



The region of Trentino is dominated by the Dolomite Mountains

The majestic range of Alpine mountains known as the Dolomites, a UNESCO World Heritage site, tower above the city of Trento, around which are some of Italy's most northern vineyards. The Dolomitic range comprises 18 alpine peaks, which rise to above 3,000 metres and offer an impressive backdrop to the region's viticulture, as well as offering a mineral cocktail of porphyry, basalt, magnesium and limestone, making for wines of individual character.

Cooperative production

It is not surprising that the history of production in Trentino has been influenced by the fact that only 27% of the land is arable – and that applies to all agriculture, including apples and other fruits, along with viticulture. Its mountainous topography ensures that farming is very fragmented, which over the last century has given rise to one of the most evolved and structured cooperative systems in Italy and Europe. Cooperative farming in Trentino reaches a long way back, and has played a fundamental role in all sectors of its agriculture. Its success stems from the necessity to create an effective economic system for the region's fragmented farming industry, including that of viticulture.

As much as 80% of all farming is controlled by cooperatives, and 92% of the region's wine is produced by cooperatives, with member grape growers owning little more than 1 ha of vineyard. As many as 48% of Trentino farmers own a mere 0.5 ha of vineyard and only 0.8% of farmers own more than 10 ha of vineyard. For this reason, up until the 1950s, most wine in Trentino was sold locally in bulk. Today, some small successful wineries are emerging. Two such names include Foradori and San Leonardo, which stand out for their world-class quality wines, considered to be among Italy's top labels.

Elisabetta Foradori, winemaker and owner of the Foradori estate, of which 68% of the 150,000

bottles are exported, inherited her estate from her grandfather in 1956 and started making wine in 1984. In 2002 she made a courageous choice, to go biodynamic. Today her cellars are filled with wine fermenting in terracotta, handmade amphorae, which were shipped from Spain. "I have never looked back since I made this choice," says Foradori. "I seek to achieve balance and harmony in my wines and I believe in biodiversity through mass selection. Lately I have planted vines from seed in order to increase the potential of diversity, to reach a true and balanced expression of the terroir."

Trentino produces a mere 1.5% of Italy's wine. According to Foradori, the cooperatives promote a political system where votes are all important, giving everyone a say when it comes to decisions regarding Trentino's viticulture and its promotion. "Trentino's wines are mainly visible in supermarket chains, and is little-known for its potential for excellence. It needs to emerge and enhance its image."

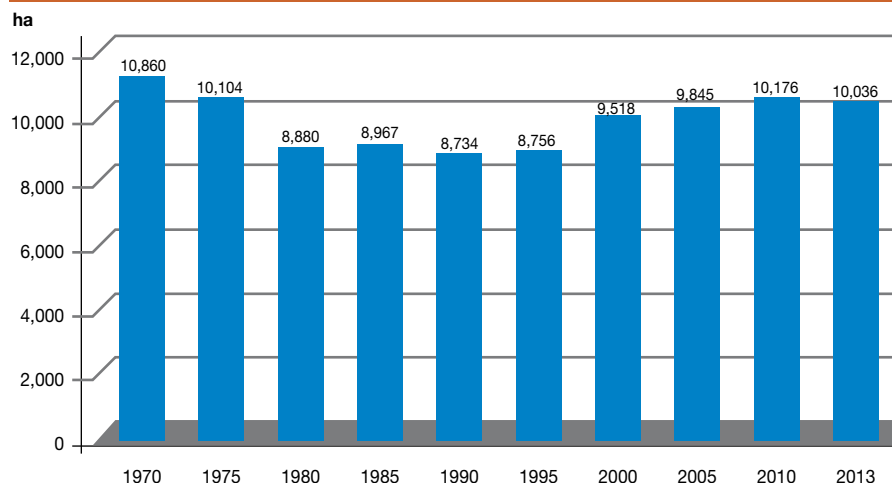
"Cooperative farming still today is a major economic resource within the territory," says Alessandro Bertagnoli, president of the main Consorzio Vini del Trentino, the 120-member-strong grape-grower's association. "The

presence and power of the cooperatives are often demonized, but they should be seen as gentle giants, playing an important role in the region's livelihood and economy." Bertagnoli, also president of the Aldeno cooperative, with 240 members and 300 ha, produces a line of organic and vegan wines. "My mission for Trentino can be summed up in three key words: tradition, vocation and sustainability," says Bertagnoli. "Sustainable viticulture is one of the consortium's main aims. We must respect nature, use less chemicals and be aware that what we do today will affect future generations. This is one of the main aims, together with promotion, that the Consorzio Vini del Trentino is committed to."

Cavit, Trentino's giant cooperative system, was one of the first to be established, in 1950. Today there are three main cooperative players: Cavit, with 11 affiliated cooperatives under their holding; Mezzacorona, with one affiliated cooperative; and La Vis, affiliated to the Cembra cooperative. Together they produce 85% of the region's wine production, most of which is exported.

Cavit, which produces 6m bottles, currently represents 4,500 winegrowers and associate

Growth of vineyard area in the province of Trento



SOURCE: VINI DEL TRENTINO CONSORZIO DI TUTELA

TRENTINO POWER LIST – REVENUE 2014

Mezzacorona	€171.1m
Cavit	€158.5m
La Vis	€89.1m
Ferrari	€52m
Cantina Toblino	€13.3m
Vivallis	€13m

SOURCE: WWW.ANIMAMARTINO.IT/IND-2014

members; altogether they farm 5,700 ha of vineyards, equal to 60% of Trentino's total wine production. Financially things are going well; the most recent figures show the company made €158.5m, a +3.7% rise against 2012/2013. Of this, exports represent €125m, or 80% of production; exports rose +4.7%. Andrea Nicolini, export manager, proudly points out that over the last few years their export strategy has been to increase both volume and value. There has been a focus on increasing the production of sparkling wines – in 2014, production grew by 12% – using both Charmat method and the classic method.

