



Instituto Universitario de Investigación Mixto  
Agroalimentario de Aragón



Universidad  
Zaragoza



Università di Scienze  
Gastronomiche di Pollenzo  
University of Gastronomic Sciences of Pollenzo

# Food, Culture, and Society: Consumer Trust in Food Origin in Times of Crisis

Including results from PRIN 2020 Research  
“About the Origin. Identity, Authenticity and Contradictions of Food”  
(Prot. no. 2020K5XAK9)

Maria Giovanna Onorati

*University of Gastronomic Sciences of Pollenzo, Italy*

***Universidad de Zaragoza, Facultad de Veterinaria, Sala de Grados,  
20/01/2026***

# Conceptual Framework

# Premise:

## Food Origin as a Marker of Food as a Cultural Object

✓ Food origin is a symbolic construct that turns food into a cultural product — *grown, sourced, prepared, tested, and tasted* — rather than an item simply found in nature — *predated* (Montanari, 2015).

✓ Food origin is a cultural space where socially relevant expectations, representations, and values converge, shaping *how food is understood, trusted, and legitimized*





# For the Sociologist: Food Origin is a matter of Trust and Identity



## TRUST AND KNOWLEDGE

- Trust is crucial for societal development (Durkheim, 1893). Trust means “relying on the truth of the statement of a probable outcome of a phenomenon, even in the absence of complete information” (Giddens, 1990) → belief
- Trust is a mix of **knowing** and **ignoring** (Simmel, 1908), necessary to reduce the complexity in societies. When trust can no longer absorb uncertainty, it demands “amplified” & “simplified” symbols, and “retreats into unquestionable evocations” (Luhmann, 2002).

## FOOD TRUST AND IDENTITY

- For **omnivores**, identifying food as **appropriate** and **safe** is central to identity (Fischler, 1988).
- The **omnivore's paradox** shapes taste (Warde, 1997) as a **tension** between **neophilia** (being programmed for variety, desire for exploration and novelty) and **neophobia** (fear of the unknown, resistance to change).

## FOOD CULTURE DIGITIZATION

- **Digital food culture** (Lupton & Feldman, 2020) favours **amateurization** of gastronomic standards, with growing **emphasis** on elusive categories like “**authentic**” (Rousseau, 2012), especially when combined with “**sustainable**” (Kobez, 2020), and contradictory values.



# FOOD PRACTICES, TRUST EVOLUTION, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

*From Exploration, to Information, to Reassurance*

## ANOMIC NEOPHILIA → DIVERSIFICATION & DE-TRADITIONALIZATION →

From de-regulated neophilia toward codified forms of typical. Origin as credence quality: a cognitive shortcut to manage diversity and differentiate taste.



## ORIGIN → FROM CREDIBILITY TO SECURITY

Food crises shift trust from credible information to risk protection. Origin labels act as fast heuristics within the quality–safety policy nexus.

## DIGITAL AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION, COMMUNALISATION & RETRO-INNOVATION

Digital platforms amplify affective polarization and fragment practices into communities and self-regulated, «heroic» practices. Retro-innovation (Stuiver, 2006): advanced technologies combined with returns to nature and tradition (e.g., agroecology) as adaptive strategies to rebuild trust, and strengthen networks (e.g., AFNs).

## FATALISTIC CONSUMPTION & RE- TRADITIONALISATION

Prolonged uncertainty, consumption becomes fatalistic: risk is perceived as an unescapable destiny. Trust turns essentialist (our/other's), dogmatic (authentic/fake), and defensive (safe/risky); Typicality turns into authenticity and national belonging. Neophobia, re-traditionalization

# Scenario Data

Origin, Authenticity, Identity

Cultural, political, economic implications



# Food Origin as a Political Rhetoric

## Gastronationalism “waving the flag in the plate” (DeSoucey, 2010)

“A cultural and social blend of culinary traditions, the element is associated with the use of raw materials and artisanal food preparation techniques. It is a communal activity that emphasizes **intimacy** with food, respect for ingredients, and **shared** moments **around the table**. The practice is rooted in anti-waste recipes and the transmission of flavours, skills and memories across generations. It is a means of **connecting** with family and the community, whether at home, in schools, or through festivals, ceremonies and **social gatherings**”. (UNESCO, 2025)



COLDIRETTI PROPOSES A LAW TO BAN THE PRODUCTION, USE AND COMMERCIALIZATION OF SYNTHETIC FOOD

YOU TOO, SIGN!

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?

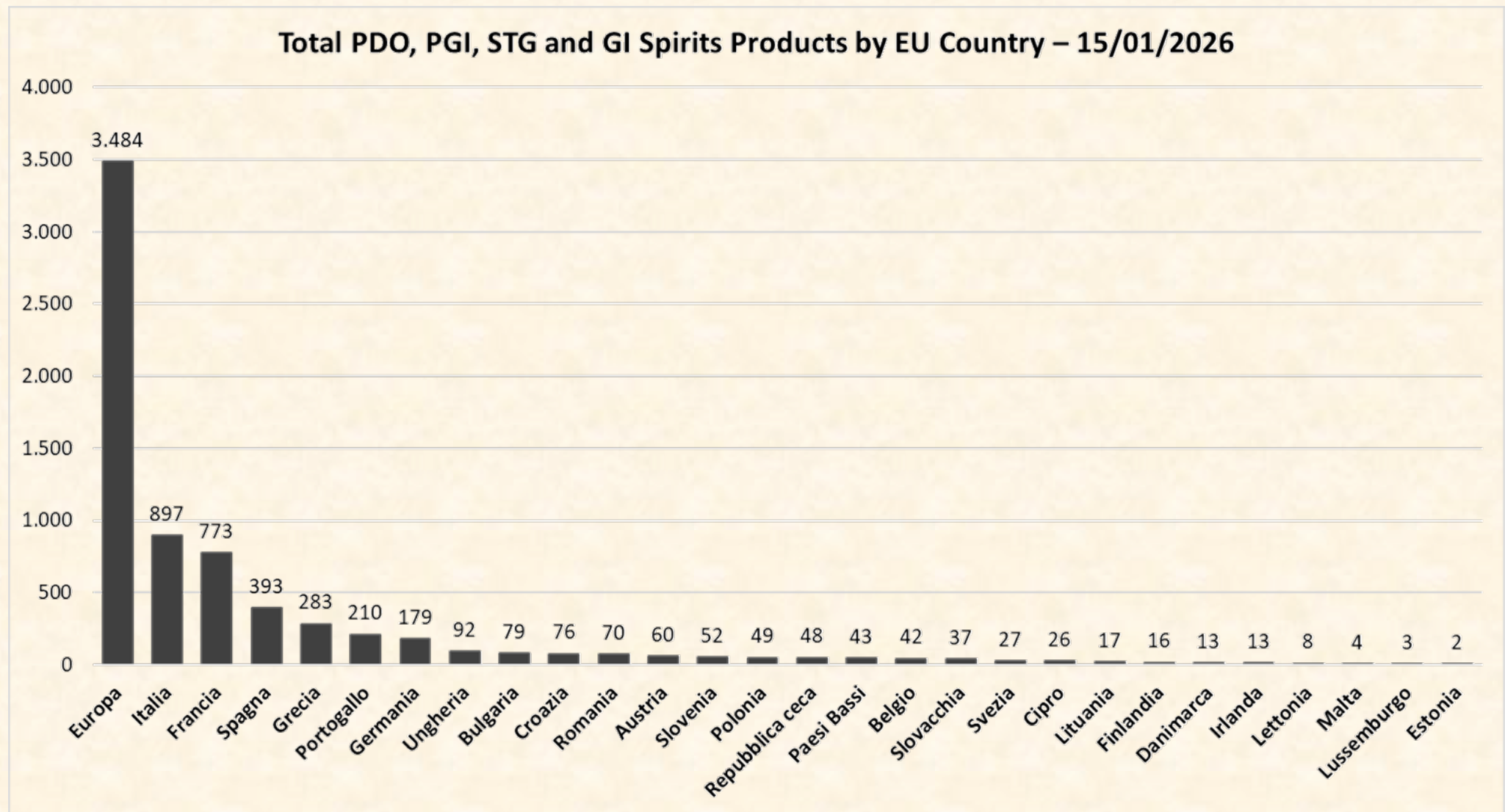
NATURAL FOOD	VS	SYNTHETIC FOOD
<p><b>YES TO NATURAL FOOD</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ IT IS MADE BY PEOPLE FOR PEOPLE BY USING GOOD TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION</li> <li>✓ IT PRESERVES THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE EXTRAORDINARY RURAL LANDSCAPE</li> <li>✓ IT COMBINES TASTE, HEALTH, IDENTITY, AND HISTORY</li> <li>✓ THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET IS A LIFESTYLE AND UNESCO HERITAGE OF HUMANITY</li> <li>✓ IT IS THE PRIMARY VEHICLE OF PROXIMITY THAT CREATES A BOND WITH THE TERRITORY AND SOCIAL COHESION</li> <li>✓ IT SUPPORTS BIODIVERSITY AND THE VALORIZATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES</li> </ul>	<p><b>NO TO SYNTHETIC FOOD</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ IT IS PRODUCED IN A BIOREACTOR FROM ROGUE CELLS</li> <li>✗ IT IS HARMFUL TO THE ENVIRONMENT, CONSUMES MORE ENERGY AND POLLUTES MORE</li> <li>✗ IT IS RISKY FOR HUMAN HEALTH</li> <li>✗ IT LIMITS CONSUMER FREEDOM AND STANDARDIZES FOOD CHOICES</li> <li>✗ IT FAVORS THE INTERESTS OF A FEW WHO WANT TO MONOPOLIZE THE WORLD'S FOOD SUPPLY</li> <li>✗ IT BREAKS THE EXTRAORDINARY BOND THAT UNITES FOOD AND NATURE</li> </ul>	

