



Mineral water tariff no longer on tap

By Monica Soladay

Plan to order *acqua minerale* during your next meal out at an Italian restaurant? Thanks to a recent deal between the United States and the European Union, the price of Italian imported bottled water will remain as is for now.

In January, the U.S. imposed a 100 percent tariff on mineral water imported from Italy in addition to products from other E.U. countries. The tariff, which was scheduled to go into effect this spring unless an agreement between the two world powers could be reached, was one of a series of measures intended to pressure the E.U. to reconsider its 13-year ban on importing hormone-treated U.S. beef on the grounds that it presented a health risk.

On May 6, after months of negotiations, the U.S. and E.U. reached an agreement in which European countries committed to importing more quality American beef, announced Italian Industry Undersecretary Adolfo Urso. He attributed the agreement, which was signed just one day before the tariff was scheduled to go into effect, to the Italian government's lobbying efforts.

The U.S. receives 40 percent of Italian mineral water exports and the mineral water industry employs more than 50,000 people in Italy, according to reporting by ANSA.

Perhaps better publicized was the measure's potential 300 percent tariff on French Roquefort cheese — a pungent, crumbly blue that could have seen its price increase to almost \$60 a pound. In addition to Italian mineral water, special hams, sausages, truffles, chocolate and pears made in 25 European countries were also potential tariff targets. The tariff presented potential problems for this country's restaurant, hospitality and food importation industries, in addition to food producers and exporters abroad.

"Whatever language you speak, you should be able to live like an Italian," said Robert Allegrini, president of the Italian American Chamber of Commerce Midwest. "Consuming mineral water from Italy is a way to do that because it sparkles with the very essence of the Italian spirit." ▲