



Fancy Food 2009. Tasting the Italian Pavilion

Marina Melchionda (June 24, 2009)



In occasion of the NYC Summer Edition of Fancy Food 2009 i-Italy met Aniello Musella, Director of the Italian Trade Commission in North America, the major coordinator of the Italian Pavilion at the Show. The full interview is written, while the video is an extract

The country's largest specialty food and beverage event, the NYC Summer Fancy Food Show, is about to start. For the occasion, we interviewed Dr. Aniello Musella, the Director of the Italian Trade Commission in North America. The ITC is the major organizer and coordinator of the Italian Pavilion, that will cover about 24,100 square fee (20% of the total) with about 250 exhibitors.

Dr. Musella talked with us about the Show, focusing on the several novelties of this year's edition, the important presence of a delegation from Regione Calabria, and the expectations of the Italian



vendors and institutional representatives participating.

We also faced together a number of issues of general interest, among which the falsification of Italian products in the US, the growing popularity of Italian slow food in the country, and of course the economic crisis and its impact on Italian importation in the US.

Fancy Food 2009. What's new about the Italian participation?

Well, this year we have even more space covered by the Italian exhibitors. As I said we have 250 companies in the Italian pavilion, but outside the Italian pavilion we have more or less one hundred Italian companies in the other areas of the Javits Center. So this year we will have in total 350 Italian companies exhibiting at the Fancy Food in New York. The Italian pavilion is the biggest ever at the Fancy Food Exhibition. The space covered by the Italian pavilion is twenty percent of the total space; that means that this year's Fancy Food is going to be quite Italian, and less international, this year.

How is the Italian Trade Commission involved in this event?

We organized the participation of the Italian companies inside the Italian official pavilion, but apart from that we have a lot of side events that focus on different aspects of the Italian food industry. One of the seminars that we organized(*) focuses mainly on healthy products and on the Mediterranean diet; and another which focuses on the quality, and the preservation of the quality, of Italian food products. These are two aspects that are very important for the Italian companies. The two seminars are intended for American distributors, importers and restaurateurs to inform them of the significance of quality Italian food and wine products.

What kind of products will be promoted? Are there any novelties under this point of view?

We have basic products: pasta, cheese (these are lots of varieties of cheese this year), processed foods, and for the first time we will also have organic products. As a matter of fact, our desk will be focused on the promotion of organic products from Italy, and we will have eight companies that will present their own products at Fancy Food. I think this is one of the most important innovations we have had this year.

Regione Calabria will be one of the protagonists of this year's edition...

We have been working with the Calabria region for many years, and this year at Fancy Food we focus on the Calabria region with specific side events. We will present on the evening of June 29th a tasting of the traditional products of Calabria, with wines of course, and we will have a food and wine expert presenting the major characteristics of Calabrian food and wine products. In addition, on the 10th of July we will start a promotion of food and wine from Calabria in over 14 restaurants and specialty stores here in New York. This is quite a big campaign that we supporting: the promotion of products from a region that is small, and not

well known in the United States and New York. So we are really putting great effort into this.

How is the promotion of the Mediterranean diet being perceived in the United States?

The Mediterranean diet and organic food are very well perceived in metropolitan cities where there is a lot of attention paid to healthy food. We are mainly talking about New York and San Francisco, since these are the two areas in which organic food is more successful. Hence, these are the two American cities where we primarily focus our promotion of Italian organic food.

How is the current economic crisis affecting the popularity of Italian cuisine in the country?

Well, my opinion is that during an economic crisis, when people do not frequent restaurants often, they tend to seek simple foods, even in the United States. People are looking for simple food with quality content, so pasta and Italian food products are very important in this concept. This is the idea behind Plotkin's concept, which claims that Italian food products are in the highest demand during economic crises because the products are simple, healthy and people eat this food at home more than in restaurants. Of course I agree with Plotkin, and I hope his concept is accurate.

How is Italian "slow food" facing the growth of the "fast food" industry?

Slow food reminds me of the Italian Slow Food organization, that with Petrini doing a great job has been very successful here in the United States. I think with areas like New York and San Francisco, slow food is something that has a great future. In this concept of slow food with the Italian products and diet, the main idea is enjoying the food rather than eating and rushing back to business. This



concept works very well with the Italian Mediterranean diet.

How does the importation in the US of counterfeit food products affect the Italian export industry?