Logos: COLDIRETTI, FILIERA ITALIA, COLDIRETTI, COLDIRETTI





# Economic Impact of the GI Economy in EU-27 and in Italy



- Geographical Indications (GIs) represent a €90 billion economy in the EU-27, encompassing about 4,000 certified products. This shows their strategic importance within the EU economy
- Italy emerges as the leading country by number of GI products, with 897 certified food and wine items, followed by France and Spain.
- This leadership highlights the central role of GIs in Italy's agri-food business (19% of Italian GDP) and the familiarity of Italian consumers with these logos.



# Do you know the difference between a PDO and a PGI?



145,00€



## key differences:

- Origin of the grapes
- Time of ageing
- Price



## key commonalities:

- Regulated by a *disciplinare*
- Embedded in a tradition
- Territory reputation



2,50€

- Grapes:** 100% local, autochthonous regional varieties
- Process:** Only cooked must, no additives
- Ageing:** ≥ 12 years in wooden barrels
- Logic:** Brands *territorial uniqueness* (provenance, technique, know-how)

- Grapes:** Sourced across Italy, processed in Modena
- Process:** Wine vinegar + must; controlled caramel allowed
- Ageing:** ≥ 60 days
- Logic:** Capitalizes on *territorial reputation*

# Do you know the difference between a PDO and a PGI?



## DOP – Protected Designation of Origin

*Every part of the production (including raw materials), processing and preparation process must take place in the specific delimited region. The strongest links with the geographic area.*



## IGP – Protected Geographical Indication

*At least one of the stages of production, processing or preparation must take place in the area. The relationship with the specific geographic region is in the name, evoking a particular quality, reputation or other characteristic is essentially attributable to its geographical origin*



## STG – Traditional Speciality Guaranteed

*The connection with the geographic area is in the “specific character” of a preparation method and its raw materials, production method or processing must be “traditional” and historical (min. 30 years).*





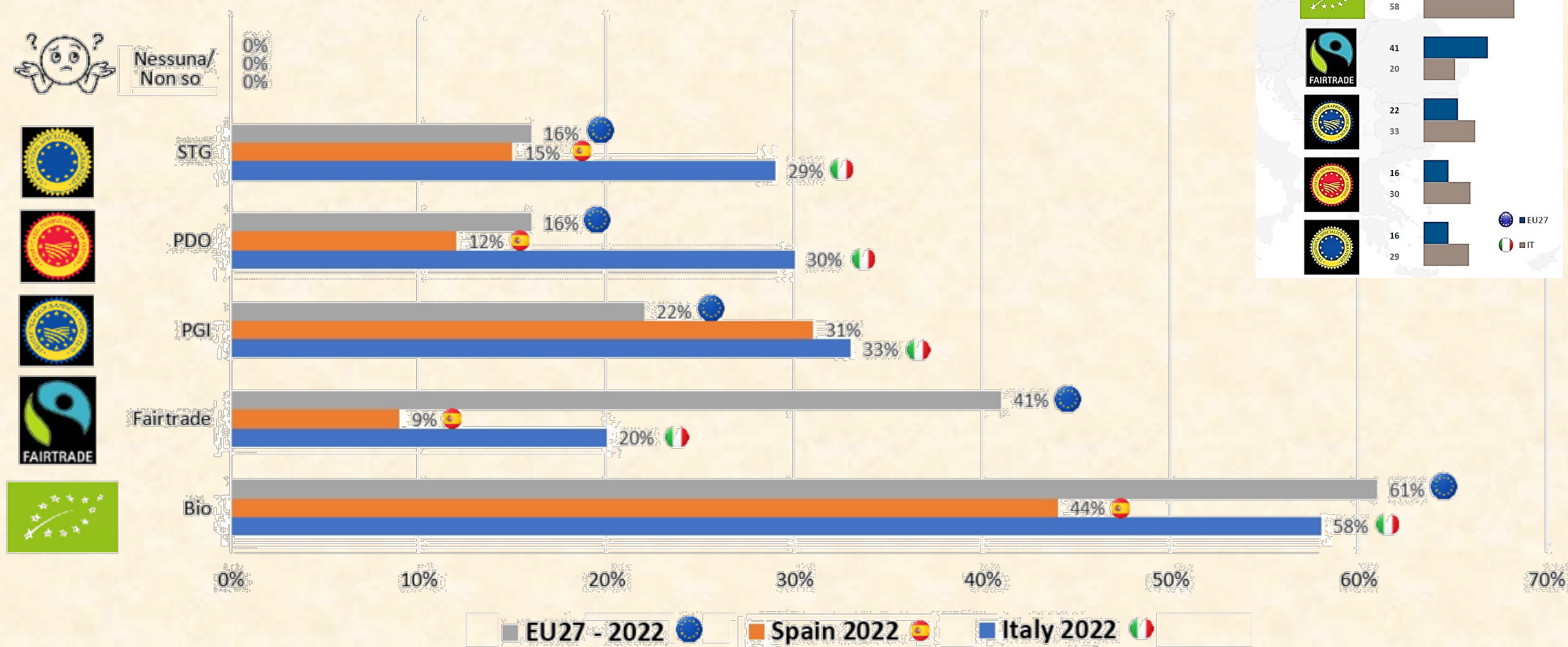
*Where does the raw material one of the popular Italian PGI Bresaola della Valtellina come from?*





