



Is your “Italian cheese” Italian?

By **ROBERT CAMPANA**

Is your “Italian cheese” Italian? Or your “Italian wine” Italian? Or your “Italian sauce?” Sure, many products on the market “sound” Italian, but what are they really? The official term is called “Italian sounding.” This term has been officially recognized by the Italian government for some years now and means the counterfeiting phenomenon that targets Italian products in the food industry, even if they are protected by geographical indications or designations of origin. Technically, it is a practice that does not damage the intellectual property right in the United States, but does induce the consumer, through the use of words, colors, images, and geographical references to erroneously associate the local product with the Italian one. It is for this reason that I have decided to start an awareness campaign on educating about the difference between real Italian and Italian sounding food/beverage products. The page is found on Instagram at @stopitaliansounding.

What is the easiest way to recognize an Italian sounding product? Most Italian sounding products tend to exaggerate their “Italianness” through the ways just mentioned above. If you are interested in buying a real Italian product, the best thing you can look for is “Product of Italy,” “Prodotto in Italia,” or “Prodotto d’Italia.”

It is also important to understand the view point that one must take when discussing the issue of Italian sounding. The viewpoint that is taken is that of Italy. Since Italian sounding products are claiming to be Italian, it would only be fair to judge them from an Italian set of eyes. It is specifically for that reason why I don’t consider Italian sounding products produced in the United States to be Italian, but “Italian style.”

Of course, I recognize the fact that the Italian diaspora has created extremely successful companies here in the United States and for that they are to be commended and applauded for their success and sacrifices. However, it is still important to spread awareness about Italian sounding products because they are damaging to the Italian economy and, perhaps even more importantly, to the image of Italy.

The most imitated products are cheeses, oils, and wines. In fact, in 2019, the total value of just five Italian sounding cheeses produced in the United States (Parmesan, Italian blue cheese/Gorgonzola, Ricotta, and Romano) was over \$23 billion. These five imitated cheeses were worth over 1% of the entire Italian GDP. That is enormous especially if we take into consideration all of the other Italian sounding products that are available to the market.

Am I saying to stop the production of Italian sounding products? Absolutely not! They should still be produced, but with better labelling. The words “Italian style” could solve a lot of confusion as an informed consumer is always a happier consumer.

For more examples of Italian sounding products, how to recognize real Italian products, and much more, considering following my Instagram page at @stopitaliansounding. Also feel free to email me at stopitaliansounding@gmail.com

