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PRESS RELEASE

The Commitment of Donnafugata on Pantelleria

The speech of José Rallo held at Pantelleria on September 2, on the occasion of the meeting organized by the Cervim and the Minister for Agriculture about “Heroic viticulture on mountains and smaller islands: a resource that generates revenue and protects the landscape.”

Pantelleria. An island lying between Sicily and Africa, through the centuries inhabited by people devoted more to farming than to fishing. Colonizers from all over the Mediterranean followed one another in time, introducing a variety of crops able to adapt to Pantelleria’s extremely dry and windy climate.

Donnafugata came to this island of sun and wind 20 years ago, in 1989. Its first production unit was in the Ghirlanda area, where the winery began making naturally sweet wines, Passito and Moscato di Pantelleria, from 7 hectares (17.3 acres) of vineyards and with a small but well-equipped vinification cellar.

The 1989 was the first vintage of Ben Ryé, Passito di Pantelleria DOC, created by combining the island’s viticultural traditions with the innovative enological techniques that the winery had been using for its premium white wines in Sicily.

In just a few years Donnafugata perfected a **production model** giving excellent qualitative results, as attested to by the market popularity and awards won by Ben Ryé (see press kit).

Ben Ryé, whose name is Arabic and means “son of the wind”, is the fruit of wedding rugged territory to an ancient variety of grape: **Zibibbo** (Moscato d’Alessandria). Brought



The speakers of the conference about heroic viticulture (from left): CINQUE TERRE - Heidy Bonanini (Azienda Agricola Possa) www.possa.it www.parconazionale5terre.it; VAL D’AOSTA - Costantino Charrère (Les Crêtes) www.lescretes.it; VALTELLINA - Casimiro Maule (Nino Negri) www.ninonegri.it; Ministero delle Politiche Agricole - Luca Zaia (Ministro) www.politicheagricole.gov.it; PANTELLERIA - José Rallo (Donnafugata) www.donnafugata.it; CERVIM Centro Studi e Ricerche sulla Viticoltura di Montagna - Francois Stévenin (Presidente) www.cervim.it; ALTO ADIGE - Willi Stürz (Kellerei Cantina Tramin 1898) www.tramin-wine.it; ETNA - Salvo Foti (Vinicola Benanti) www.salvofoti.it www.vinicolabenanti.it.



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to the island from the coasts of North Africa, Moscato of Alexandria was here given the Arabic name “zebibb”, meaning “dried grape”.

The Zibibbo vineyards are one of the icons of the island, along with capers, olive trees, Pantellerian gardens, drywalls and the *dammusi*, the typical lava-stone houses with white domed roofs found all over the island. A heritage of farming and a hard to maintain landscape that is being lost through time.

In the 1950s there were about 5,000 hectares (12,350 acres) of vineyards on the island while **today there are only around 500 hectares (1,235 acres)**, according to the Trapani Chamber of Commerce. From 1989 to the present Donnafugata's vineyards have risen from 7 hectares to 68 (168 acres, either owned or run), all in Pantellerian “bush” style and with some of the vines more than 100 years old. Its project is one of viticultural recuperation aimed at making premium wines capable of remunerating a complex production system and restoring life and beauty to unique environments (like the Contrada Barone vineyards or Khamma's natural amphitheater).

The grape-growers' work on Pantelleria is an extraordinary example of **heroic viticulture**. The climate is hot and windy, the terrain is steep and the vines are grown on little terraced plots with retention drywalls in lava stone. From “basins” dug in the earth the vines grow at nearly ground level and are trained horizontally to protect them from the wind. Tending them is laborious and takes dedication because the work is **almost entirely manual** and, even more, requires a skilled and intelligent interpretation of individual growth environments.

Donnafugata grows grapes in **11 different areas** (*contrade*) of the island, an aspect logistically difficult but ensuring a unique complexity for the final product. These viticultural contexts differ in soil composition (minerals, sand, pumice stone), altitude, exposure, distance from the sea and age. For example, Contrada Barone, with an altitude of about 400 m (1,300 ft), northeastern exposure and quite distant from the coast, produces grapes giving wine considerable crispness and elegance; the vineyards surrounding the Khamma cellars, lower-lying (200 m / 650 ft) and with a northern exposure, give grapes well balanced in their sugar/acidity content, while grapes from Contrada Martingana, very close to the sea and with a southeastern exposure, bring sweetness and vigor.