# WHAT WAS CONSUMER AWARENESS OF EU IG/Quality schemes labels in Italy, Spain, and EU-27 in 2022 ('New Normality')?

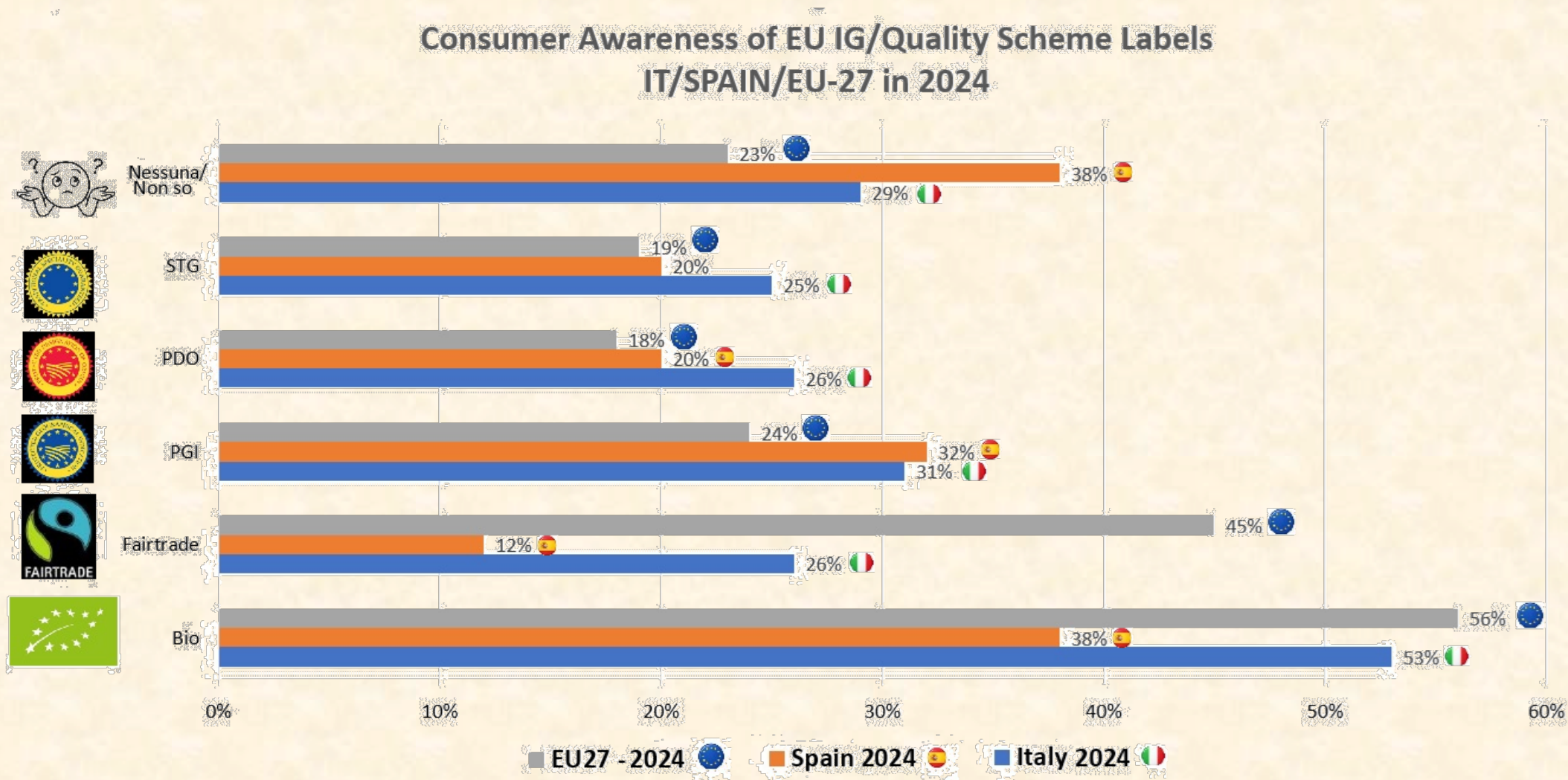
## Consumer Awareness of EU IG/Quality Scheme Labels IT/SPAIN/EU-27 in 2022



Source: Eurobarometer - Europeans, Agriculture and the CAP - 2022 – <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2665>



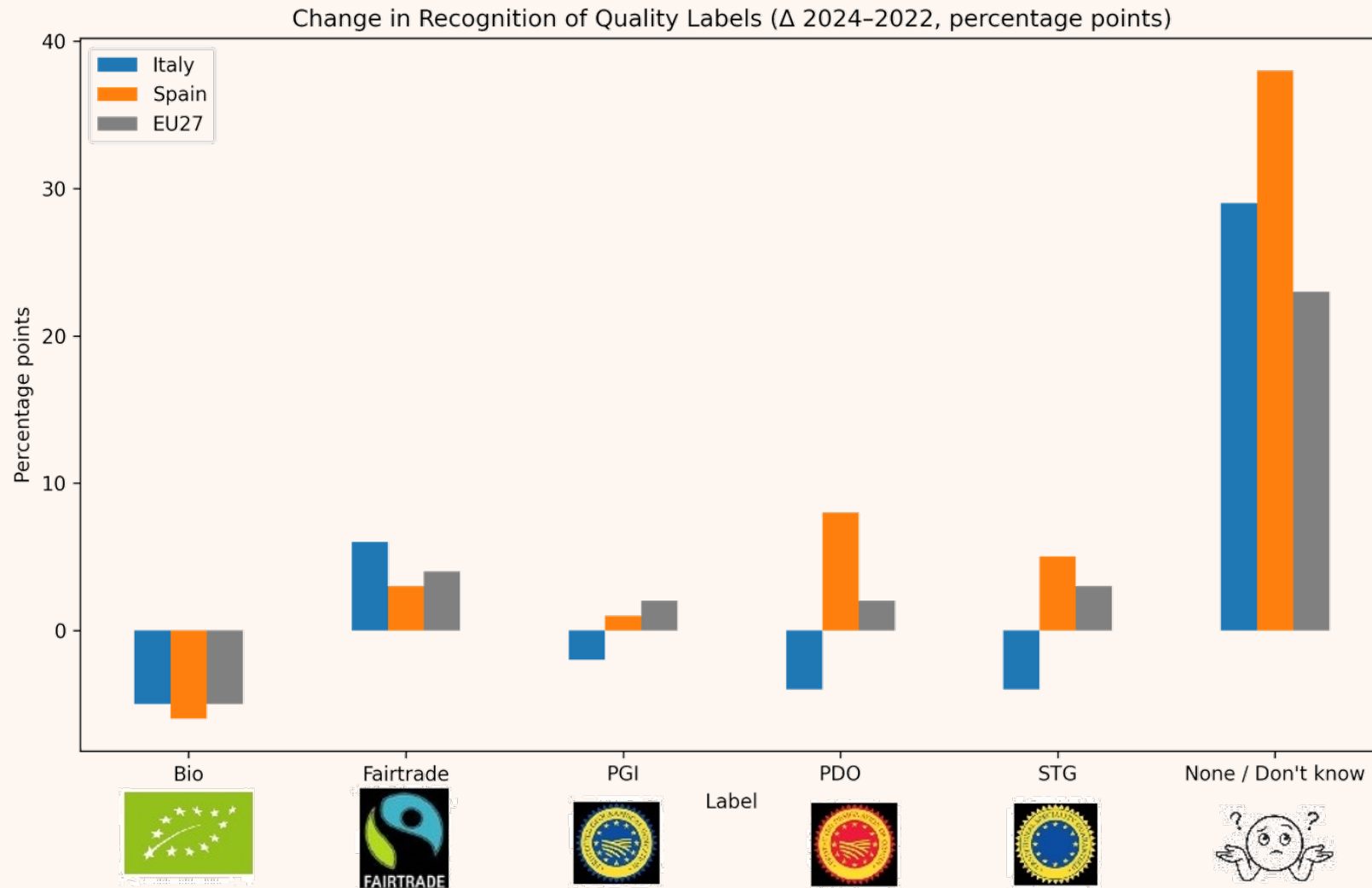
# WHAT WAS CONSUMER AWARENESS OF EU IG/Quality schemes labels in Italy, Spain, and EU-27 in 2024 ('De-globalizing Policrisis')?



