



## **ASSOVINI SICILIA, THE ASSOCIATION THAT'S ALL ABOUT BUSINESS**

*Promoting high-quality wine from Sicily as if it were a big company, with all that entails in terms of goals, strategy and specific know-how: that's the secret of the association which, today, groups together some 70 of the Region's main wine-producing firms, generating 80% of the value of Sicilian wine in bottle*

To inform about a real “viticultural continent”, Sicily, with the voice of the companies that make it great: that is the mission of Assovini Sicilia, which groups together many of the most famous wine producers who promote the name of Sicily around the world. Founded in 1998 and based on an idea of three of the leading players among the winemakers of the island, Diego Planeta (Planeta Estates), Giacomo Rallo (Tenuta di Donnafugata) and Lucio Tasca d'Almerita (Conte Tasca d'Almerita), the association today numbers some 70 members, who have three elements in common: total control over the whole wine production process, from the vine to the bottle; production of high-quality wine in bottle; and a global vision of the market.

United by a shared vision of quality and convinced of the importance of promoting their Region, members both large and small speak to each other on an equal footing and with a common objective: to make Sicily into one of the “classic” areas of the wine world, without neglecting to safeguard the environment, preserve their roots and pass on their extraordinary heritage to future generations. An important reward for this way of working together came at the end of 2014 with the granting by UNESCO of World Heritage status to the head-trained bush vines of Pantelleria.

### **OUR MISSION**

When it was founded, almost twenty years ago, the goal of Assovini Sicilia was that of carrying out the activities of a sort of syndicate, spurring on the institutions and the producers to concentrate on quality viticulture rather than the quantity-related type that – for years – had created value that was incapable of being reinvested in the island. In the old days in fact, there was a huge trade in bulk wine or grapes, which were sold to other Regions. Obviously, prestigious producers did exist, but the marketplace tended to recognize individual brands rather than a shared value.

Through its activities, Assovini Sicilia has contributed towards creating an awareness that pools together entrepreneurs with the same idea of quality, convinced of the uniqueness of their particular area and of their products. Thanks to its teamwork, Assovini has succeeded in forming infrastructures for the sector, entering into discussions with the institutions, adopting a policy of quality throughout the island and creating a common language. Even today, every member contributes towards creating value; small or medium-sized companies, which represent the majority of its members, have access to resources and promotional tools that would otherwise be unobtainable; the large ones make Sicily's name known around the world, availing themselves, too, of the considerable work that has been done on preserving the genetic and environmental heritage and on promoting typical local characteristics.

In recent years, as well as its institutional activity, Assovini has added that of promotion and communication, with the result that it now manages the applications for CMO funding on behalf of



all its members. Its most important event is undoubtedly “Sicilia en Primeur”, a preview tasting of the latest vintage for the Italian and foreign trade press, as well as opinion-leading and lifestyle publications. This event was created with the aim of revealing the manifold aspects of Sicilian winemaking and of the Region’s wine zones, offering the chance to taste in a single place wines as diverse as Cerasuolo di Vittoria, the Region’s only D.O.C.G., Nerello Mascalese from Etna, Nero d’Avola from Noto, Grillo from Marsala, and a great many more. The event does not only involve tastings and meetings with the producers, but also offers the opportunity to get to know a wide variety of places and landscapes, as well as of artistic, vinous and gastronomic heritages, thanks to “Sicilia en Primeur”’s itinerant formula and the wine tours on offer. In 2015 “Sicilia en Primeur” will be held in Taormina.

### **UNITY IN DIVERSITY**

There doesn’t exist just one Sicily, but rather many expressions of a veritable “wine-producing continent”. On this island one’s gaze can stray from Pantelleria, where the hot wind from Africa blows over the terraced vineyards, to the often snow-covered slopes of Etna, which has a mountain climate and altitudes that reach up to 1,000 metres above sea level. Then there is the South East, for example at Noto or Vittoria, where the countryside is charismatic beyond belief, or Erice, with its well-ventilated hillsides and soils of volcanic origin. It is no accident that Sicily is the only Region of Italy where the harvest lasts a whole 4 months, from the end of July to the very last days of October.

