. FDA reviews and authorizes many categories of substances that do not require review and authorization in the EU, a reflection of the comprehensive U.S. food regulatory framework.

Spotlight on Colors: More Misinformation

			
Synthetic Dyes Approved for Use	9	10	15
Colors with Warnings	0	0	6

It is commonly reported that the EU has banned many of the food colors authorized for use in the U.S. This is false.

The EU permits nearly all the colors authorized in the U.S. and also permits almost twice as many synthetic colors for use as compared with the U.S.

Of the six food colors that require a “warning” in Europe, only three are approved in the U.S. Quinoline Yellow (E104), Ponceau 4R (E124), and Carmoisine (E122) have never been approved or used in the U.S.