Source: Eurobarometer - Europeans, Agriculture and the CAP - 2024 – <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3226>

Text

# WHAT HAS CHANGED IN CONSUMER AWARENESS IN THESE TWO YEARS according to Eurobarometer?



- Structural decline of Bio label recognition, especially in Spain and Italy, more pronounced than at the EU27 level.
- Sharp increase in “None/Don't know” responses, particularly in Spain and Italy.
- Fairtrade recognition increases notably in Italy, signalling heightened ethical sensitivity.
- GIs, especially PDO and STG labels show growing national divergences, with a strong increase in Spain, a slight decline in Italy, and an overall modest growth at the EU27 level.
- PGI remain overall unchanged: consumer trade-off between *transparency*, *sustainability*, and *affordability*

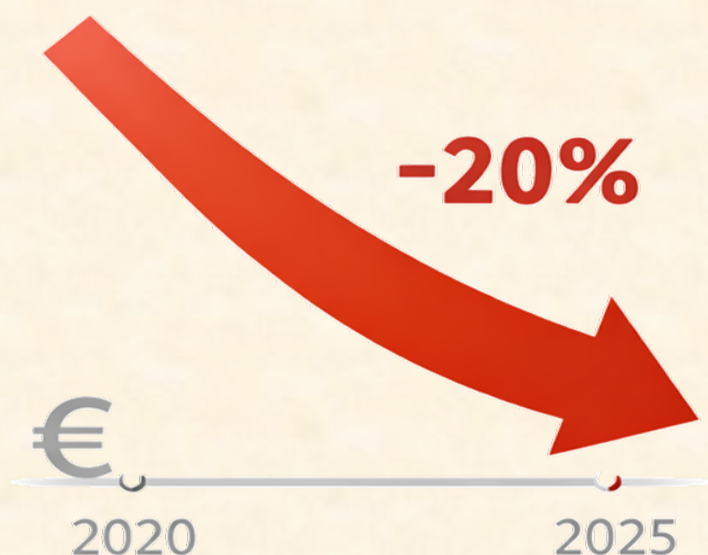


# Less and Less Fruit and Vegetables on the Italian Table

In Italy, between 2024 and 2023, fruit and vegetable volumes have declined (–4.6%), while consumer expenditure has increased (+6.2%), driven by food price inflation.

<i>Fruit and Vegetable Sales Trends in Italy [Var. 2024 vs.2023] Year ending April*</i>			
	<i>Total Fruit &amp; Vegetables</i>	<i>Fruit</i>	<i>Vegetables</i>
<b>Volume</b> sales 2024/2023 (% annual change*, Total GDO)	–4.6%	–7.0%	–2.7%
<b>Value</b> sales 2024/2023 (% annual change*, Total GDO)	+6.2%	+3.9%	+7.6%

**Source:** Rapporto COOP- Nielsen, 2024, <https://italiani.coop/consumi-ortofrutta-italiani/>



**Purchase Power ( ■ ■ )**



**Food Shopping Prices**  
(Dec 2025)

# Italian Food Consumption by Origin label 2019-2025

## BOOM OF EVOCATIVE ITALIANITY

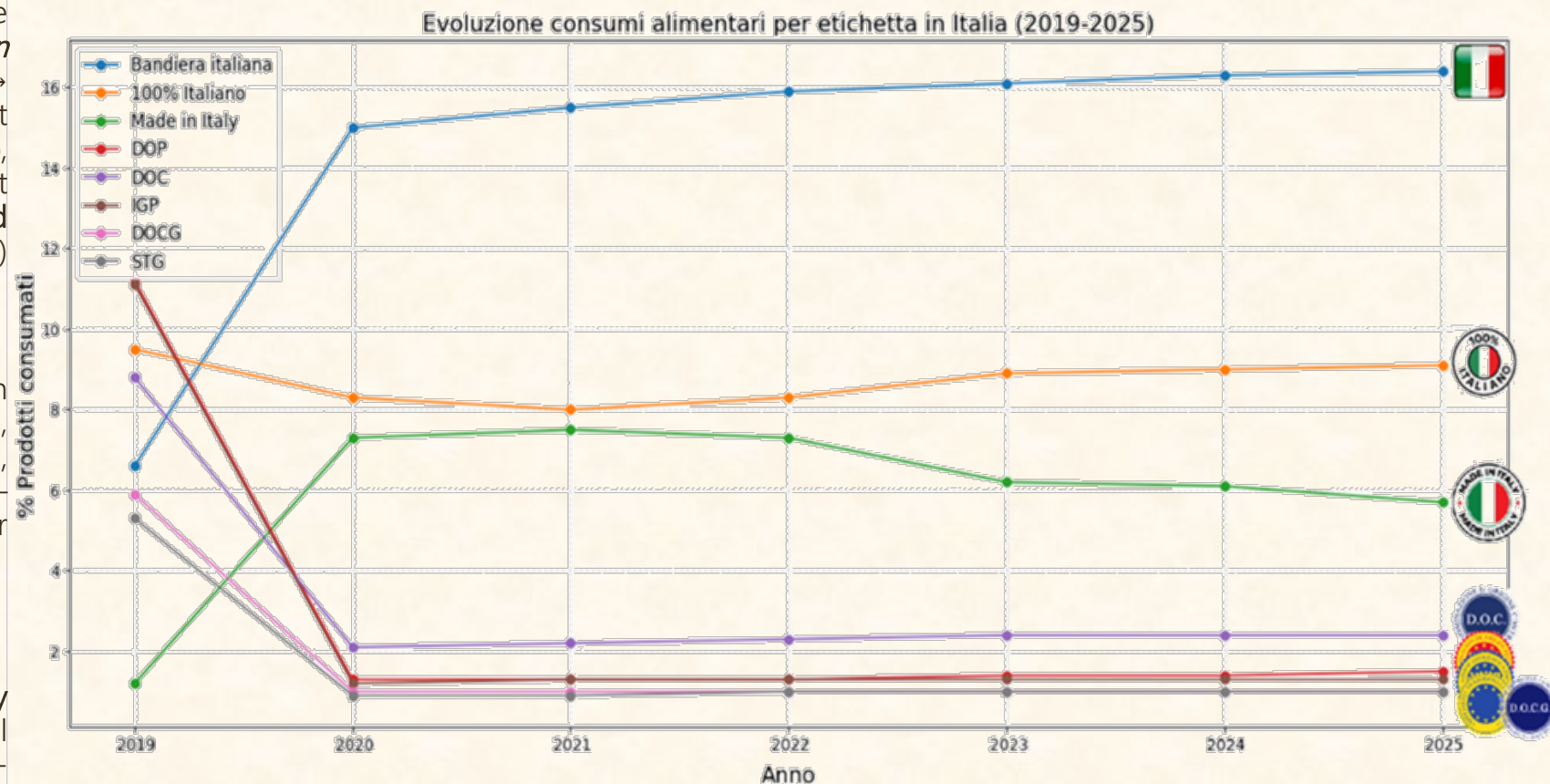
Between 2019 and 2025, the share of products displaying the *Italian flag* more than **doubled** (6.6% → 16.4%), becoming the dominant identity marker; after a brief dip, *Made in Italy* stabilizes in the last two years (more than 16,000 food products now display an Italian flag)

## Decline of EU origin certifications

From 2020 onward, European geographical indications (PDO, PGI, etc.) show a **structural downsizing**, remaining persistently marginal — more sharply than Eurobarometer data would suggest.

## AFFECTIVE SHIFT OF TRUST

Reorientation toward highly evocative origin labels: emotional shift in trust, driven by identity-based, symbolic reassurance rather than by the search for detailed, verifiable information.



