

Libera Terra. For a Sicily With No Mafia

Natasha Lardera (July 02, 2009)



The association Libera, founded to support civil societies against all mafias, collected over a million signatures for the approval of a law introducing the possibility to re-use the land confiscated from organized crime for social advantage. Silvia Forte represented the company at the latest Fancy Food Show in New York

Approved on March 25 1995, the Italian Law 109/96 provided the allocation of goods, land and properties of illicit origin to all those, such as associations and co-operatives, able to return them to needy citizens, through services and socio economic activities. Ten years later, 2500 out of a total of 6500 have been allocated...

But let's move back in time and explain from the beginning - the association Libera, founded to support civil societies against all mafias and committed in the creation of an alternative community by Don Ciotti, together with many relatives of Mafia victims collected over a million signatures for

the approval of a law introducing the possibility to re-use the land confiscated from the mafia for social advantage. The chance of getting back what had been stolen from them represents to these people the actual possibility to create a different future

for their children, in their own territory, a future free from the culture of violence and corruption.

Another stepping stone was 2001, when in Sicily, some of these lands were given, with a free loan, to social co-operatives of type B (social groups that bring together permanent workers and previously unemployed people who wish to integrate into the labor market), who started producing pasta, olive oil, wine, honey, legumes and cereals following organic farming methods.

The first one was the Cooperativa Placido Rizzotto – Libera Terra in Sicily that brought back to life, after years of neglect, lands in the corleonese area. Rightly so, others followed in Sicily and later in Calabria and Puglia. All products, environmentally sustainable and made in the respect of the traditions of their territory of origin, are then put on the market under the Terra Libera label represented by Italy's leading organic food company, Alce Nero.

But is this dangerous at all? Silvia Forte, representative of the company at the latest Fancy Food Show in New York, replied – “Yes, despite all they still get threats. I have spoken with many of these guys working the fields and the stories are endless. Machines are stolen, lands are set on fire...I was talking to one worker from Sicily who told me that in order to see what was happening at night he started sleeping in his car, parked by the field...every morning he would then find a single bullet on top of the car. At first he didn't react but collected all the bullets. Later he made a necklace out of these bullets and started walking around town wearing it, just to show that he was not intimidated.”

And business continues no matter what, so much that new products are regularly been added to the line., including delicious, high-quality wines. Centopassi, for example, is the name of the Sicilian line, dedicated to special fighters such as Peppino Impastato, Niccolò Azoti and Pio La Torre. “We have promised,” the company's reps say, “One more step towards a higher quality level, achieved through the selection of the best grapes of our Nero d'Avola, as well as Catarratto and Grillo, the noblest white grape varieties of our land.”

“This is a special project,” Silvia Forte continues, “We hope it will continue to grow and that the deserted lands of other regions will finally be fruitful again.”

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