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Italian Wine Leaders Gather in Conegliano for a Congress on Crisis

The Assoenologi meeting will confront falling consumption, trade tensions and shifting tastes in the Prosecco heartland

Thursday, May 21, 2026

Assoenologi will hold its 79th national congress in Conegliano from May 28 to 30, bringing together winemakers, researchers, policymakers and industry executives at a moment of pressure for the Italian wine sector, with falling consumption, trade tensions, changing consumer habits and growing debate over alcohol and health all shaping the agenda.

The meeting will take place in the historic Prosecco zone, between Conegliano and the Santa Lucia di Piave fairgrounds, and will focus on the relationship between wine and young consumers, the role of wine tourism, international markets, climate change, sustainability and scientific innovation. Riccardo Cotarella, the president of Assoenologi, said the industry needed to confront the causes of the current slowdown directly rather than soften the message. He pointed to tariffs, higher retail prices, shifting markets and consumers, and health concerns as factors that must be addressed with clear analysis and practical responses.

The congress opens May 28 at Conegliano’s Teatro Accademia with remarks expected from Christophe Hansen, the European commissioner for agriculture, and Matteo Piantedosi, Italy’s interior minister. Two panel discussions will follow. One will examine how the wine industry can reconnect with younger drinkers, with contributions from Marianna Neri of Casanova di Neri, students involved in the Cannonau project at the

University of Cagliari, Joanna Wołosz, captain of Imoco Volley Conegliano, and Denis Pantini of Nomisma's Agrifood and Wine Monitor. A second panel will look at wine tourism as a mix of territory, culture and new challenges, with speakers including Gianmarco Mazzi, Italy's tourism minister; Marina Montedoro, president of the Association for the Heritage of the Prosecco Hills of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene; Luca Zaia, president of Veneto's regional council; Dario Stefàno of Lumsa University's Center for Wine Tourism and Olive Oil Tourism Studies; and Matteo Zoppas, president of Italy's trade agency.

The day will also include a session on wine and health led by Francesco Montorsi, head of urology at San Raffaele Hospital in Milan. The program is set to close with a conversation with Francesco Lollobrigida, Italy's agriculture minister and Assoenologi's 2026 Personaggio dell'Anno, along with special awards that include recognition for Alessandro Regoli, WineNews' editor.

On May 29, attention will shift to export markets and business management. Denis Pantini will present an overview of major international markets. Renzo Cotarella, chief executive of Marchesi Antinori, will speak about company management in a difficult market environment. René Sorrentino of Ges Sorrentino will discuss Germany, which remains one of the most important markets for Italian wine alongside the United States. The day will also include discussion of digitalization, supply-chain networks and climate change. Michele Faralli of the University of Trento is scheduled to present technical research on how changing climate conditions have altered viticulture over four decades in terms of biology, production and quality. The day will end with a technical tasting featuring Italian traditional-method sparkling wines and Champagne, followed by visits to wineries in Conegliano and Valdobbiadene.

The final day on May 30 will focus on sustainability, future consumption trends and training. Viviana Corich of the University of Padua is scheduled to present research on reducing alcohol levels in wine through fermentation management. Riccardo Velasco, director of Crea Conegliano, will discuss new grape varieties and clones developed through breeding techniques including Tea, fast breeding and hybridization. Another tasting will highlight native grape varieties from the area beyond Prosecco. Lorenzo Furlan of Veneto Agricoltura will then speak about cultivation methods aimed at

improving soil quality.

The congress will also mark 150 years since the founding of Cerletti, Italy’s oldest enology school under the Kingdom of Italy. That tribute will be followed by a roundtable on wine, territories and identity with leaders from the various Prosecco consortia before a tasting devoted to Prosecco and its denominations.