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Italian Nursery Groups Urge Policymakers to Fund Vineyard Replanting Instead of Vine Removals

They say reconversion with certified plant material would better prepare growers for weaker demand, drought, heat and disease pressure

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Italy’s grapevine nursery industry is urging policymakers to spend public money on rebuilding vineyards rather than paying growers to pull them out, arguing that Italian wine production should adapt to weaker demand and climate pressure through

replanting, new plant material and faster innovation.

The proposal was laid out on Thursday, November 12, in a report published by Unione Italiana Vini, which said two nursery groups, Miva and the Associazione Vivaisti Viticoli Friuli Venezia Giulia, want available resources directed toward vineyard restructuring and reconversion instead of incentives for vine removals.

The groups argue that the difficulties facing Italian wine cannot be addressed only by reducing planted area. Their position is that vineyards need to be redesigned so they can better match changes in consumer demand, higher weather risk and long-term climate shifts. That would mean investing in varieties, clones and rootstocks seen as more suitable for future growing conditions, while also giving greater weight to certified vines, traceability, plant health guarantees and the research that takes place before a vineyard is planted.

The debate comes at a sensitive time for Italy’s wine industry, which has been dealing with weaker consumption in some markets, shifting export conditions and the growing cost of adapting vineyards to drought, heat and disease pressure. A policy choice between subsidizing removals and subsidizing reconversion could shape not only future grape supply, but also demand for nursery stock, the pace of varietal renewal and the ability of growers to respond to changing market needs. For the broader beverage sector, that could eventually affect the volume and mix of wines brought to market, as well as investment decisions across the supply chain.

Unione Italiana Vini said the two associations together represent nearly all of Italy’s grapevine nursery sector. In comments cited in the report, Miva President Dino Scanavino and Yuri Zambon, director of VCR for the Friuli Venezia Giulia nursery association, said the country should move beyond simply replacing old vineyards with similar ones and instead steer investment toward new planting choices that can improve resilience and quality over the coming decades.

Their argument centers on the idea that nursery production is not just a support activity but a strategic part of the wine industry’s adjustment. By pushing for certified vine material and stronger phytosanitary controls, the associations are effectively linking public support to the quality and health status of new vineyards. They also frame

nursery innovation as part of a broader response to climate change, since rootstocks and grape varieties can influence water use, disease resistance, ripening patterns and crop consistency.

The same report also highlighted a separate but related proposal from nurseryman Marco Vacchetti to simplify how wine grape varieties are classified in Italy. The current system can slow the introduction of new or previously excluded plant material because cultivation rules and denomination rules are closely tied together. Vacchetti's proposal would separate those two issues.

Under the approach described by Unione Italiana Vini, a grape variety could be grown if it is listed in the national register, while any decision on whether that variety can be used in DOC, DOCG or IGT wines would remain in the hands of territorial authorities that regulate appellations. In practice, that would mean a variety could be planted and studied more easily without automatically gaining access to protected denominations.

Supporters of the change say it would allow faster field testing of resistant varieties and local grapes that are currently shut out of cultivation. It would also avoid repeating trials that have already been recognized elsewhere and would help produce more agronomic and winemaking data under real vineyard conditions. The idea is not to weaken denomination rules, according to the report, but to make experimentation easier while keeping local control over appellation standards.

That distinction matters in Italy, where the wine sector is built on both strict geographic identity and a large stock of local varieties. Any attempt to update the varietal system touches on a long-running tension between preserving traditional rules and allowing producers to react more quickly to new disease risks, new climate conditions and different consumer preferences. A more flexible cultivation framework could help growers test alternatives without immediately changing the composition of protected wines.

The nursery groups' proposals suggest a broader strategy for managing the current wine downturn. Rather than cutting vineyard area first and addressing competitiveness later, they are calling for a public policy that treats replanting as an industrial and environmental upgrade. In their view, money spent on reconversion could improve

vineyard performance and product positioning at the same time, while removals would shrink capacity without necessarily solving the underlying problem of how and what to produce.

Whether that view gains support will depend on how Italian and European policymakers decide to balance supply control with investment aid. But the intervention from Miva and the Friuli Venezia Giulia nursery association makes clear that one part of the industry wants the response to the current wine crisis to focus less on reducing hectares and more on redesigning the vineyards that remain.