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*But
is it
Real?*

Walking the
Amalfi Coast

Spoofing Broadway

Like No Other
Balsamic Vinegar

Roman Aqueducts
Today





Knocking Off MADE in ITALY

What We're
Losing When
Counterfeiters
Imitate Italy's Most
Traditional Foods

By Amy Riolo and Luigi Diotaiuti

For Italian Americans, purchasing, preparing and consuming Italian food enables us to preserve our cultural identity and retain authentic culinary skills passed down by our ancestors.

But, while the word “authentic” is one of the most popular words used to describe Italian products, the number of truly authentic products is dwindling.

Salting the
Parmigiano
Reggiano



Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano-Reggiano

An increasing amount of foreign products misrepresenting themselves as “Italian” can be found everywhere. The “Made in Italy” label has become so coveted that even foreign governments want to have a piece of the pie.

A lot more goes into creating Italy’s world renowned cuisine than meets the eye. Strict geographic indicators are enforced by the Italian government and are adhered to by producers ensuring quality and authenticity. Using traditional, sustainable methods, they create products that are higher quality, a better value and more nutritious.

Most people who have travelled to Italy agree that the same types of food served in Italian restaurants in the United States taste better there. And there’s a good reason for that. In order to make less expensive counterfeit products appeal to consumers abroad, producers need to manipulate them. To replicate the sweet, rich taste of slowly aged balsamic vinegar, for example, sugar and caramel flavors are added to the commercial varieties.

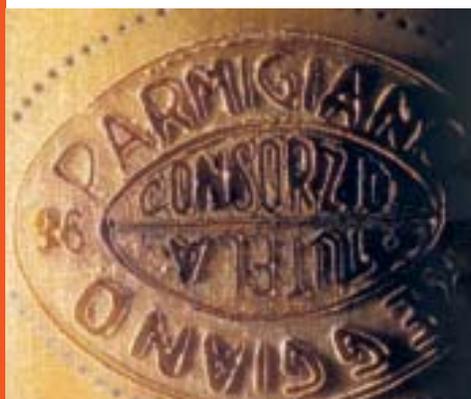
In the United States, there are many Italian-style products being produced under their Italian names. It is often difficult to decipher where they

originated or whether they are truly Italian or not. This is especially true in the cheese-making industry where very different products are marketed under the same name for business purposes.

In addition to misleading consumers, these advertising tricks also undermine the legitimacy of local artisan products. Many of the cheese makers in Vermont, for example, are true visionaries who make wonderful products. If those producers were to misrepresent the origins of their cheese, it would totally undermine the future of that state’s industry. By promoting authentic products everywhere, we will be contributing to a better food future for everyone.

Meanwhile, Mother Nature cannot be cheated. Fortunately, many consumer trends are demanding more transparency in the food-labeling industry. As consumers become more interested and educated in the stories behind food, it will become more difficult to take advantage of them. Nevertheless, the use of Italian flags, Italian themes, the words “Italian” and “organic,” along with many other misleading themes currently confuses many consumers. ►

An authentic wheel of Parmigiano Reggiano has the oval brand of the Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano-Reggiano, the consortium of Italy’s artisanal cheese producers based in Parma, Italy.



Here's the latest on some Made-in-Italy products that counterfeiters are knocking off, including some Italian protected DOP (*Denominazione di origine protetta*) products that increasingly are finding their way into the marketplace as Italian:



Selling truffles in Alba, in Italy's Piedmont region



Authentic Aceto Balsamico di Modena



Prosciutto di Parma

Truffles

According to Bruno Capanna, the president of the truffle foraging association in Acqualagna, “white truffles typically retail for €2,000 to €5,000 per kilogram (about \$2,673 and \$6,682 per 2.2 pounds). Top black winter truffles go for €1,500 to €3,000 per kilogram (about \$2,004 to \$4,009 per 2.2 pounds).”

Truffles cost practically three times the price of gold, and small truffle harvests are causing Italian suppliers to import truffles from China. Many of the Chinese truffles are getting passed off as Italian because the variances can only be identified with molecular tools. The difference in flavor is difficult to perceive unless the truffles are cooked. Their value is only 10 percent of the European truffles, so the sellers pocket the profits...and buyers are deceived.