Source: Osservatorio Immagino, 2019–2025 (<https://gs1it.org/servizi/osservatorio-immagino/>)

Trust weakens, money tightens, symbols of belonging amplify



# THE RESEARCH

# PRIN Project Positioning

**PRoject of National Interest PRIN2020 - “About Origin: Identity, Authenticity, and Contradictions of Food”**  
(CUP: B57G21000280001)

An interdisciplinary research project (32 academic disciplinary sectors),  
involving **5 universities**,  
aimed at inquiring:

- the meaning of food origin in Italians' food consumption,
- the cultural and social drivers underlying its growing importance.



Università degli studi  
“G. d’Annunzio”



Università di Scienze  
Gastronomiche di Pollenzo  
University of Gastronomic Sciences of Pollenzo



UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI DI BARI  
ALDO MORO



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM  
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA



UNIVERSITÀ  
di **VERONA**



# From Theory & Context to Research Hypothesis & Questions

- **H1:** *In times of crisis, consumers' growing attention to the origin of food takes on the features of a fatalistic compromise, only partly attributable to critical and responsible consumption practices, and more closely linked to the emergence of widespread fears and identity-based claims.*
- **RQ1:** *How is attention to food origin translated into everyday consumption practices, purchasing routines, and label use?*
- **RQ2:** *What explicit meanings and underlying value orientations do consumers associate with the declared or symbolically evoked origin on food labels?*
- **RQ3:** *Which latent factors—such as values, beliefs, trust orientations, and risk perceptions—shape and predict these orientations toward food origin?*

# Survey Design

- *Target:*
  - Representative national sample
    - (stratified by gender, age cohort, and region)
- *Research tool:*
  - Structured survey (questionnaire)
- *Administration channel:*
  - Online (CAWI and CATI)
- *Fieldwork period:*
  - April –June 2023



# The questionnaire:

## *Sections, Questions, Variables*

### 5 Sections:

1. Sociodemographic;
2. Food habits and motivational drivers;
3. Purchase channels & digital activism;
4. Certifications;
5. Italian food)

47 question items  
170 variables

### Target:

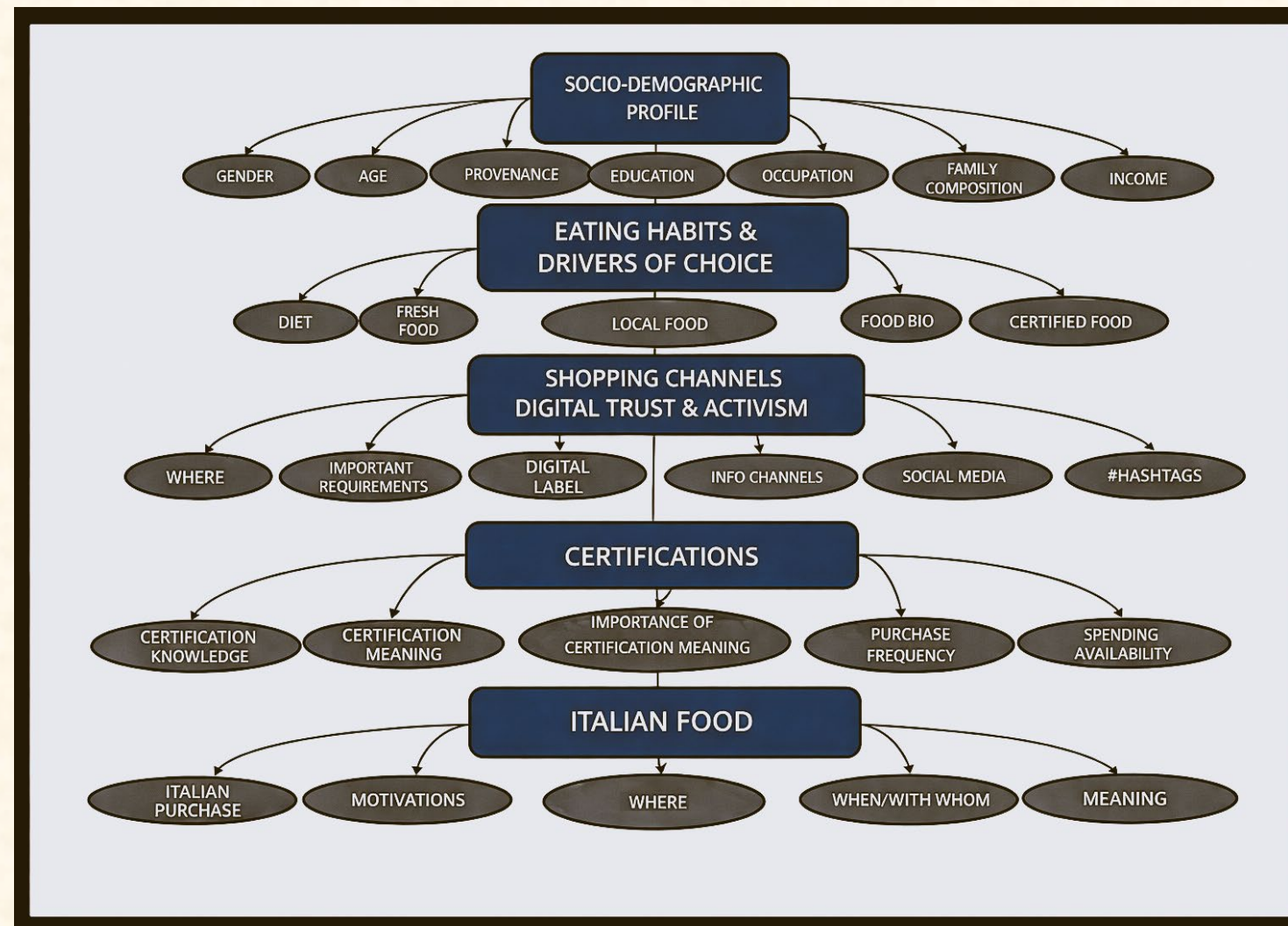
- 4642 valid cases representative of Italian population (ISTAT 2022)

### Sample profile:

Gender: 48% males; 52% females

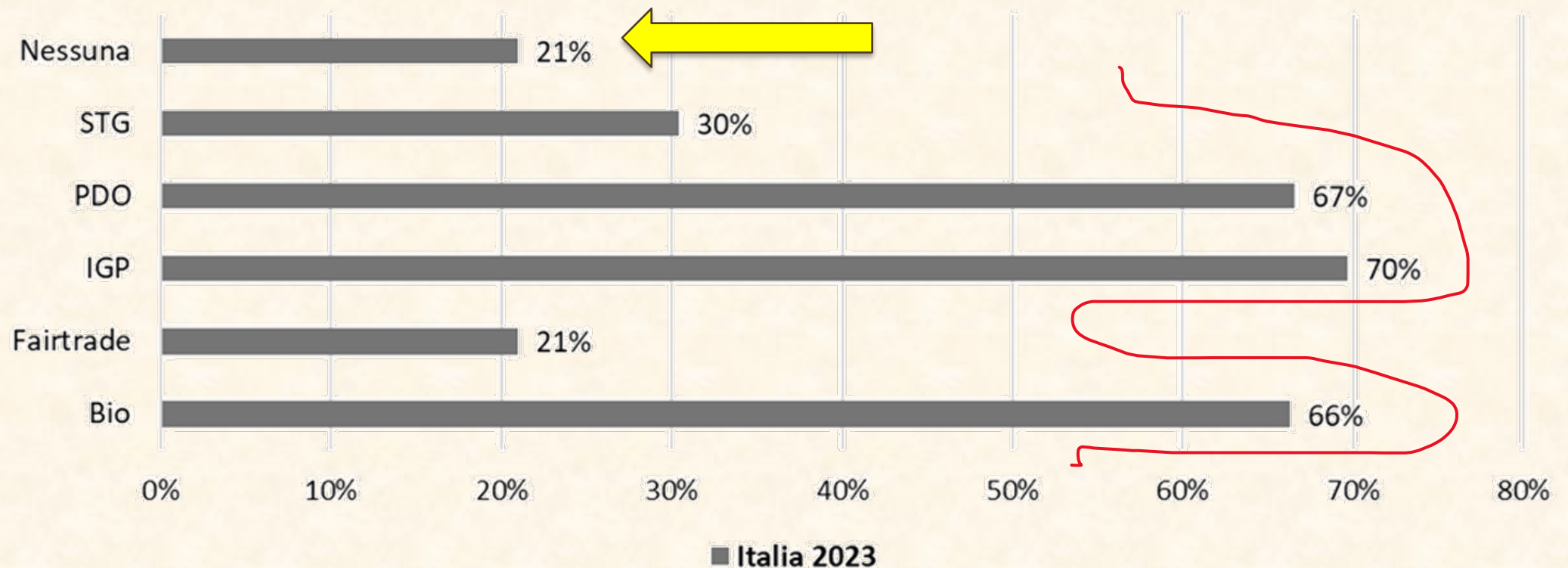
Age-generation: < 27 (Gen Z) 10,4%  
27-42 (Millenn) 21,8%  
43-58 (Gen X) 30,7%  
59-77 (Boomers) 26,7%  
+77 (Silent) 10,4%

