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Italy’s wine sector weighs two separate routes to lower-alcohol products

One route removes alcohol after fermentation, but wines with naturally lower levels remain in the legal wine category

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Producers, researchers and lawyers at a workshop on Nov. 17 at SIMEI in Fiera Milano Rho drew a clear line between two different routes to no- and low-alcohol wine, as Italy’s wine sector weighs how to answer growing interest in lighter products without

confusing legal categories or production methods.

The event, organized by Millevigne, focused on what speakers described as two separate models. One is dealcoholization in the winery, where alcohol is removed from wine after production. The other is the production of wines that begin with a naturally lower alcohol level because of choices made in the vineyard and during winemaking. Alessandra Biondi Bartolini, Millevigne’s scientific director, said those products belong to a part of the wine business that requires planning on several fronts, including market knowledge, consumer expectations, regulation and technical choices.

That distinction could shape investment decisions across the beverage industry, especially for wine companies considering whether to enter low-alcohol segments. The technical path, the legal limits and the final labeling rules are not the same, which means vineyard and winery spending may depend on whether a producer wants to reduce alcohol naturally or remove it after fermentation.

Citing IWSR data, Lorenzo Biscontin, chief executive of Cantina Italia.ai and a business and marketing consultant, said the global market for no- and low-alcohol wine totals 688,000 hectoliters, with no-alcohol wine making up the larger share. He said the United States accounted for 38% of total consumption in 2023, while the United Kingdom and Germany lead the category in Europe. Canada and Japan, he said, are posting some of the fastest annual growth rates, approaching 30% in the no-alcohol segment.

Biscontin said the market still faces three main obstacles: many consumers prefer full-strength products, no- and low-alcohol wine competes with a wide range of other drinks, and taste remains a weak point in the eyes of many buyers. He pointed to Stella Rosa as an example of an international brand that has tried to address that issue with a “taste-first” approach based on transparency, flavor innovation, positioning the product as a real alternative to wine, and keeping quality consistent.

On the legal side, Filippo Moreschi, a lawyer in Mantua and vice president of the Union of Vine and Wine Jurists, outlined the European and Italian rules now governing the category. He referred to European Union Regulation 2117/2021, Italian ministerial decrees issued in 2024 and 2025, and Regulation 471/2026, known as the Wine

Package. He said Italy still prohibits dealcoholization for wines with geographic indications, including DOP and IGP wines.

Moreschi also said labeling rules will change from Sept. 19, 2027. Current descriptions such as “dealcoholized” and “partially dealcoholized” will be replaced by “Zero alcohol,” or “0.0%” when the alcoholic strength does not exceed 0.05% by volume, and “Reduced alcohol content” for products above 0.5% by volume. Those labels will also have to carry the wording “obtained by dealcoholization.”

He said the legal path is different for wines with naturally low alcohol. If producers lower alcohol through agronomic and winemaking techniques without dealcoholization, the product remains fully within the legal wine category under EU Regulation 1308/2013. That route can also be used for wines with geographic indications, he said, if the relevant production rules are amended.

The vineyard side of that strategy was addressed by Tommaso Frioni of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Piacenza. Frioni said the main technical goal is to limit sugar accumulation in grapes without damaging aromatic balance or acidity. Among the methods he cited were severe topping before veraison and the use of natural antitranspirants in the cluster zone. He said those trials point toward a different vineyard model designed specifically for lower-alcohol wines, with attention not only to environmental sustainability but also to economic viability for growers.

Antonella Bosso of CREA’s Viticulture and Enology Research Center in Asti, who is also Italy’s delegate to the International Organisation of Vine and Wine, reviewed the cellar technologies now allowed for dealcoholization. She said the available tools include vacuum evaporation and vacuum distillation, as well as membrane-based systems such as reverse osmosis and osmotic distillation. Bosso said each method brings trade-offs that producers will have to weigh in terms of quality, cost and suitability for different wine styles.

Bosso also presented early work from DEVIN0, a cross-border project under the Interreg VI-A Italy-France ALCOTRA 2021-2027 program. The project is testing dealcoholization technologies on Italian grape varieties including Barbera, Dolcetto, Cortese, Moscato Bianco and Brachetto, as well as French varieties including Grenache, Syrah,

Vermentino and Cinsault.

The discussion at SIMEI showed that the push toward lighter wine in Italy is no longer limited to marketing language. It is moving into law, vineyard management and cellar engineering, with producers being asked to decide not only what sort of product they want to sell, but also which regulatory framework and production model they are willing to follow.