Aceto Balsamico di Modena

The production of what we now call Aceto Balsamico di Modena began in 1046 with the Holy Roman Emperor Henry III. The term “balsamic” was first used alongside the word “vinegar” in 1747. In 2013, the production chain of Aceto Balsamico di Modena involved 1,000 people in Modena, creating €600,000,000 (almost \$802 million) in consumption turnover for the town.

Authentic Aceto Balsamico di Modena is made from grape “must” (freshly pressed grape juice) that’s partially fermented and boiled and/or concentrated from grape varieties such as Lambrusco, Sangiovese, Trebbiano, Albana, Ancellotta, Fortana or Montuni. It must be aged for at least 10 years in high-quality, natural wooden barrels. Beware that words like “autentico,” “aceto balsamico bianco,” and “di Modena” appear even on counterfeit products.

Prosciutto di Parma

The ideal geographic conditions of the Parma region have made it the perfect place to produce ham since Roman times. Pork legs are cured in a traditional method using only pure sea salt without additives to achieve a concentrated flavor.

A trimmed ham will have lost more than a quarter of its weight through moisture evaporation, helping to concentrate the flavor. According to the prosciutto consortium, “Parma pigs must be specially bred Large White, Landrace and Duroc breeds, born and raised by authorized breeding farms located in 10 regions of central-northern Italy.”

Their diet must consist of a special blend of grains, cereal, and residual whey from the local Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese-making industry. Authentic Prosciutto di Parma uses only pigs which are a minimum of 140 kilos (just over 308 pounds) and at least nine months old.

Counterfeit prosciutto is often made with pigs consuming inexpensive grains, raised in less than ideal conditions, and slaughtered at six months old. ➤

Courtesy of oriGIn—The Organization for an International Geographical Indications Network



Authentic Prosciutto di Parma

Evgeny Karandev

WWW.NIAF.ORG

Italy's Cheeses Several of Italian's most famous cheeses that are protected by DOP (*Denominazione di origine protetta*) designation, meaning they originate from and are produced within a particular area of Italy, are nonetheless imitated using lesser ingredients or shortchanging the traditional process. Among them:

Caciocavallo Podolico

Named one of the “five highest-priced cheeses in the world” in 2013, authentic caciocavallo podolico is a time-honored craft made exclusively from the milk of the Podolico cow found only in the Appenine Mountains between Basilicata and Calabria, which are now at risk of extinction.

Traditional methods of caring for these cows includes the ancient process of taking them to cooler pastures in the summer. Though they have a smaller milk yield than other cows, it is higher in flavor and nutrients.

Imitation caciocavallo cheese is made from other cows' milk using nontraditional techniques. It has a very different flavor, and is lower in nutrients.

Pecorino Romano

A hard cheese made with fresh sheep's milk, Pecorino Romano often takes the name of the place it originates from – hence the names Pecorino Romano, Pecorino Sardo, and Pecorino Crotonese. Outside of Italy, the most popular is Pecorino Romano.

True Pecorino Romano must be made with fresh sheep's milk from sheep coming from specific areas, and only natural fermentation and sheep's milk rennet (coming from the same region) can be used in its production.

To truly be called Pecorino Romano, the cheese must be shaped a certain way, fall between a narrow range in size, and weigh 20-35 kilograms (about 44-77 pounds). The type of Pecorino that is eaten sliced must age a minimum of five months, and the kind that is grated must be aged a minimum of eight months. The consortium also dictates the way the logo must look. Some fraudulent Pecorino Romano cheeses made outside of Italy using substandard ingredients have called themselves “Romano” cheese.

Parmigiano-Reggiano

As a successful GI (Geographic Indicators) product with an eight-century history, Parmigiano-Reggiano is the most widely consumed Italian cheese in the world. It's made with only the milk from cows (which have been fed only on fodder), rennet and salt, with the same traditional process, in the same places, as it has been made for centuries.

Additives are prohibited, and it must be aged a minimum of 12 months, but is typically aged 20-24 months. This industry currently provides work to over 50,000 people. In 2012, it created a €1,924 million (\$2,555,759) revenue in consumption turnover.

Production is regulated by the Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano-Reggiano. In order to be authentic, it must be labeled as Parmigiano-Reggiano and have its name spelled out in stenciled dots which can be visible on the rind. Other names, such as “Italian,” “Organic,” and “Parmesan,” are not authentic.

