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Made in Italy app will fight €60 billion industry of 'fake' Italian food, say creators



By Niamh Michail+

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Photo: iStock

Related tags: Italcheck, Italian-sounding, RINA Services, Agroqualità, Food fraud, Authentic, PDO, PGI

The creators of Italcheck, an app to verify genuine Italian products for shoppers and aid manufacturers fight food fraud, will help fight against the €60 billion fake Italian products black market.

Marco Masselli, founder of Italcheck, said he designed the app to detect fake Italian-sounding names that undermine genuine manufacturers.

"I have the strong belief that authentic 'Made in Italy' products are an incredible resource for our country. But, as one of the most appreciated manufacturers and producers in the world for certain product categories, Italy and its producers are subject to a massive counterfeiting phenomenon," he told FoodNavigator.

"Sometimes this results in pure copies of an original product, [while] others producers from all over the world try to make consumers think they are buying Italian products by making them look as if they were Italian, through Italian [sounding] names and misleading Italian words, images, trademarks and recipes."



A Rizzoli product bearing the Italcheck logo. © Italcheck

With a total of around 5000 products across 28 different categories, including food, clothes and electrical equipment, and 250 companies represented, Masselli said it offers traceability to both consumers and producers, who can be sure their products have not been counterfeited.

Food industry operators that have signed up so far include food manufacturer Rizzoli, ice cream manufacturer Pepino, pasta manufacturer Pastificio Alta Valla Scrivia, Quick Mill coffee machines, Calabria Food preserves and Palazzolo pastry.

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The web-based app can be used with any smartphone, tablet or computer and geo-localises users through their IP address, allowing the creators to track how many people use it at any given time – currently between 4000 and 5000 people scan around 10,000 products each month.

Manufacturers pay a fee to become Italcheck certified and can then add the logo to their products. *“Once they become part of the Association, they will benefit not only from the added commercial value of being able to say that their authentic products are certified, but they will benefit from marketing and commercial initiatives such as the British Retailer Consortium (BRC) and International Food Standard (IFS),”* said Masselli.

The Italcheck app has the backing of Italian Identity, a non-profit independent association launched in February this year which aims to identify and protect authentic 'Made in Italy' products from imitations.



Fake Italian: A €60 billion-industry

The practice is commonplace to the point of being unremarkable, with many consumers failing to even notice the sheer quantity of products they buy that have a slightly Italian-ringing name.

But it has long been a sore spot for the Italian food industry. Socialist and Democrat MEP Nicola Danti has called it *“an odious and unfair commercial*



practice” that undermines the credibility and trust in all the products sold in the European internal market, he told us earlier this year.

Achille Tonani, general manager business at one of Italy’s leading food certification bodies, RINA Services, and CEO of Agroqualità, said Italcheck’s certification system could help to reduce damages from a €60 billion-industry of imitations and forgery.

“It’s not easy to quantify the value of the global trade of fake made in Italy, but the Italian sounding business is more than double the actual value of Italian food exports and is estimated at around €60 billion a year. In the North American market, 97% of Italian sauces, 94% of tinned food and 76% of tinned tomatoes are imitations, whilst only 15% of Italian cheese is authentic. In North America forgery of parmesan, provolone, ricotta cheese and mozzarella it’s equal to 100%.

“This data is sufficient to highlight the damage done by the Italian sounding, not only to our food industry but to multiple industries in Italy.”

The issue of EU protected food names, such as PDO Parmesan or French Champagne is a sticking point in negotiations for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) **raising objections from US politicians and the US dairy industry.**

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