

Voluntary - Public

Date: 7/30/2009

GAIN Report Number: IT9018

Italy

Post: Rome

Italian and EU Agricultural News

Report Categories:

Agriculture in the News

Approved By:

Dana Biasetti

Prepared By:

Dana Biasetti

Report Highlights:

Report contains Italian and EU agricultural news items of interest for the month of July 2009.

General Information:

Italian Agricultural News

Genetically Modified Crops Get The Vatican's Blessing

'Pope Benedict XVI's scientists have given their blessing to genetically modified crops as a possible solution to world hunger and poverty.'" The Vatican seldom approves of scientists meddling with God's creation, so the decision by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences to support genetically modified crops as an answer to world hunger and poverty may come as a surprise. GM crops were heartily endorsed at a week-long seminar held by the academy, and participants agreed that the crops offer food safety and security, better health and environmental sustainability. The verdict is not shared by the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development, a global UN-backed think tank that last year rejected GM as a solution to hunger, and some say the seminar excluded dissenters within the church who fear that GM technology allows

multinationals to control agriculture at the expense of the poor, but participants denied the bias.

(Comment: The position of the Vatican is more nuanced than the one quoted in the press clipping. The Pope's most recent Encyclical, Truth in Charity, refers to biotechnology and food security in the following terms: The problem of food insecurity needs to be addressed within a long-term perspective, eliminating the structural causes that give rise to it and promoting the agricultural development of poorer countries. This can be done by investing in rural infrastructures, irrigation systems, transport, organization of markets, and in the development and dissemination of agricultural technology that can make the best use of the human, natural and socio-economic resources that are more readily available at the local level, while guaranteeing their sustainability over the long term as well. All this needs to be accomplished with the involvement of local communities in choices and decisions that affect the use of agricultural land. In this perspective, it could be useful to consider the new possibilities that are opening up through proper use of traditional as well as innovative farming techniques, always assuming that these have been judged, after sufficient testing, to be appropriate, respectful of the environment and attentive to the needs of the most deprived peoples.)

Italy welcomes EU rose' decision - European Commission bows to pressure from Rome

Italy has welcomed the European Commission's decision to drop plans to permit the making of rose' wine by mixing red and white wines. Italian Minister of Agriculture Zaia is quoted as saying, "Europe must not give room to surrogates or imitations but protect and promote its' quality agro-food heritage and wealth." Spain joined Italy and France in their strong lobbying to have the EC reverse its decision to lift a ban on producing blended rose' wine. France, Italy and Spain are Europe's three biggest producers of rose' and Europe as a whole produces some 75% of the world's rose' wine. Rose' wine accounts for 8% of worldwide wine production

Italy stretches quality- food lead

Italy has stretched its lead at the top of the European Union quality-food charts with the long-awaited entry of balsamic vinegar from Modena. The vinegar, whose origins are shrouded in mystery, has received a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) label.

The condiment, which is not really a vinegar because it is made from a reduction of cooked grape juice, has been made in Modena and Reggio Emilia since the Middle Ages. Italy now has 178 Geographic Indicator labels registered in the EU.

Italian police seize 10,000 tons of radioactive biomass fuel imported from Lithuania

Police across Italy seized 10,000 tons of wood fuel pellets contaminated by a radioactive substance. The fuel seized which was imported from Lithuania was found to contain caesium-137, a highly toxic isotope whose radiation can cause serious health problems, including various types of cancer. Wood pellets and other kinds of biomass fuels are commonly used in stoves and furnaces as an environmentally friendly alternative to oil-based fuels.

Quality vs. Quantity: Italian and American Wine Consumption Trends Diametrically Opposed During Economic Downturn

Latest research shows that Italian wine consumers are continuing to purchase high quality wine during the economic downturn, although the alcoholic beverage industry has been weakened by the recession. Italian wine drinkers choose to reduce quantity rather than quality when making a wine purchase. Wine drinking habits of Italians differ greatly from American habits in this recession.

70 percent of Italian consumers continue to buy the same quality of wine they've always purchased, while 38 percent of consumers are reducing the quantity of wine purchased. In direct contrast, American consumers are much more likely to purchase less expensive and discounted alcoholic beverages on special offer during the downturn, and purchase the same amount they always have. 50 percent of U.S. wine and spirits consumers have changed their shopping habits and are actively seeking sale items, thereby choosing quantity over quality.

Chinese wasp wreaks havoc in Italy - Insect threatens native chestnuts

Experts are warning that an outbreak of parasite wasps from China could doom Italian chestnut trees to extinction. Chestnut trees account for 10 percent of Italian forests, covering nearly 2,000 acres spanning all of Italy's twenty regions. Believed to have come to Europe from China as a stowaway aboard imported tree saplings, the oriental chestnut gall wasp is the autumn fruit's worst enemy. Combating gall wasp infestations has proven exceedingly difficult as the galls provide larvae with a protective shielding against pesticides. The National Forestry Service says that there is little it can do apart from searching out and destroying infected plant material.

Mediterranean a 'sea of hell', Greenpeace says Alien species, slime and algae result of climate change

The Mediterranean is turning into a 'sea of hell', Greenpeace says. Climate change has filled the sea with alien species such as poisonous puffer fish, while algae is coating the seabed with slime. While some experts say the picture painted by Greenpeace is alarmist it is important to step up research into biodiversity and climate change to assess the Med's real state of health. While the Med represents less than 1 percent of the world's oceans, it hosts between 5-15 percent of all marine species known to man. Warmer waters have resulted in the colonization of alien species coming via Gibraltar and the Suez Canal.

EU Agricultural News

Feed industry attacks EU GM policy

The European Union should be thinking very carefully about the food security implications of its current policy on genetically modified organisms in feed, says the president of FEFAC, the European Feed Manufacturers Federation. The EU livestock industry is facing a huge competitive disadvantage as a result of being unable to secure an adequate and reliable source of feed ingredients that contain less than 0.9 percent GMOs. EU compound feed costs increased by €15 billion to a total of €50

billion over the last two years due to high raw material prices. Some €2.5bn, or 17 percent of the increase can be attributed to EU GM policy, due simply to the loss of corn gluten feed and distillers dried grains.