Mozzarella di Bufala

The most typical and well-known food in the Italian south is buffalo mozzarella (*mozzarella di bufala*). Since antiquity, when Southern Italy was known as Magna Grecia, making buffalo mozzarella has been synonymous with history, tradition, authenticity and craftsmanship.

Buffalo mozzarella made in Italy is certified by the European Union with a Denominazione d'Origine Protetta, or DOP seal. The protected term for true buffalo milk mozzarella is Mozzarella di Bufala Campana DOP. Since 2008, the legislations surrounding the cheese determine where the buffalo themselves come from and the region in which the cheese is made. The race of buffalos and their feed are also determining

Ravioli al Caciocavallo at Al Tiramisu Restaurant. The dish is made with authentic caciocavallo podolico, one of the five most expensive cheeses in the world, and is a target for counterfeiters.



Mozzarella di Bufala
courtesy of the Consorzio di Tutela della Mozzarella di Bufala Campana

factors.

The cheese must be made of fresh, whole buffalo milk with a minimum of 7.2 percent fat content. The milk must be filtered in traditional methods within 60 hours of milking; natural veal rennet must be used, and additives omitted. The cooking temperatures, shapes, taste, fat content, and humidity levels present in the cheese are all pre-determined. Even the logo's appearance must fit the standard.

Recently, at a factory near Caserta in the Campania region, authorities arrested ersatz cheese producers for cutting the buffalo milk with cheaper cow's milk and not adhering to other production standards.

How to Know?

Many foods from Italy are labeled and protected under European Union regulations. One of the ways to protect our products and purchasing power is to pay attention to and support Geographic Indicators (GI's), which are “geographic names associated with goods produced in the corresponding geographical area with specific qualities, characteristic, and reputations.”

Soil, climate, production techniques and the human factor are what distinguish products from one another. The more you are able to control these items, the more you are able to

control quality, taste and value.

And, GI's aren't just for Europeans. They are becoming increasingly important in the U.S. economic landscape as well. Idaho potatoes are a wonderful example of how GI's can be an effective model on this side of the Atlantic, and demonstrate how this type of commitment to agriculture can boost rural development anywhere—and help to guarantee consumers are buying authentic products. ▲

The mission of culinary duo Amy Riolo and Luigi Diotaiuti is to tell the whole story behind the food we eat and to preserve Italian culinary traditions on the brink of extinction. Amy and Luigi bonded over their insatiable appetite for cuisine, culture and travel. Luigi is an award-winning restaurateur, chef and sommelier who owns Al Tiramisu, Washington D.C.'s most authentic Italian restaurant. Amy is an award-winning author, historian, anthropologist and Mediterranean diet expert.



What You Should Know

In the world of food fraud, imitation isn't the sincerest form of flattery. In fact, fakes and falsely labelled food products not only rip off buyers, they undermine industries whose artisan-crafted products often represent centuries of perfection, the finest ingredients, and production values typically unmatched in most other food industries. And, for Italian products, the counterfeiting goes beyond food products to include everything from handbags and stemware to footwear and pottery. Take a look at the Chinese-made Lifan 300, an imitation Fiat 330 that retails for a quarter the cost.

You can look up the authenticity of a company or product on the Made in Italy website at www.madeinitaly.org.

And, to further protect yourself as a consumer, you should know the following labels that can help distinguish authentic products from fakes:

DOP and IGP Labels: DOP (*Denominazione di origine protetta*) means the product originated from and was produced within a particular area of Italy. IGP (*Indicazione geografica protetta*) means the product originated in or is famous for coming from

a specific area in Italy, but only part of its production took place in that area.

Olive Oil Labels: About 30 Italian olive oils have the DOP label, which means the olive oil meets tough standards, such as limits on acidity levels and storage time of olives before processing. The IGP Olive Oil label means the product meets the basic standards, such as using only olives picked directly from the tree rather than the ground, but has looser origination requirements.

Italian Wine Quality Labels: DOC (*Denominazione di origine controllata*) means the wine was produced within a limited area, using precise grape varieties, and adhering to strict production controls. DOCG (*Denominazione di origine controllata e garantita*) is the finest quality label, given to wines subject to the strictest varietal, processing, and production controls. IGT (*Indicazione geografica tipica*) means the wine was produced from approved grape varieties within a defined geographical region.

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