Geographic Areas: Nord-West 27,2%  
Nord-East 19,1%  
Center 19,6%  
South 23,5%  
Islands 10,7%



# Italians' awareness of EU's IG/Quality schemes Logos in 2023 (PRIN 2020)

Which of these logo certifications do you know (are you aware of)?

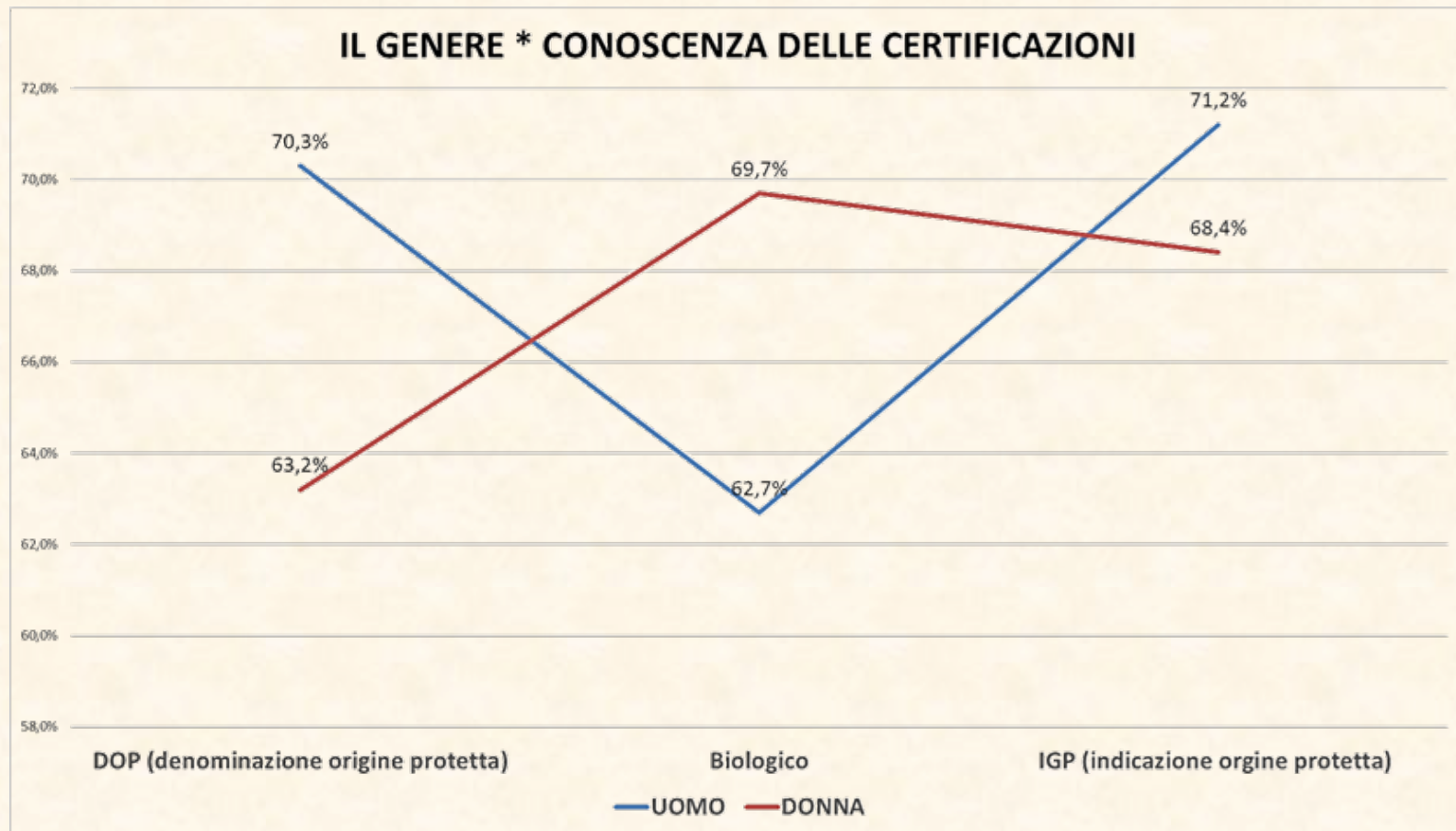


Source: PRIN 2020 survey "The Origin of Food among Italian Consumers", 2023. Base: 4,642 valid cases.

- Decline of EU labels: Rise of unawareness (+21%)
- Signs of a polarization: Authentic vs. Ethical/Ecological
- Rise of identity markers: where(*from*) vs. how



