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Italian wine industry faces uncertainty as US tariff dispute remains unresolved

Producers accelerate shipments and adjust strategies while legal appeals and trade negotiations create instability in key export market

Thursday, June 12, 2025



Italian wine producers are facing a period of deep uncertainty as the threat of new tariffs on exports to the United States continues to loom. The U.S. is Italy’s largest export market for wine, and any increase in tariffs could have significant consequences for both Italian producers and American consumers. The situation remains unresolved after a recent legal setback for the Trump administration’s proposed tariffs, which were challenged in court and found to be contrary to law by a three-judge panel at the International Court of Trade on May 28, 2025. The White House has appealed the decision, leaving the issue unsettled as negotiations continue in Paris.

Many Italian wineries have taken preemptive action, shipping large quantities of wine to the U.S. before any new tariffs could be enforced. Bernardino Sani, CEO of Argiano in Montalcino, confirmed that his company shipped all its Brunello 2020 and much of its other wines early in the year. Gaia Gaja of the renowned Barbaresco producer Gaja said they also shipped what they could between November and February to avoid potential taxation. She noted that while their U.S. business remains stable for now, any move to raise tariffs as high as 50 percent would force them to reconsider their strategy.

Other producers are adopting a wait-and-see approach. Piero Mastroberardino of Mastroberardino in Campania reported no significant impact so far and expressed confidence in continued growth in the U.S. market. Antonio Capaldo, CEO of Feudi di San Gregorio, said his company is working with U.S. partners to absorb costs unless tariffs reach unsustainable levels.

Some wineries are sharing the burden with their importers to minimize price increases for American consumers. Aldo Vacca, general manager at Produttori del Barbaresco, said this approach should keep effects on U.S. consumers minor, emphasizing the importance of maintaining their presence in their main export market.

However, not all producers are able to absorb or share these costs easily. Chiara Ciavolich from Abruzzo described how new tariffs would add to an already difficult situation after two years of severe crop losses due to disease and heat. Christoph Künzli of Le Piane in Alto Piemonte said he may have to reduce production of premium wines and focus more on basic wines if tariffs rise above 20 percent.

For some, the uncertainty itself is the biggest challenge. Giovanni Negro, president of the Roero consorzio in Piedmont, said that while a 10 percent tariff can be managed by sharing costs with importers, it is impossible to plan effectively without knowing what will happen next.

The broader context for Italian wine producers is also challenging. Raffaelle Boscaini of Masi in Veneto pointed out that tariffs are just one part of a “perfect storm” affecting the global wine industry, which also faces geopolitical tensions, changing attitudes toward alcohol consumption, economic pressures, and climate change impacts.

Producers like Alessandro Campatelli in Chianti Classico say that uncertainty over tariffs makes it difficult even to negotiate with importers or plan pricing strategies. Antonio Rallo of Donnafugata in Sicily said his company is preparing for different scenarios and working closely with importers to manage costs if tariffs increase.

Some wineries are looking at long-term solutions such as diversifying export markets or even establishing their own import companies in the U.S., as Sabrina Tedeschi’s Valpolicella/Amarone estate has done. She noted that diversification is crucial during uncertain times.

Despite these challenges, many Italian producers remain committed to the U.S. market but are also exploring ways to reduce reliance on any single country by expanding into other regions worldwide. The ongoing uncertainty has forced many to rethink their strategies and prepare for a range of possible outcomes as trade talks continue and legal appeals work through the courts.

As Italian winemakers wait for clarity on future tariffs, they continue to adapt their business models and logistics while hoping for a resolution that will allow them to maintain strong ties with American consumers without significant disruption or price increases. The coming months will be critical as both governments work toward an agreement that could shape the future of transatlantic wine trade.