

Celebrating Made in Italy: a heritage that nourishes the world

On **April 15th**, we celebrate the National Made in Italy Day – an opportunity to recognize the value of what we produce, export, and share with the world. Among the key players is the agri-food sector, which has become increasingly central to the national economy. Today, this sector generates nearly €335 billion in added value, accounting for 19% of Italy’s GDP, with a turnover that has reached €586.9 billion: +8.4% compared to 2021 and +29% since 2015. In a context marked by health crises and international tensions, it is the quality of Made in Italy agri-food products that has driven growth.

To mark the occasion, we gathered the insights of three experts: **Prof. Michele Carruba**, President of our Scientific Committee; **Dr. Anna Cane**, President of the Olive Oil Group at ASSITOL; and **Prof. Giuseppe Pulina**, Full Professor of Ethics and Sustainability of Animal Farming at the Department of Agriculture, University of Sassari.

National Made in Italy Day: between health, policy choice and cultural identity

Interview with Michele Carruba

To mark the National Made in Italy Day, we interviewed Prof. Michele Carruba, President of our Scientific Committee, to explore the deep connection between the Mediterranean Diet, public health, and the role of political choices – including those related to tariffs and global market regulations.

Today, longevity is often seen as key indicator of development. How does lifestyle - especially diet – influence our life expectancy?

Longevity is one of the main indicators of social development, even more than economic growth. Countries with the highest life expectancies are those that have chosen to invest in quality of life, prevention, and public health. Many factors influence this parameter: environmental, cultural, genetic, and socioeconomic conditions. An increasingly crucial role is played by the ability to invest in research and innovation. It is through science that concrete solutions are developed to improve health, nutrition, and overall quality of life. Italy can – and must – do more in this regard: currently, we invest only 1.43% of our GDP in research and development, compared to 1.98% in China and 2.88% in the US. Bridging this gap would strengthen the foundations of our future health and unlock the country’s scientific and productive potential.

But above all, it is lifestyle that makes the difference: it alone accounts for around 50% of life expectancy, making it the most powerful modifiable factor we have. Nutrition and physical activity can activate our genes, as shown by epigenetics. This means that even those with genetic predispositions can improve their life expectancy through conscious daily choices.

How can politics help protect our public health?

Politics can influence – and shape – all the factors that affect longevity: environment, culture, access to science, mobility, and even lifestyles. Investing, for example, in green spaces, bike lanes, or public campaigns on nutrition can make the difference to public health. But beware: we need smart policy. By that, I mean policies that promote our food culture, not penalize it with outdated and ineffective tools like Nutriscore, taxes on nutrients, or tariffs.



Italy has a unique heritage: the Mediterranean Diet. It not only reduces the risk of chronic and degenerative diseases but also increases life expectancy. Seen not merely as a dietary pattern but as a balanced lifestyle philosophy, it integrates food choices, physical activity, and mental well-being, guiding citizens toward more conscious behaviour. Yes today, despite growing global interest, adherence to the Mediterranean Diet is declining. It is estimated that fewer than 15% of the population fully follows its principles. The causes are many – environmental, political, cultural, and social – and they are gradually undermining one of the key elements that once made Italy a global benchmark for longevity. Yes, our country still ranks high, but it's no longer at the top.

Italy is also a leading example when it comes to food safety. How important is this for public health?

Italy is not only known for the health benefits of the Mediterranean Diet, but also boasts a long-standing tradition of food safety, with strict regulations that have protected us from major health crises. Food is healthy not only for its nutritional properties, but also when it is safe throughout the processes that transform raw materials into finished products. This culture of safety, now a key part of the European regulatory framework, is a fundamental asset of Made in Italy. It is tangible proof of how policy can promote prevention, not just economic growth.

What about tariffs? Can they impact health as well as the economy?

Absolutely. Tariffs imposed on iconic Mediterranean Diet products – such as olive oil, pasta, or aged cheeses – are not just a threat to the Italian economy: they are a setback for global health. Take the United States as an example: on the one hand, they heavily invest in research and development, yet on the other, they tax the very products that could help them prevent major chronic diseases. It's a paradox.

Those who impose tariffs on such products are not only targeting an economic sector – they are depriving citizens of a health opportunity. Made in Italy is more than a label: it is a cultural, scientific, and nutritional heritage that deserves to be protected – especially for what it represents in terms of public health.

Olive oil, an icon of Made in Italy

by Anna Cane

Olive oil is the quintessential product of the Mediterranean Diet – the healthiest dietary model in the world. Beyond its health benefits, olive oil embodies a range of values that make it a true icon of Made in Italy: landscapes, traditions, people, flavours, aromas, lifestyles, cultures, and much more. No other product encapsulates so many powerful symbols that evoke our beautiful country. Italy boasts a level of biodiversity unmatched by any other producing country, even those with higher production volumes. With over 500 olive cultivars, Italy offers an extraordinary variety of sensory profiles.

But Italy also holds another record: its expertise in olive oil, part of the unique Italian know-how that has brought olive oil to global recognition. Thanks to these skills, the Italian olive oil sector can respond to alternating harvests and raw material shortages by selecting the finest oils from different producing countries and creating blends tailored to the preferences of diverse international market.

Italian olive groves supply about a quarter of the country's total needs, considering both domestic consumption and export. In recent years, consumption trends have shifted significantly toward extra virgin olive oil, which, in addition to its content of monounsaturated fatty acids, is rich in antioxidants – particularly polyphenols and vitamin E.

Scientific research in the medical field has been ongoing for decades, making extra virgin olive oil the most studied food in relation to human health. It is also the only food whose cardioprotective



properties have been unequivocally proven. Other potential benefits – such as cancer prevention, reduced risks of diabetes, and protection against neurodegenerative diseases – are currently being investigated, with highly promising preliminary results.

Italian breeders of Made in Italy

by Giuseppe Pulina

Perhaps few know that the word “Italians” derives from “Vitalians,” which referred to calf breeders, as the populations of the peninsula were once called. This origin tells us a lot, especially since the first “Made in Italy” product wasn’t a piece of clothing, a piece of furniture, or a work of art—it was meat. Followed by milk, cheese, cured meats, and even leather, a sector where we still hold the global lead in terms of quality and craftsmanship.

Our history, intertwined with a diverse and generous geography, has endowed Italy with an unparalleled animal biodiversity. Among cattle alone, there are over 80 different breeds, each representing the unique characteristics of their territory and traditions, which vary from valley to valley, island to island. This has given rise to spectacular livestock landscapes, from Alpine *malghe* perched between sky and rock, to the *meriagos* of Sardinia, where the ancient language of shepherding still survives.

Just as we inherited a great mosaic of cultures, we also inherited one of the richest cured meat traditions in the world, with hundreds of products, forty-three of which are recognized as DOP or IGP, reflecting an art that blends technique and passion, memory and innovation.

The Made in Italy of our meats and cured products is, first and foremost, about taste, revealing the art of raising animals well and carefully transforming their products. But it is also a guarantee of nutritional quality and food safety, values that are increasingly central to conscious consumption. Last but not least, is sustainability – the real kind – rooted in daily practices and balance with the land, because the pastures and forests of livestock farms absorb CO₂ in such quantities that they completely offset the climate-altering emissions from the entire national livestock sector.

This is why Made in Italy livestock farming is not just an origin label but, above all, a way of preserving our roots, carrying them into the future with respect for animals, the environment, and that culture of the beautiful country that still makes us “vitaliani” today.