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EU relaxes rules on 'ugly' fruits and vegetables

Associated Press Writer

BRUSSELS, Belgium -- It's time to welcome back the curvy zucchini, the mangled mushroom and other odd and ugly fruits and vegetables.

The European Union bid adieu Wednesday to rules that have cemented its image as an ivory tower: starting next summer, it will allow the sale of fruit and vegetables that may be crooked, bent or twisted but are fine for consumption.

"This marks the new dawn for the curvy cucumber and the knobbly carrot," EU Agriculture Commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel said. "We simply don't need to regulate this. In these days of high food prices and general economic difficulties, consumers should be able to choose from the widest range of products possible."

The ban, imposed more than 20 years ago, has triggered much ridicule. Europe's tabloid media have long used it to highlight bureaucrats' desire to regulate every nook and cranny of Europeans' lives.

"This is good news for producers and consumers. It may just perhaps even nail once and for all the myth that the EU regulates everything in sight," said Alyn Smith, a Scottish member of the European Parliament.

At its weekly meeting, the European Commission ended marketing standards requiring 26 fruit and vegetables to be sold without any odd curves.

They are: apricots, artichokes, asparagus, avocados, beans, Brussels sprouts, carrots, cauliflower, cherries, zucchinis, cucumbers, cultivated mushrooms, eggplants, garlic, hazelnuts in shell, headed cabbage, leeks, melons, onions, peas, plums, ribbed celery, spinach, walnuts in shell, watermelons and chicory.

"Pretty-food" standards remain for 10 other types - including apples, strawberries and tomatoes - but governments may allow "uglier" versions to be sold if they wish.

The demise of the ban means the EU can shed 100 pages of rules and regulations.