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# Italian Wineries Launch €27 Million Research Drive to Rebuild the Industry

The program backs sustainability and AI projects as producers confront climate stress, rising costs and shifting consumer habits.

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A coalition of nearly 30 Italian wineries has launched a new research program backed by €27 million, most of it from Italy’s National Recovery and Resilience Plan, to fund projects aimed at reshaping the country’s wine sector through sustainability, efficiency and artificial intelligence.

The initiative is being managed by the Wine Research Team, or WRT, a group founded in 2014 at the urging of the Italian winemaker Riccardo Cotarella. The new phase of the program was presented in recent days in Bra, in the Piedmont region, and includes nine projects for wine companies as well as two partnerships with Italian research and academic institutions: the Edmund Mach Foundation in San Michele all'Adige and the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenzo.

The effort brings together wineries from several Italian regions, including Coppo in Piedmont, Di Majo Norante in Molise, Famiglia Cotarella in Lazio, Leone de Castris in Puglia, MonteZovo in Veneto, San Salvatore in Campania and Villa Sandi in Veneto. Organizers said the scale of the investment reflects both the urgency of climate and economic pressures on wine producers and a broader push to modernize one of Italy's most important agricultural industries.

At the presentation, WRT president Vincenzo Tassinari said Italian wine remains a leading part of the national economy and an important ambassador for Italian quality abroad, but he described the current period as one of deep change. He said the projects are focused not only on making production more sustainable but also on improving efficiency, while keeping younger generations engaged with wine.

Tassinari said investment in innovation and research is an investment in the future of the sector. He added that communication and outreach to younger consumers would also be essential if wine is to remain relevant over time.

A central theme of the new program is the use of artificial intelligence across the wine supply chain. That issue was highlighted by Annabella Pascale, chief executive of Tenuta di Artimino in Carmignano, Tuscany, where a pilot project called "WRT Futura" is set to be carried out.

Pascale said many wine businesses already work with forms of artificial intelligence through drones, satellites, monitoring systems and large volumes of data. The problem, she said, is often not a lack of information but a lack of integration. In her view, AI should not be treated as a threat to workers or decision makers but as a tool that helps people make better choices.

She said wineries already hold extensive data on vineyards, cellars, customers and business management. AI systems, she said, could combine those streams and turn them into practical value. She pointed in particular to possible gains in sustainability through tighter control over water use, energy consumption and other processes where waste still exists.

Attilio Scienza, one of Italy’s best-known scholars in viticulture research, also stressed what he called the strategic role of AI for agriculture. He said the discussion should focus on narrow AI systems designed for forecasting rather than broad fears about machines replacing people. In farming and grape growing, he said, prediction is critical because once damage has occurred it cannot be undone.

Scienza argued that Italy’s immediate priority should be building a strong national information infrastructure for wine and agriculture. He said large amounts of data already exist but are often fragmented or poorly organized. As a result, researchers and companies are frequently forced to rely on data gathered in countries such as France and Australia, even though those conditions do not fully match Italy’s own vineyards and climate patterns.

He said Italy needs its own knowledge base so AI tools can be trained on domestic conditions rather than imported assumptions. That point goes to the heart of why organizers say this round of funding matters: not simply as support for isolated technology purchases but as an attempt to create long-term strategic capacity for the entire wine chain.

Michele Antonio Fino, coordinator of the master’s program in Food Culture, Communication & Management at the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenzo, said WRT stands out because it links vineyards, wineries and scientific and technological research. He said that kind of connection is not common because many companies are absorbed by daily operational pressures and have limited room for strategic planning.

Fino described funding from Italy’s recovery plan as a rare chance to generate knowledge and long-range thinking rather than short-term fixes. In his account, the goal is to influence development guidelines for the whole sector and build a future

measured across generations.

The event in Bra also included a tribute to Carlo Petrini, the founder of Slow Food who recently died. Petrini was remembered alongside his sister Chiara Petrini, who received a commemorative plaque in his memory. The choice of Bra carried symbolic weight because it was Petrini’s hometown and a center of his work linking food culture, agriculture and local identity.

In remarks delivered remotely, Cotarella said the wine world needs people who are wise, honest and able to work for the good of the entire sector, qualities he associated with Petrini’s life and legacy.

The new WRT program arrives at a time when European wine producers are facing pressure from rising temperatures, shifting rainfall patterns, higher production costs and changing consumer habits. Organizers presented the €27 million package as a response to those overlapping challenges, with research meant to help wineries adapt while preserving competitiveness.

By combining public recovery funds with private-sector participation and academic partnerships, the project aims to move Italian wine research beyond individual experiments toward shared tools and common standards. The emphasis on AI suggests that organizers see digital forecasting and data management not as separate technical issues but as part of how vineyards will respond to climate stress, resource constraints and market change in the years ahead.