In some of these places, from bramble-infested abandonment Donnafugata has recouped and returned to production **century-old, non-grafted vineyards** able to resist phylloxera (the louse that attacks vine roots). These vineyards are distinctive for their extraordinary ability to give wines aromatic complexity (due to the sugar reserves their trunks contain) and are a treasure-trove of biodiversity for their uniqueness amongst European grapes.



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From the production-cost standpoint, Donnafugata data speaks for itself. While at Contessa Entellina work in the vineyard requires little more than 30 days annually per hectare (2.5 acres), **on Pantelleria the amount of work triples**. For many reasons: the vines are grown bush-like, very close to the ground; the terraced plots are small and scattered; vineyard tending includes upkeep on drywalls and windbreaks. Where rebuilding drywalls is concerned in the past three years the winery has spent nearly 300,000 euro to repair/rebuild 11 km (6.8 miles) of drywalls.

An indicator of the singularity of Pantelleria's grape-growing context can be seen in the fact that, at Contessa Entellina, a worker can pick an average of 800 kg (1,760 lbs) of grapes per day, but on the island only 340 kg (750 lbs).

In the special case of Ben Ryé, added to the cost of fresh grape production just described are the costs of drying the grapes and stripping them by hand from their stalks. For example, it takes a worker an hour to lay 100 kg (220 lbs) of fresh grapes on racks to dry in the sun, and an equal amount of time to manually destalk 5 kg (11 lbs) of dried grapes. **Time, Care, Quality.**

To make a liter of Ben Ryé Passito di Pantelleria, a naturally sweet wine, **it takes 4 kg (9 lbs) of fresh grapes**, with a grape yield in wine of 25% (for a dry white or red, yield is 65% to 70%). An average per-hectare grape yield of 4,000 kg (9,000 lbs), will give 1,000 liters (35,000 oz) of wine, or about 1,300 750-ml bottles per hectare.

On Pantelleria Donnafugata employs **15 people year round, increasing to about 40** at peak harvest time. In addition to Sicilians and inhabitants of Pantelleria, some of the workers come from Poland. Most of these people do not reside permanently on the island and so Donnafugata pays for their travel, room and board.

Such complicated production requires the adequate remuneration that only products with high added value can guarantee. Premium production, with a strong and distinctive image (and good communication strategy) is the only kind able to generate revenue and protect the landscape too. The presence of vineyards on the terraced plots covering the island give the landscape color and life. Inestimable value but also usable, with economic benefit for the local community.

Finally, in 2008, amongst its Khamma vineyards, Donnafugata recouped an authentic **Pantellerian garden**, restoring it so it can be visited and donating it to the **FAI (Fondo Ambiente Italiano – The Italian Trust)**. Its structure is ancient Middle Eastern in conception, circular (with an 8.4 m inner diameter / 28 ft) with high (up to 4-meter / 13 ft) walls in lava stone, and it contains a single citrus tree. The *giardino pantesco* is an ingenious agronomic system, **self-sufficient in terms of water supply** and able to protect the citrus tree from wind and drought. This small contribution to protecting the island's landscape and biodiversity was made possible thanks to the worldwide success of Ben Ryé.



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FIGURES IN DETAIL

Vineyards on Pantelleria

Total	In the 50s	5.000 ha (12,350 acres)
	Today	500 ha (1,235 acres)
Donnafugata		68 ha (160 acres, owned or run)

Donnafugata: Contessa Entellina Vs. Pantelleria

Vineyard running costs Harvesting included	Contessa Entellina (partly mechanized cultivation)	About 30 work-days per year per hectare
	Pantelleria (cultivation almost entirely by hand)	About 90 work-days per year per hectare (including windbreak building and drywall upkeep)
Average grapes picked daily	Contessa Entellina	800 kg (1,760 lbs)
	Pantelleria	340 kg (750 lbs)

Some figures for Donnafugata on Pantelleria

Vineyard density	from 2,500 vines (traditional planting) to 4,673 (innovative)
Average grape yield per hectare for Ben Ryé production	4,000 kg (9,000 lbs)
Amount of grapes a worker lays in the sun	100 kg (220 lbs) per hour
Amount of grapes a worker destalks	5 kg (11 lbs) per hour
Fresh grapes used for 1 lt. of Ben Ryé	4 kg (9 lbs)
Grape yield in wine	25%
Bottles of Ben Ryé produced	about 1,300 per hectare

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