This is quite a big issue in the United States. Just to give you an idea of how much the counterfeit food products affect the Italian export industry, I will mention two figures. In 2008 the export of authentic Italian food and wine totaled in value \$3.5 billion. The fake Italian products in the United States reached a value of \$4.5 billion. So the value of the fake products is actually greater than that of the authentic goods. This is a very big issue for the Italian Trade Commission whose main task is to promote authentic Italian products. What we mainly do is organize a lot of educational addresses to consumers in order for them to know what they are getting if they buy the fake products instead of authentic products. Therefore, we do a lot of tasting, pairing together the authentic products with the imitations. We do it for cheese and many other products. There is a lot of activity addressed to American consumers in order to combat this kind of problem as much as possible.

What are the main initiatives promoted by the Italian Trade Commission to protect the "Made in Italy" in this country?

We have established for two years now an Intellectual Property Rights Desk that works to fight the counterfeiting of food products and many other products. In the food sector this is a big problem. The Desk tries to inform the Italian companies how to register their brand and trademark to avoid fake products here in the United States. In some cases the Desk assists the companies if they have to defend themselves against any local company that uses their name with a different product. In my opinion this is an important activity in supporting Italian companies that produce food for the American market.

What are the expectations towards this year's edition of the Fancy Food Show?

Fancy Food always has always participated in the Consortium and the Chamber of Commerce in Italy and they have always worked well at the exhibition in New York. This year of course we have an economic crisis going on, and the consumer demand had decreased quite a lot. So the expectation that the crisis will end soon as possible is a big concern. Fancy food remains an important meeting point for the Italian companies to start new contact or to consolidate contact with the local importers, distributors and restaurateurs in the United States. So it is still very important for the Chamber of Commerce and the Consortium, with their own companies, to be at Fancy Food in order to consolidate their presence in the market.

Besides the Show, what are the main activities organized throughout the year to promote the "Made in Italy" in the US?

The summer Fancy Food is just one activity that the Italian Trade Commission organizes for the promotion of the Italian companies in the United States. For example, we organize a lot of trade delegations to Italy to visit production areas of specific regions. This is something that is very useful because it gives the Italian companies the opportunity to meet importers and distributors that maybe they would have never met. This works very well because small companies have unique and niche products that do well in the specialty food sector of the United States. This is just one activity that the Italian Trade Commission organizes. Besides that we also organize the Fancy Food show in San Francisco that takes place at the end of January where we have 100 Italian companies at the exhibition.

Apart from that we organize a lot of educational addresses to consumers, i.e. tasting, and we do those in specialty stores. We organize these activities throughout the year. The Fancy Food show is an important moment, but it is one among many others we organize.

(*)INFO ON THE EVENTS ORGANIZED BY THE ITALIAN TRADE COMMISSION:

"IL MADE IN ITALY A TAVOLA: INGREDIENTI SALUTARI, QUALITA' DEL CIBO E TUTELA GIURIDICA DEI PRODOTTI TIPICI NEGLI USA" (Made in Italy: healthy ingredients, quality of food, and juridical protection of Italian traditional products in the US)

WHEN: June 28, 4:30- 6pm



WHERE: Jacob Javits Convention Center, New York, Room 1E03

ABOUT: The seminar is divided into two sessions: in the first one Dr. Katherine McManus - Director of [Nutrition Dept., Brigham Hospital](#) [2], Boston - will talk about the healthy aspects of Mediterranean diet and Italian organic products; the second one is organized by the Italian Intellectual Property Rights Desk in New York. Members of [Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe, LLP Law Office](#) [3] will talk about the juridical protection of Italian food products in the US .

WHY IS ITALIAN FOOD THE BEST DURING ECONOMIC HARD TIMES?"

WHEN: June 29, 4:30pm

WHERE: Jacob Javits Convention Center, New York, Room 2D08

ABOUT: The seminar is presented by Fred Plotkin, author of the best seller "Italy for the Gourmet Traveler". The renowned Italian culinary expert writes for the New York Times, and for the trade journals "[Gourmet](#) [4]" and "[Bon Appetit](#) [5]".

This interview was written in collaboration with Gabrielle Pati

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Links

[1] <http://test.iitaly.org/files/italian-trade-commission-fancy-food-2009>

[2] <http://www.brighamandwomens.org/nutrition>

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