



The Fancy Food Show in the Words of Italian Trade Commissioner

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The Italian Trade Commission has partnered with The Specialty Food Association and Universal Marketing in the organization of the Italian pavilion at the Summer Fancy Food Show as it has been doing for years. This year though was extra special as Italy was the first ever Partner Country for the Summer Fancy Food Show since the year of its inception. Together the three entities have built programs that bring more and more Italian specialty foods to the US consumer.

The Italian community formally met New York's new Trade Commissioner & Executive Director for the US of the Italian Trade Commission, Maurizio Forte during the celebrations for the Republic on June 2nd. Forte's busy calendar after that included the Chicago Trade Show FMI Connect at the beginning of June and the Summer Fancy Food Show that has just ended. The Italian Trade Commission has partnered with The Specialty Food Association and Universal Marketing in the organization of the Italian pavilion at the show as it has been doing for years. This year though was extra special as Italy was the first ever Partner Country for the Summer Fancy Food Show since the year of its inception. Together the three entities have built programs that bring more and more Italian specialty foods to the US consumer.

i-Italy had a chance to speak to Commissioner Forte, who was attending the show and getting to know as many participants as possible.

This is your first Fancy Food Show, what is your general impression?

As always Italy's presence is pretty incisive. We are not just the country occupying the largest exhibition space (more than 26.000 square feet) with the largest number of exhibitors (more than 300), but now, for the first time in the 61 years of show history, the organizers, The Specialty Food Association, have elected Italy as a partner country as well as the sponsor of this great event. This is to show how much the US love our country and our food products. This year Italy has set a record of participants: exhibitors vary from small family-run businesses to large, well known, more commercial providers. There are individual companies as well as regions that have grouped together several producers and represent the grandeur of their territory. Among the latter we find regions like Puglia, Sicily and Veneto, but I believe that all of Italy's food is well represented. And facts speak for themselves: whoever we stopped to talk to was proud to be at the show, happy to have a chance to reach such a wide audience as the Fancy Food gives the sort of exposure that only a few trade shows do. There is not one visitor of the fair that has not peeked into the Italian pavilion. At certain moments it was hard to even walk through the aisles. the dollar is strong and Americans are buying, therefore this is an incentive for our producers to do more, work hard and produce only the best. On our end, we are already getting ready to sit down and discuss the next edition as we want Italy's image to grow stronger and stronger.

What products seem to be more successful in the US? Are there any products that are still unknown?

I like to joke that Italy is not a military power, but it's a culinary power, a force to reckon with. Italy sells everything to the US, leaving us in a position of leaders in many different categories. Italian



wine is at the first place, followed by olive oil, pasta and cheese. Italy's wine exports have risen 42% since 2008, thanks in part to the growing popularity of sparkling prosecco, a wine that is good and affordable. In volume terms, this now outsells France's champagne worldwide. But Italy sells everything, from mineral water to cured meats, condiments, pastries and so on. There is nothing still undiscovered as we have been working for years at promoting all our country's products. There is a difference though on how we use certain products which relates to a difference of lifestyle: in Italy, for example, if we want to make a plate of spaghetti in tomato sauce we tend to just get the fresh tomatoes, cut them up season them and proceed to make the tomato sauce. Here it is easier to open a jar... of any kind of sauce. Italian producers then focus on more prepared foods as this is what the US market wants.

It is indeed known that several producers have adapted traditional recipes to please big foreign customers. An article published in the Economist stressed how a producer like Corsini, a celebrated bakery, makes “unusually large cantuccini, traditional Tuscan almond-packed biscuits, for Starbucks—unimaginable in Italy but perfect for the American coffee chain’s oversized cups.”

It is important to please big foreign customers but always maintaining authenticity. An American consumer buys an Italian product because it tastes good and it is gratifying, yet there is so much more to know about that product. Its nutritional value is vital. Our nutrition is valid because it is healthy, we eat well and as a consequence we are seconds only to the Japanese in terms of longevity. The way we eat, The Mediterranean diet helps you lose weight, feel great, and improve your health. The Mediterranean Diet is not a diet for those who say “I need to lose weight” (even though it does help), but rather, it is a lifestyle – including foods, activities, meals with friends and family, and wine in moderation. In order to live healthy you have to eat healthy, so do not consume a product only once in a while when you want to taste something good, but make it your regular eating habit. Your lifestyle and your health will benefit from that. We are working hard in educating consumers in order to simply live better by eating well. We are planning to launch a series of promotional campaigns in the fall in order to spread this concept. We are working harder and harder and who knows what the next edition of the Fancy Food Show will be like.

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