

## Gaja rails against 'Italian' wine

10 Sep 2010 by Jancis Robinson

*Mad Man of Barbaresco Angelo Gaja has just sent me the following cri de coeur entitled 'The Crisis and World Markets Hobble Italian Agriculture'. It is all a long way from the relaxed, rather back-slapping tone of yesterday's presentation of the Istituto di Grandi Marchi at the [Masters of Wine AGM](#), but probably more accurately reflects the current state of the Italian wine market (see [Italian wine prices plummet, Minister unconcerned](#)). I assume, perhaps wrongly, that the non-100% 'Italian' products to which he refers so disdainfully are what make up most of the ocean of 'Pinot Grigio' exported from Italy - presumably based on white wine imported into Italy and made thoroughly eGrigious.*

The current crisis, long in developing, has been a heavy blow, and it is not the fault of producers that they did not foresee in advance what even Nobel prize-winning economists were unable to predict.

Consumers, faced with declining purchasing power, have also reduced their expectations and expenditures, preferring what is 'good enough' to the excellent. Accordingly, the typical Italian products which have suffered the most have been those in the upper-middle price range [now, whose would those be, I wonder? - JR].

Those who have benefitted the most have been firms which offer phony agricultural products [fighting talk! - JR], those with a semblance of being Italian but which are not of true Italian origin, gaining market share both abroad and in Italy itself.

What is to be done? There is no lack of suggestions:

Higher quality: but for wine, olive oil, Parmesan cheese ... quality has never been better.

BETTER VALUE: but by now even wine at €2 a bottle is well made.

FARMERS MARKETS: a palliative, but one which encourages cultivators to reckon with the market, to think of themselves as entrepreneurs as well, and gives consumers a better idea of the seasonal nature of agricultural production.

SHORTENING THE DISTRIBUTION CHAIN: but first producers need to get together to organise and unify what they have to offer.

MORE MARKETING: too many producers already boast that they do no marketing. They are mistrustful of the word itself which, for them, suggests merely some sort of ploy to increase sales.

NO OGM: but current bans need to be overcome. It would be better if producers were more virtuous and consumers learned to recognise and reward certain products through clear and honest labelling practices.

INCREASE DEMAND FOR THE PRODUCTS: in Italy the producers themselves are taking care of the question, but public funds should be allocated for promotion on foreign markets.

MAKE EXPORTING AN UTTER PRIORITY: absolutely, and of decisive importance for the growth of the agricultural sector.

PROTECT ITALIAN NAMES AND BRANDS on foreign markets, combat imitation and falsification; more can and must be done.

If the crisis does not ease, any and all remedies will be insufficiently effective.

What remains is the chronic absence in foreign markets of supermarket chains capable of highlighting the excellence of Italian agriculture and its exceptional products. Accordingly, the opening - which has taken place as I write - of EATALY in New York, a place where Italy's finest produce will find a showcase capable of showing its true worth, with an obvious return in terms of image and of increased consumer demand, is of great significance.

### A project for the future

At the current moment, the producers who are running the greatest risk are those of artisan level, and they are the overwhelming majority of the small and individual firms in Italy. Programmes to aid and assist their work are a priority. For over a year there has been a serious and impassioned debate over the meaning of the words *Made in Italy*, which theoretically means one thing but often concretely means the exact opposite. And the words contain a fundamental contradiction which is impossible to eliminate, as many firms which have transferred production abroad have greatly contributed to the success of *Made in Italy* in foreign markets.

For artisan producers it might be more useful to begin thinking about a new concept: a new logo, legally recognised but not obligatory, which could be applied to products TOTALLY made in Italy, a logo designed by one of Italy's greatest design talents which could be used - by individual choice - alongside *Made in Italy*.

A symbol of this sort would be based on the assumption, on the part of a producer, of a solemn commitment (for which he [or she? - JR] would have to take the entire responsibility, legal as well), to use solely Italian raw materials in every phase of the elaboration of the finished product. The programme would be supported by a promotional campaign designed to inform consumers about the exact significance and importance of the logo. The program would also need to be supported by the professional groups in the sector and those of the stores and shops which sell Italian food and produce: it is in everyone's interest to protect work authentically carried out in Italy.

Angelo Gaja  
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