# Gender differences in awareness of EU's IG/Quality schemes Logos in 2023 (PRIN 2020)

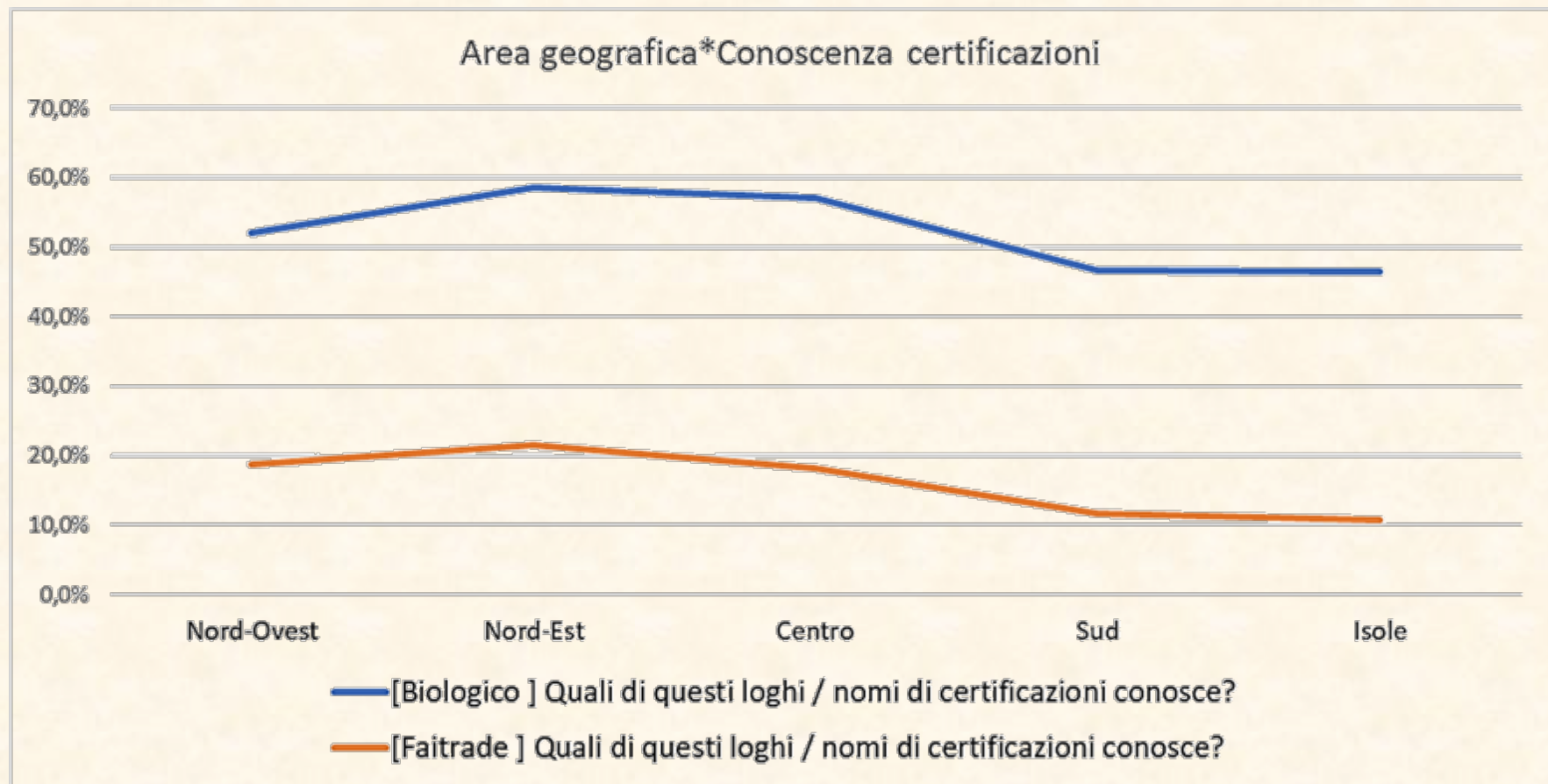


Source: PRIN 2020 survey "The Origin of Food among Italian Consumers", 2023. Base: 4,642 valid cases.

## Gender polarization:

- **women** are more aware of **BIO** and **IGP** logos → trust logics of everyday care (health, well-being, sustainability, naturalness, "good but accessible" quality, purchase choices of daily consumption)
- **men** are more of **PDO** and **PGI** → trust logics of expert distinction (excellence, authenticity, tradition, strong origin, more episodic and "selective" consumption of symbolically strong products)

# Territorial differences in awareness of EU's IG/Quality schemes Logos in 2023 (PRIN 2020)



Source: PRIN 2020 survey "The Origin of Food among Italian Consumers", 2023. Base: 4,642 valid cases.

## Territory polarization:

- **BIO and FAIRTRADE** → ethical-based requirements and organic products → more expensive, presuppose caring lifestyles and socially costly orientations → are more common in the richest part of the Country (North & Center) and hardly popular in the poorest areas (South & Islands)



**Contradiction:** that 58% of organic farming in Italy is concentrated in the South, compared to 23% in the Centre and approximately 19% in the North (ISMEA–SINAB, 2024).



# Descriptive Trends

Which of the following characteristics are most important to you when deciding to buy these products?



Italia 2023

Source: PRIN 2020 survey "The Origin of Food among Italian Consumers", 2023. Base: 4,642 valid cases.

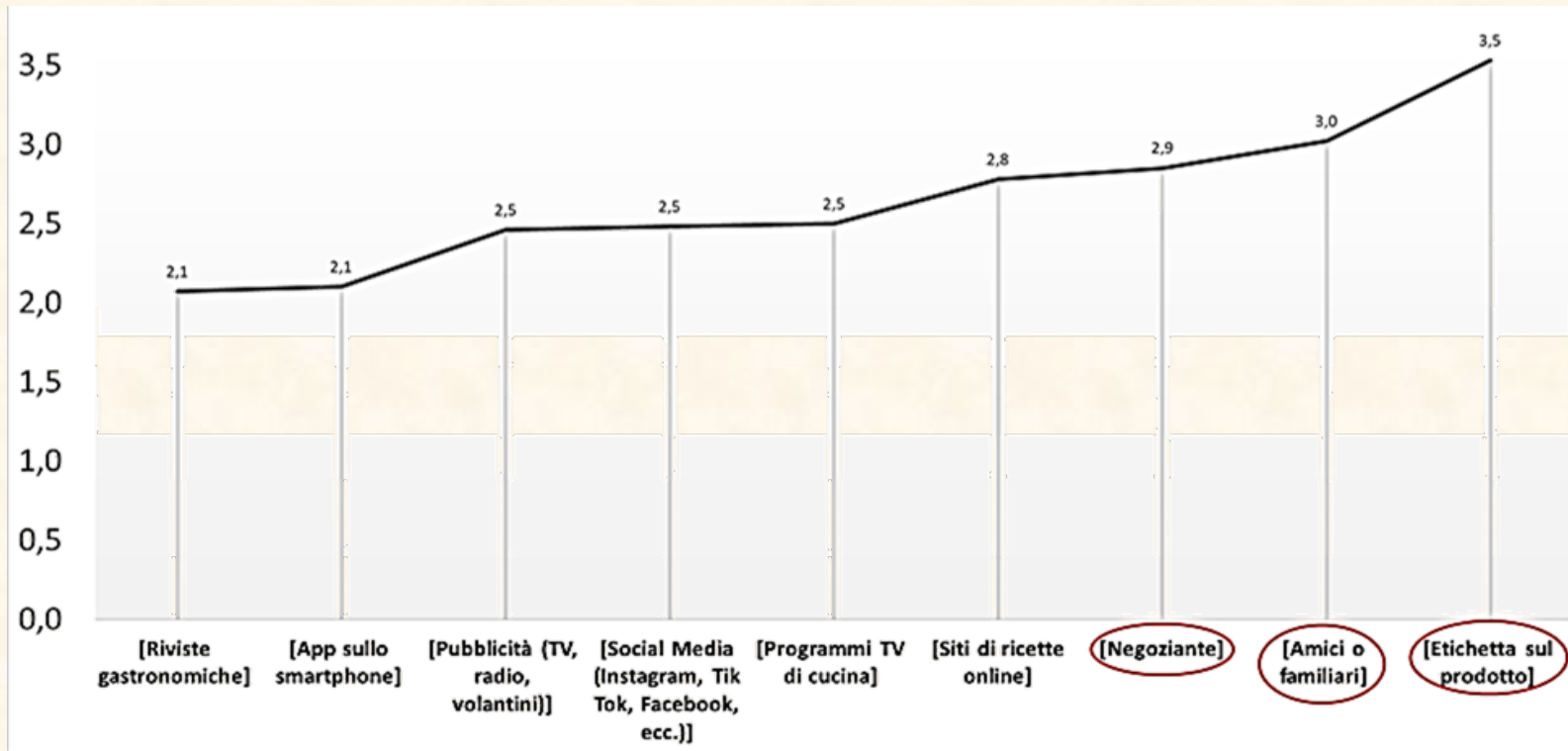
## Fatalistic Trust pattern of origin as reassurance

- Certifications linked to **origin** or **territory** are perceived as products **authentic**, of a **superior quality**, and **safer**.
- **Organic** is perceived as **healthy** and **expensive**.