Given the importance of sparkling wine, it's not surprising that Chardonnay represents one of the widest planted varieties, over 2,830 ha. Altogether, sparkling wines produced under the Trento DOC appellation are made by 41 producers with more than 100 labels between them. In 2014, some 7m bottles were sold to the tune of €70m, showing an average +6% increase. "Exports reach some 20% and the leaders include Ferrari and the cooperative brands Rotari, Cesarini Sforza and Altemasi, followed by niche producers such as Abate Nero, Pisoni, Maso Martis and Opera," says Sabrina Schench, spokeswoman for the Istituto Trento DOC.

Other grape varieties used in the production of Trento DOC include, but to a far lesser degree, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Noir and a small percentage of Pinot Meunier. The wines, almost invariably brut, are made according to the classical bottle fermentation method and must age on the lees at least 15 months before being released; 24 months for 'millesimato' or vintage types, and 36 months for 'riserva'.

Ferrari, a family-run business established in 1902, is the leader in the Trento DOC sparkling wine sector, producing some 45m bottles, of which 15% is exported worldwide. Indeed, it was thanks to Giulio Ferrari that the region has become a sparkling wine area. In 1902, the young oenologist was in France, where he noticed some similarities between the regions of Champagne and Trentino. Today, Ferrari wines are an Italian icon, served at state and red carpet

events. And now, the company has decided it's time that the world knew more about the region the brand comes from. Camilla Lunelli, family member and communication and PR Director, says that from 2016, the company is beginning an intensive export campaign that will focus on the Trentodoc appellation, rather than solely on the Ferrari brand name. "Trento DOC is tied to Trento's unique mountainous viticulture and this awareness and potential needs to be communicated and promoted internationally."

Other wines

Trentino's total vineyard surface counts some 10,000 ha of vines, mostly registered under the Trentino DOC appellation, which covers the Adige Valley from Avio in the south to Mezzacorona in the north. Trentino's main area of production of white aromatic wines is the mountainous Valle di Cembra. Until about 20 years ago, the valley was dominated by the red Schiava variety, a light table wine often made into a rosé, but it's since been replanted mainly to Müller-Thurgau, which climbs the steep hillsides with its pergola and double-pergola vineyards. The Cembra valley is also an excellent area for other white varieties such as Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Blanc and Pinot Grigio, the latter being the second-most planted variety in Trentino (2,650 ha); it has acquired a reputation as some of the best in Italy, thanks to its vibrant, mineral quality.

"The Piana Rotaliana of Mezzacorona is an extensive flat valley, some 35 km in length," explains Lucio Matricardi, head winemaker at Mezzacorona cooperative. The Mezzacorona cooperative is the second-largest in Trentino, with 2,600 ha, 1,500 members and a 4.5m-bottle production. He notes that the valley offers diverse climates which can vary between 3° and 6°, taking in an alpine climate in the north, to a more Mediterranean climate further south. The Piana Rotaliana is also home to the production of the red variety Teroldego Rotaliano DOC, Trentino's most widely planted red variety amounting to some 623 ha, of which the Mezzacorona cooperative farms 350 ha.

The Valle dei Laghi, close to Lago di Garda, is home to the local white Nosiola, a recently revived variety. It's traditionally been used to produce Vino Santo Trentino DOC, a dessert wine made from late-harvest and partially dried grapes. Crisp and dry in character, 'Nosiola' is a local dialect word meaning 'nocciola', or

hazelnut, so-named because of its nutty taste. It is indigenous to Trentino. Other dessert wines include Moscato Giallo and Moscato Rosa, Trentino DOC white and rosé muscatel wines, made from the Muscat grape.

Marzemino Trentino DOC, made from the local variety and varietal Marzemino – which entered history when Mozart referred to it in Don Giovanni – is Trentino's third-most planted red variety (332 ha), after Teroldego and Merlot. Once made in a sweet and often slightly fizzy version, it has more recently emerged as a modern dry fruity wine, that's mineral and fresh, with the versatility to match many dishes. The young and dynamic winemaker Massimo Tarter of Cantina d'Isera in the Vallagarina – one of the largest and oldest producer cooperatives – has ambitions to revive Marzemino's status as one of Trentino's rising stars.

The Lagrein varietal also plays an important role in Trentino DOC wines, as do international varieties such as Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, which were introduced into Trentino towards the end of the last century, as were Cabernet Franc and Carménère. A prime example of the success of the Bordeaux blend style is San Leonardo, which has been perfecting its style since 1724. "Our vision has always been to produce age-worthy, fresh, elegant wines that reflect the terroir," says Anselmo Guerrieri Gonzaga, owner of the San Leonardo estate, which has a 280,000 bottle production and exports to 52 countries. "Trentino still has a lot to do in terms of communication and promotion. It has the potential today to make fresh, fruity wines with low alcohol and vibrant acidity, which is what many consumers want, but the region is still relatively unknown," he says, going on to explain that Trentino's mountainous land is a challenge for viticulture.

However, the region's production is multifaceted and there is space for everyone: Cooperative production has shown that it's possible to produce in volume, while maintaining a consistent quality that offers value for money. The sparkling houses are also increasing in number and as more of their wines appear in a world market that has an insatiable appetite for sparkling wine, they will help to build awareness of the region. It is now time to focus on organic production and the individual identity of small, quality producers who are struggling to emerge from the shadows of the mountains, to show the potential of Trentino's uniqueness and terroir character. ■