



## Farmers in Europe are unhappy with oat “milk” marketing

One might expect that dairy farmers would take issue with the rising number of plant-based “milks” in the marketplace (and many of them have), but even oat farmers are uneasy with the marketing tools being used to promote some oat drinks.

Take a look at this German [commercial](#) for the introduction of a vegan chocolate bar made using an oat drink. The company and brand Katjes is well known and very popular with European consumers. It is no. 3 in the German sweets market, with a fully vegan portfolio. One third of its production is exported. The product itself certainly has merit, but the message in the ad is very aggressively against dairy farming. The [German Minister for Nutrition and Agriculture, Julia Klöckner, tweeted](#) that the film makers have obviously never been on a dairy farm. Two local German Farmers’ Unions reacted by submitting a complaint to the [German Advertising Standards Council](#). The Council has supported the farmers. [Katjes' response](#) was short and clear: the current marketing of the dairy industry is corny and far away from reality. Consequently, it should be possible to show the other side, too. Dairy farmers who do a good job are not mentioned, however.

The overall reaction of German agriculture to the Katjes ad is parallel to the response from Swedish farmers to the latest marketing campaign run by Oatly (“Ditch milk”). Some Swedish oat farmers want to boycott Oatly now.

A recent article concerning the controversy in Sweden can be found [here](#), and a portion of it is translated from the original Finnish below:

Now, Oatly's new aggressive anti-milk campaign even annoys oat farmers.

"Of course I have to sell to the one who pays the best, but right now it doesn't seem so nice or inspiring to sell just to Oatly because they are running such an insane and destructive campaign," says farmer Lars-Johan Merin for Land Lantbruk, Sweden, the main voice of producers.

Oatly itself justifies the campaign by stating that oat's carbon dioxide emissions are lower than traditional milk. In the TV commercial for the campaign, the company compares drinking milk to driving a car without a seatbelt, riding a bike without a helmet, using unfiltered tobacco, or having unprotected sex.

For Oatly, anti-milk advertising has already become a trademark. In the past, its advertisements have said that oat drink is "like milk but made for humans". Swedish milk producers took Oatly to court and the campaign was stopped, under threat of a fine. Thus began the so-called “Milk War” in Sweden.

The current Oatly campaign was apparently designed to mimic an old anti-alcohol campaign:



For young Swedes and for people beyond the Swedish borders, “Spola mjölken” will probably not mean much, but is a reference to a classic alcohol information campaign from the 70’s “Spola kröken” (“Flush the booze”).

Complicating matters is the fact that a Chinese company recently bought a 30% stake in Oatly. They are not happy either. More information about the controversy can be found [here](#).

-Steffen Beuch and Charlene Wight, 2019.