

Italian Cheese Road Tour: Exploring PDO Cheeses with Agriform

Natasha Lardera (September 17, 2012)



Agriform, in collaboration with igourmet.com, the North America's leading online gourmet food and gift retailer, launches the Italian Cheese Road Tour, at the Saratoga Wine & Food and Fall Ferrari Festival. The taste tour aims to introduce consumers to different cheeses and to educate them about PDO cheeses of Italy.

At this year's edition of the [Saratoga Wine & Food and Fall Ferrari Festival](#) [2] guests, trade representatives and gourmands alike, had the possibility to travel through Northern Italy by tasting delicious PDO ([Protected Designation Origin](#) [3]) cheeses while sipping on wines provided by the festival's sponsor, [Antica Cantina di Canelli](#) [4].

Authentic artisanal cheeses were provided by [Agriform](#) [5], one of Italy's leading companies specializing in the marketing and sales of traditional Italian dairy products, especially cheese. Agriform partners are some of the most important dairy cooperatives of the North-Eastern part of



Italy. Agriform itself is a "second level cooperative", where the products are supplied mainly from its productive entities and shareholders, firmly linked to the territory of origin, through thousands of member farmers.

Agriform works principally with Protected Designation Origin cheese products sourced directly from its members. Agriform partners represent some of the most important dairy cooperatives of North-Eastern Italy. Agriform itself is a "second level cooperative" whereby products are supplied mainly from its productive entities and shareholders, firmly linked to the territory of origin and a network of thousands of member farmers. Most of Agriform's products are produced in the area encompassed by the Alpine region of Veneto and Trentino and by the Appenines of Emilia, embracing a great part of the Po River Valley.

Agriform launched at the festival the Italian Cheese Road Tour in collaboration with igourmet.com [6], North America leading online gourmet food and gift retailer. The taste tour was formulated with the aim of introducing consumers to different cheeses and educating them about PDO cheeses of Italy with emphasis on Asiago (fresh and aged), Valtellina Casera, Grana Padano, and Piave. Giving consumers the opportunity to sample and learn about the cheeses, their provenance, maturation regimes on site at events and then be able to bring the cheese home with them that day by purchasing it from the pop up shop.

In addition, as a large consumer audience is reached at these events, the e-tail partnership formed with i-gourmet provides access to cheeses in areas for consumers that might not normally have access to these high quality products. Gift cards were also given to consumers on site by igourmet.com [6] to encourage their Italian Cheese Exploration after the event. The tour's upcoming stops are: Newport, New York City and Boston.

In Saratoga a thorough seminar was held by Italian Cheese Guru, [Lou Di Palo](#) [7] who, with the collaboration of La Cucina Italiana's wine editor, Ian Wolff presented the featured cheeses paired with wines.

In order, the cheeses tasted at the show were: Grana Padano Stravecchio Oro del Tempo PDO (paired with Due Bollicine Pinot Chardonnay Brut), Asiago Fresco(fresh) PDO (paired with Sut, Ribolla Gialla), Asiago Stagionato (aged) PDO (paired with Santi Rosato, bardolino DOC), Valtellina Casera PDO (paired with Nino Negri, Inferno, Valtellina Superiore DOCG) and Piave Oro del Tempo PDO (paired with Bottega Finaia, Lagrein, Trento DOC).

First of all, what does PDO really signify? "High quality and a guarantee from the European Union's Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) system that the products bearing the label are produced, processed and prepared within a particular geographical area, and with features and characteristics that must be due to the geographical area. The PDO labelling system aims to protect consumers from fraudulent claims of quality. It also helps you know your food is safe because every PDO product has to have a traceability system attached to it, and is closely monitored. It is the best way to guarantee that the product is the result of ancestral traditions and methods."

Agriform describes Grana Padano Stravecchio Oro del Tempo as "the new top quality of the Grana Padano range." Stravecchio (literally extra old) Oro del Tempo adds that extra prestige to the fame of Grana Padano: 20 months of maturation give the cheese a more intense and fragrant flavor. Like every precious thing, Stravecchio cheese is one of a kind, unique: its excellent quality is ascertained when it reaches the maturing department, and every week thereafter until the twentieth month. At that point, with skill and experience, the expert selects the cheeses that deserve to become prime Grana Padano with the certificate of origin and guarantee. It can be enjoyed alone at before a meal, with aperitivo, or at the end with some fresh fruit, grated over pasta and in salads.

Fresh Asiago is a fine table cheese, whose name comes from the Alpine highlands in the North of Vicenza, one of Europe's biggest areas of pastures, where it is already produced. It is a semi-cooked cheese, white to slightly yellow in color, with marked and irregular holes. It has a delicate, pleasant flavor that is delightfully fresh. Ideal for sandwiches, Fresh Asiago is versatile in the kitchen: it melts without losing texture and it is an ingredient Caesar's salads cannot do without, or together with tomatoes, avocados, fresh fruits and nuts. Fresh Asiago calls for semi- to non-aromatic white wines,



even sparkling. It also pairs well with young and fresh red wines.

Completely different from its brother, Seasoned Asiago is obtained from low-fat cow's milk. It's a semi-cooked, medium fat cheese, produced in the provinces of Vicenza and Trento and in some areas of Padua and Treviso. It is compact, with a few small or medium size holes. It is an excellent cheese to be enjoyed through the whole meal. In the aged variety, it can be grated to season rich entrees. It is also perfect after a meal, to finish dinner with pure goodness. It goes preferably with full bodied red wines.

Produced only in the [Sondrio province](#) [8], Valtellina Casera PDO is a low-fat cheese made from semi-skimmed cows' milk. It is of compact structure, while the taste is sweet with a touch of dried fruit and pretty delicate (becoming more intense as the aging period proceeds). It is a delicate ingredient to add to salads and to many other dishes. It can also be eaten on its own, especially after an early maturation, maybe accompanied by red wine (at the festival it was paired with Nino Negri, Inferno, Valtellina Superiore DOCG). In the kitchen it is an essential element for many tasty traditional recipes of the Lombardy area, such as Pizzoccheri, buckwheat pasta. (For the preparation of Pizzoccheri, Valtellina Casera is used when just over its minimum aging of 70 days while its flavor is delicate and milky and before it turns more intense).

Piave is a table cheese, it is the most famous cheese typical of [Belluno](#) [9]. Created from the experience of local master cheese makers, it is still produced following the ancient art of cheese making rules. Its flavor, pleasantly intense, is due to the high quality of the milk of the valleys of Belluno and the use of milk enzymes specific in its processing. It is offered in various stages of maturation: Fresco (Fresh), Mezzano (Semi-aged) and Vecchio Oro del Tempo (Aged). It is excellent as a main dish, in classic recipes or as a basic ingredient of fine Italian cuisine.

"The line of products that is most affected by the plague of Italian sounding is that of cheeses," Italian Trade Commissioner Aniello Musella said at the festival, "Domestic cheeses are sold in packaging featuring Italian colors and images, or they have Italian sounding names so consumers are tricked into believing they are authentic. Education is key. The concept of the Italian Cheese Road tour presented by Agriform in collaboration with I-Gourmet, was formulated with the aim of reaching consumers in a lifestyle event setting and educating them about PDO cheeses of Italy. The tasting was a real success."

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- [4] <http://www.cantinacanelli.it>
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