



Would You Like Some Dioxins with That Pizza?

Eleonora Mazzucchi (March 26, 2008)



Pandemonium in Campania: from garbage to mozzarella

If you haven't heard, here's the skinny—or should we say the fat?—on Italy's latest waste management crisis. Up until recently the city of Naples had been quite literally mired in trash: piles of garbage bags overflowing onto the streets, clogging roads and sidewalks and emanating waves of stench, much to the displeasure of locals and tourists alike. It seems as though the putrid mounds have been carted away, but as if that hadn't been bad enough, now mozzarella di bufala, Naples' Campania region's prize export, has taken a hit.

The agricultural provinces around Naples is where much of mozzarella production occurs (other mozzarella regions are Puglia and Lazio), and the buffalo farms that churn out the particular bufala brand are under scrutiny. Abnormal dioxin levels were found in the buffalo milk of some of these



farms and many are saying that the cause is improper waste disposal from Naples. Of the close to 2000 farms that make mozzarella di bufala only a sliver were found to contain dioxins (the Italian Confederation of Farmers say those levels don't pose a health hazard) but that hasn't stopped health inspectors' reports from creating widespread panic. Japan and South Korea have banned all imports of the mozzarella and Neapolitan sales of mozzarella di bufala have gone down by half.

Illegal dumping of toxic waste in parts of Campania, due to the breakdown of public disposal services in Naples, is the primary culprit for the dioxin presence. Others speculate it is the burning of trash at low temperatures, improvised by many locals at the height of the garbage crisis —as opposed to an incinerator's "normal burning"— that released dioxins into the air.

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