An emerging *Authentic-Safe-HigherQuality – Healthy* tangle >> A place means How

# Food Information Channels

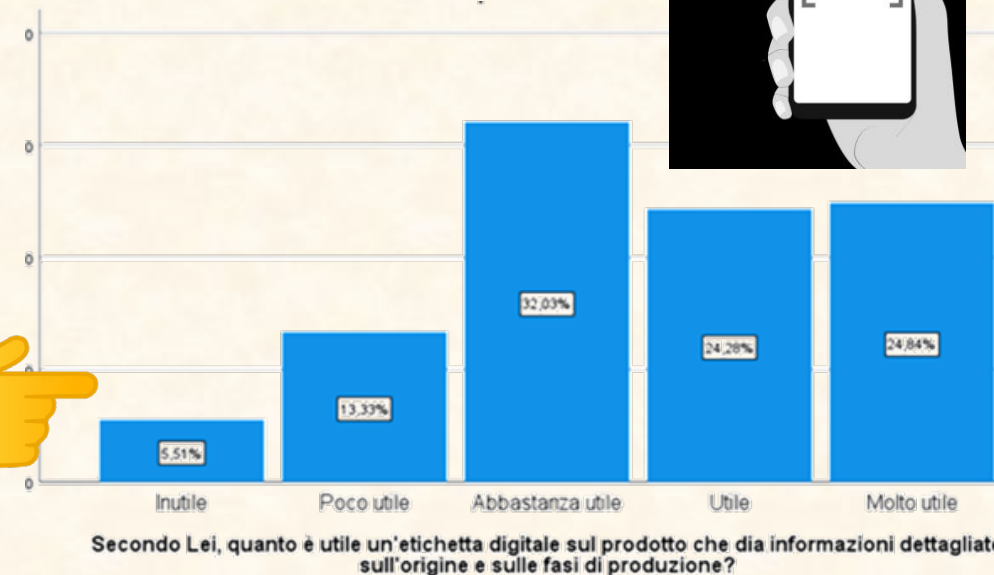
Which of the following channels do you usually use for getting informed about food?



Product labels represents the main information source (84%), followed by friends/family (74%) and shopkeepers (66%), confirming trust in human mediation.

Online recipe platforms (63%) now surpass TV, reflecting a shift toward digital activism for home cooking.

Over 80% would find a digital label useful (25% "very useful").





# Exploratory Factor Analysis

## Uncovering latent value patterns

<i>Fattore (componente)</i>	<i>Autovalore (dopo rotazione)</i>	<i>% di varianza spiegata</i>	<i>% cumulata</i>
1	7,697	15,394	15,394
2	7,670	15,341	30,735
3	7,553	15,106	45,840
4	5,752	11,504	57,344
5	4,582	9,164	66,508
6	4,217	8,434	74,942
7	3,191	6,382	81,324
8	1,538	3,076	84,400
9	1,535	3,071	<b>87,470</b>

Extraction Method: PCA. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser's normalization

<b>KMO and Bartlett's Test</b>		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0,958
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Sig.	<0,001

# Emotional Shift of Trust from knowledge to belief

		Item (in sintesi) per Fattore	Peso fattoriale
Protection	Health—Authentic-Safe Trust	<b>F1 - Sano autentico DOP</b>	
		DOP = cibo sano	0,920
		DOP = cibo sicuro	0,918
		DOP = cibo autentico	0,915
		DOP = cibo giusto	0,914
		DOP = cibo sostenibile	0,913
		DOP = qualità elevata	0,912
		DOP = cibo costoso	0,889
		<b>F2 - Sano sostenibile biologico</b>	
		Biologico = cibo sano	0,963
		Biologico = cibo sicuro	0,960
		Biologico = sostenibile	0,956
		Biologico = qualità elevata	0,955
		<b>F3 - Sano giusto IGP</b>	
		IGP = cibo sano	0,912
		IGP = cibo sicuro	0,909
		IGP = cibo giusto	0,907
		<b>F4 - Sicuro sostenibile certificato</b>	
		Certificazioni = sicurezza	0,862
		Certificazioni = rispetto ambiente	0,862
		Certificazioni = tutela produttori	0,855
	Digital Food Activism	<b>F5 - Food digital activism</b>	
		Uso Instagram per il cibo	0,889
		Uso social media per informarsi	0,880
		Pubblico recensioni online	0,845
	Caring	<b>F6 - Integrità naturale biologica</b>	
		Bio = integrità naturale	0,895
		Bio = benessere animale	0,872
		<b>F9 - Lifestyle della cura</b>	
		Etico (equità, benessere animale)	0,841
	Defending	Sostenibilità locale/stagionale	0,780
		<b>F8 - Convivialità Made in Italy</b>	
		Cibo italiano in famiglia	0,844
		Cibo italiano in occasioni conviviali	0,841
		<b>F7 - Gastropatriottismo</b>	
		Cibo italiano = sano	0,865
		Cibo italiano = qualità	0,847
		Cibo italiano = fiducia	0,808



# Sociodemographic Differences In The Value Patterns Distribution

## Territory and Identity-based or care-oriented Eating

### *Selective macro-regional effects*

F7 – Gastropatriotism (p<0.001)	↑ South and Islands	↓ North-Center
F2 – Biologico-Sostenibile (p<0.001)	↓ South and Islands	↑ North-Center
F5 – Digital Food Activism (p<0.001)	↓ South and Islands	↑ North-Center
F9 – Caring Lifestyle (p<0.001)	↓ South	↑ North

*Territorial divides mirror a fatalistic vs. reflexive consumption pattern, opposing identity-based orientations in vulnerable areas to care- and sustainability-oriented practices in wealthier ones.*

## Generation and Digital Food Activism

### *Young vs. older consumers*

F7 – Gastropatriotism (p<0.001)	↓ GenZ (<27) & Millennials (27-42)	↑ XGen (43-58) & Boomers (59-77)
F5 – Digital Food Activism (p<0.001)	↑ GenZ (<27) & Millennials (27-42)	↓ XGen (<27) & Boomers (59-77)
F9 – Caring Lifestyles (p<0.001)	↑ GenZ (<27) ↑ Millennials (27-42) & XGen (43-58)	↓ Boomers (59-77) & Silent (+77)

*Digital engagement and care-oriented resources characterize youth, while identity-anchored lifestyles prevail among older generations.*

## Education and Care

### *Cultural stratification*

F1 – Healthy/Safe DOP (p<0.001)	↓ Low Secondary School	↓ High Secondary School	↑ Bachelor & Master
F5 – Food Digital Activism (p<0.001)	↓ Low Secondary School	↓ High Secondary School	↑ Bachelor & Master
F6 – Natural Integrity/Bio (p<0.001)	↓ Low Secondary School	↓ High Secondary School	↑ PhD
F9 – Caring Lifestyles (p<0.001)	↓ Low Secondary School	↓ High Secondary School	↑ PhD
F7 – F7 – Gastropatriotism (p<0.001)	↑ High Secondary School		↓ Bachelor & Master

*Education polarizes food regimes between care-, sustainability- and digitally oriented practices among the highly educated and identity-based ones among the less educated.*

## Income and Quality

### *Stratification and gaps among middle-class fractions*

F1 – Healthy/Safe DOP (p<0.001)	↓ (<15.000€)	↑ (28.001–55.000€)
F2 – Healthy/Sustainable Bio (p<0.001)	↓ (15.001€–28.000) ↓ (28.001–55.000€)	↑ (55.001–75.000€)
F4 – Safe/Sustainable Certific. (p<0.001)	↓ (15.001€–28.000)	↑ (28.001–55.000€)
F9 – Caring Lifestyle (p<0.001)	↓ (15.001€–28.000)	↑ (28.001–55.000€)

*Income operates selectively, revealing gaps between adjacent middle-class fractions in access to safe, healthy and sustainable food and in the adoption of care-oriented lifestyles.*

# Takeaways

- Under prolonged uncertainty, **identity** becomes a **fatalistic refuge** for socially and economically **fragilized groups** and **disempowered middle-class** consumers, constrained in their access to good and healthy food.
- **Origin** - evoking national belonging - turns into a «simplified» and «amplified» device of *trust*, managing *fatalistic trade-offs* between security, accessibility and sustainability while absorbing unmanageable complexity.
- What policy responses follow from this evidence?



# 100% Italian Organic Label

## *Neo-Gastronationalism or Empowerment?*

The new initiative of the Italian Ministry of Agriculture, Food  
Sovereignty and Forests (MASAF)



*Thank you!*