

Rita d'Errico (University of Roma Tre), Silvia A. Conca Messina (University of Milan)

Food safety in Italian table olive oil from the 19th century to today

Italian food products have a strong presence on the world market, particularly items such as wine, pasta, cheese and tomato sauce. Italian extra virgin olive oil has also become very important. Over the past two centuries, Italy has transformed itself from an exporter of low quality oil to a major global producer of high quality olive oil, as the industry has embraced innovation and efficiency to improve productivity and ensure the safety and quality of olive oil. From implementing legislative changes to modernising production processes, the focus on food safety has been essential, with measures introduced to prevent contamination, improve storage practices and implement rigorous quality control procedures. The acquisition of new knowledge in the context of the second industrial revolution and its dissemination through cooperation and associations within the sector has been a key factor in this process. These efforts have not only improved the overall quality of Italian olive oil, but also increased consumer confidence in its safety. Italy is now the world's leading importer and consumer of olive oil and the second largest exporter after Spain.

This paper will analyse the evolution of Italian olive oil production using a range of archival materials (such as documents from the General Directorate of Health at the Central State Archives) and printed sources, including trade journals, ministerial reports and parliamentary debates. Specifically, the study will focus on the impact of legislative changes and scientific, technological and organisational developments that have improved the quality of olive oil, both in terms of palatability and food safety, compared to previous eras. It will also examine the role of knowledge and its circulation through cooperation and associations.