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Italian Wine Embraces Certified Sustainability

Equalitas says its third-party standard now covers about 20% of national production as Europe tightens greenwashing rules

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Italy’s wine sector is leaning harder into certified sustainability as European regulators move to crack down on vague environmental claims, and Equalitas, the Italian standard backed by Federdoc, says it has become one of the clearest examples of how the industry can prove its claims rather than simply advertise them.

Riccardo Ricci Curbastro, president of Equalitas, said the system now covers about 12 million hectoliters of wine, or roughly 20% of Italy’s production, through a voluntary certification process that relies on accredited third-party auditors, technical rules updated with university experts and a structure designed to verify environmental, social and economic practices. The group says that approach has helped Italian wine build an early lead in a market where sustainability is increasingly tied to access, reputation and sales.

Equalitas says it has certified 490 operating units, including 346 for social reasons, with those businesses generating about €6.6 billion in revenue. It has also approved 17,000 labels under the Sustainable Winery and Sustainable Wine marks. The supply chain currently includes 675 agricultural companies and 4,406 hectares of vineyards. In addition, the DpS module has been applied to the Vino Nobile di Montepulciano DOCG consortium, covering 1,071 hectares and 111 companies in what Equalitas describes as a territorial certification model that tracks environmental activity across an entire area.

The certification effort comes as Brussels tightens rules on greenwashing. Under the new European framework, generic environmental claims without verifiable proof can be challenged or penalized. Equalitas argues that certified producers are better positioned to communicate sustainability because they can document their practices. Ricci Curbastro said that matters not only for compliance but also for marketing, especially in export markets and in large retail chains that increasingly ask for proof.

Interest in the standard is no longer limited to Italy. Equalitas says it has received certification requests from France, Germany, Greece, Brazil and Romania, while more than 406 organizations have asked for offers and 56 have already signed. Ricci Curbastro said the standard is now viewed internationally as a benchmark because it combines rules, scientific oversight and independent verification rather than self-declaration.

The organization has also expanded beyond wineries and vineyards with modules for nurseries that supply vine cuttings and for labor providers working in vineyards. Equalitas says those additions are meant to extend sustainability controls to parts of the supply chain that directly affect wine production.

For Italian producers, the shift reflects a broader change in how sustainability is measured and sold. In a market where consumers and regulators are asking for evidence, not slogans, certification is becoming part of the business model as much as a public message.