

Summer Fancy Food Show: A Taste of Italy Away from Italy

Natasha Lardera (June 24, 2014)



Italy will again dominate this year's Summer Fancy Food Show at the Jacob Javits Convention Center. To know more about all this we visited the Italian Trade Agency in New York and met met Pier Paolo Celeste, Trade Commissioner and Executive Director for the USA.

Good news for Italy: Americans haven't had their fill of Italian cuisine. In fact, their appetite for Italian products – especially the healthy, authentic, quality variety – is still on the rise.

And Italy will again dominate this year's [Summer Fancy Food Show](#) [2] at [New York's Jacob K. Javits Convention Center](#). [3]

Over 300 companies, including individual producers, cooperatives, consortia, associations and chambers of commerce, will offer the best of the Made in Italy label. The [Italian Trade Commission](#) [4] has grouped them together in the Area ITALIA, which features 305 exhibitors on two floors, with 224 producers on level 3 and 81 on level 1.



To know more about all this we visited the Italian Trade Agency in New York and met met Pier Paolo Celeste, Trade Commissioner and Executive Director for the USA. In Mr. Celeste's office, under a stunning De Chirico painting and over a classic Italian coffee, we took stock of the large Italian presence at Fancy Food.

"As with every year, we are excited to bring exceptional authentic Italian food products to the American table," said Mr. Celeste. "Italy is a nation steeped in tradition, culture, beauty and good taste. What better way to convey all its richness than a massive sprawl of the best there is in Italian gastronomy? As you walk through our area you'll find yourself on a gustatory trip from the cool Italian North to the sunny, Mediterranean-washed South."

Fancy Food is clearly a fair for professionals, well known to those in the industry. To us, however, it seems like an excellent occasion for all.

"Yes, definitely, you can find the biggest players in the Italian agribusiness representing their products. But it's a real 'Made in Italy' fair, an enjoyable excursion for everyone."

The quality standard of Italian products is directly linked to the region from which they come. Each product gains its unique flavor because it comes from a certain area whose conditions cannot be replicated elsewhere.

"The Italian government is getting serious about defending food made in Italy and the Italian Trade Agency is helping out in many different ways. We advise Italian producers to draw attention to the specific quality indications, such as the PDO (Protected Designation of Origin), which identifies the designation of a product that is produced, processed and prepared in a specific geographic area; and the PGI (Protected Geographical Indication), which certifies at least one of the phases (production, processing, preparation) takes place in a specific geographic area. There is also TSG (Traditional Specialty Guaranteed), which guarantees that a food has been traditionally produced, processed or made with traditional raw materials, but that does not certify that the protected food product has a link to a specific place of origin."

We often hear that the Italian Trade Agency has an educational function too. What does this mean?

"We advise Italian producers on how to invest in the American market and, most importantly, to educate consumers. That is our mission too. Education is important and it's achieved through tastings. At the Fancy Food Show people will have the chance to taste the high quality of our products. They will be able to tell the difference between lower quality products."

All foods and beverages will be displayed and offered for sampling, from olive oil (the most widely-represented group) and balsamic vinegar to preserved vegetables, from fresh pasta to baked goods, from ready-to-eat meals to organic cheeses and meats. Coffee, soft drinks, wines and liqueurs will also be displayed.

Anything special this year?

"Well, there will be more gluten-free and organic products than before. And we'll have Chinotto, a soft drink that Americans are not so familiar with. Chinotto is produced from the juice of the fruit of the myrtle-leaved orange tree and its appearance is similar to that of cola. It's not as sweet but it's rather bitter. Chinotto soda dates back to the 1950s and is produced in Italy by different companies."

As for the classic Italian delicacy – cured meats, or salumi – last year at Fancy Food the Italian Salumi Promotion Institute announced that a 40-year ban on the importation of Italian Salumi had been lifted, and taught the American food trade all about meat products such as salami, pancetta, coppa and other cured meats that had been aged under 400 days.

Are things progressing in this realm?



“Yes, there are new salumi like Prosciutto Toscano, which got its PDO in July 1996. Tuscan salt-cured ham has been made in Tuscany since the 15th century. It is aged for at least one year and cured with a blend of natural spices commonly used in traditional Tuscan cuisine, such as pepper, garlic, rosemary and juniper. This results in a more intense and spicy flavor compared with Prosciutto di Parma and Prosciutto San Daniele. Prosciutto Toscano has been available in the US since 2013. But there are more cured meats that are still waiting to be legalized in the US, and progress is being made.”

Meanwhile how are food and wine exports to the US going in general?

“It’s going great. At the end of 2013, Italy ranked 8th among nations exporting food and beverages to the US, with an increase of 7.20%, but came in a secure first place in the most important categories, such as olive oil, cheese, pasta and wine. In 2013, Italian food exports to the U.S. rose to \$4 billion, \$1.6 billion of which is in the wine sector alone.

What explains this success?

“This increase in Italian food exports is due to the fact that Americans have become more health conscious and have realized that Italian products not only taste good, they’re also good for your health. Authenticity, quality and good nutrition all come together in the Mediterranean diet. Try it yourself at the Summer Fancy Food Show, where you can taste Italy away from Italy.”

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