Just as the climates are different, so are the soils varied: they go from volcanic ones to those of mixed composition and limestone-based ones. Thanks to the zoning operation, promoted by Assovini Sicilia and carried out by the Region of Sicily, these variations now contribute towards creating a veritable mosaic of *terroirs*, in which each wine offers its own individual character.

### **BIODIVERSITY**

Sicily contains a great wealth of different wines, as is revealed by the fact that it has no less than 22 D.O.C.s and 1 D.O.C.G.. This variety also stems from a great deal of varietal biodiversity, as the figures show; on average, every producer grows and makes wine from 9 different cultivars, from international to indigenous ones. The latter represent the real patrimony of the Region, which is still – to a great extent - unexplored. For this reason, around 38% of the members of Assovini Sicilia carries out experimentation in the vineyard. The value of the indigenous varieties was confirmed a few months ago by UNESCO, which awarded the status of World Heritage to the agricultural practice of head-training bush vines of the Zibibbo cultivar on the island of Pantelleria: an accolade that rewards heroic viticulture and the island’s iconic Passito wine. There is also a considerable effort to recuperate “relic” varieties, which are being studied in detail by the Region of Sicily: vines such as Perricone, Nocera, Inzolia Nera and Zibibbo Nero.

The interest in the local heritage is not limited to the vineyard, though. It is also evident in the winery: indeed, no less than 69% of the members use indigenous yeasts in vinification.

### **RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT**

Apart from its value within the economy, viticulture plays an important role in protecting the environment from erosion and from overbuilding. One only has to consider the heroic viticulture of Etna or of the island of Pantelleria, where the terraced vineyards, in which more than 1000 hours of manual labour per hectare are necessary each year, represent an important means for

avoiding abandoning excellent vine-growing land that is constitutionally fragile. Indeed, at the end of 2014, on the volcanic island of Pantelleria, UNESCO recognized head-training of the local bush vines as a creative and sustainable agricultural practice, thanks to the manual cultivation methods used and the use of terraces supported by walls made from local stones. And if on the one hand the vineyards protect the landscape and the soil, on the other viticulture is becoming increasingly environment-friendly, thanks to the adoption of ever “greener” cultivation practices, aided partly by the extremely favourable climate. Sicily is in fact the Italian Region with the largest number of hectares of vineyards that are farmed organically and with one of the highest percentages of use of “integrated and guided” pest control, accounting for some 83 % of the area under vine. These last two methods allow the vine-growers to intervene only in the case of need, focusing mainly on prevention and reducing spraying, thus concentrating, whenever possible, on natural solutions.

Apart from this attention to the vineyards, many producers make other wise choices in running their businesses: 89% of the members opt for systems for producing “clean” energy, 64 % adopt solutions for saving energy and 50% take steps to reduce waste. Most part of the members have environmental certification, but there are also plenty of voluntary projects for improving environmental sustainability. At a Regional level, the “SOSStain” project has been favoured, combined with national protocols such as Tergeo and Magis, to which many producers also adhere.

## **TOURISM**

In recent years tourism in Sicily has experienced notable growth. Its high-quality wines have certainly helped to increase the appeal of the Region but also to make it better known – even abroad – for its many attractions, its history and the character of the people that make it really special. This is also thanks to the producers who, for much of the year, travel around the globe promoting the “Sicily” brand. This close link between wine and tourism has led the members of Assovini Sicilia to invest in hospitality, creating infrastructures, itineraries and events. No less than 93 % of the members have dedicated spaces for visitors and 40% can offer accommodation, whilst 68 % can provide restaurant services. And if just a few years ago the number of wine tourists visiting wineries was no more than 500 people, today the average figure per producer is around 3700, with 55% of Italians and 45% of foreigners. This is also due to local initiatives such as “Cantine Aperte” or “Calici di Stelle”, in which 59 % of the members take part.

## **THE MARKET**

One of the requirements for a producer to enter into the club of Assovini Sicilia is that it markets its products both in Italy and abroad. This latter aspect has been the source of great satisfaction, because some of our members are present in no less than 110 markets, even though the average is 26 countries. These are quite significant numbers, if one considers that export now represents 57% of sales. So, apart from traditional markets such as U.S.A., Germany, Switzerland, Japan, one now finds emerging ones like Brazil, China and Korea.

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