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# LIVING LA DOLCE VITA

Italian family-run farm, Fattoria La Vialla, has proved it's possible to be successful and sustainable. Producing its own organic food and wine range, along with offering tourist accommodation, the business is carbon neutral too



Guests and staff at Fattoria La Vialla dine al fresco among the vineyards

Coming to the end of a long, dark British winter few things could raise the spirits more than a hamper of food produce from Chianti in Italy. Fattoria La Vialla, which is near Castiglion Fibocchi between Florence and Arezzo, has spent the last 30 years building up a clever agriturismo business based around entirely organic produce. With its handwritten, faux artisanal website and brown paper delivery bags, it sells direct to end consumers and won't deal with any middle men.

La Vialla began as a weekend hobby business for the Lo Franco family who were in the fashion industry. During the 1960s and 70s many farmhouses in Italy were abandoned as families went to live in cities finding the subsistence life too tough. Travelling about in their Land Rover, the Lo Francos bought ruined farmhouses, started doing them up and got the fields producing again. After a while they were enjoying the agricultural life so much that they took it up full time. It's now run by three sons Gianni, Bandino and Antonio.

Over 3,000 acres, they now have 17 farmsteads which are divided into 33 dwellings for rental to tourists. There's a restaurant plus farm shop and twice a week everyone staying at La Vialla is invited to supper, which is taken on long communal tables outside – a bit like a Dolmio ad but rather more authentic. They have 30,000 olive trees, their own forest of oaks, chestnut and firs and have even managed to make the business entirely carbon neutral. They gave a presentation at the Climate Change conference in Copenhagen. It's all so organic that on TripAdvisor one guest questioned the necessity for chickens strutting about on the dining tables.

With the exception of the salami – which is also local – the food is all produced by Fattoria La Vialla. Bread and cantucci biscuits come straight from the bakery with grains ground by a mill that came from the monastery at nearby La Verna. The aged pecorino cheese is from the grazing sheep via their own ultra modern dairy. All the pasta



sausages – from artichoke through aubergine to wild boar – are from the estate. Their wines have won a number of awards. It's all very skilfully managed and presented in rustic fashion, right down to the proper raffia keeping products in place in the export hampers, which go to the UK, Germany, Holland and the United States. And it really works: the business, a leading light of the Slow Food movement, now has 165 employees and a healthy 12,000 customers on its database.

And what about Brexit, which has baffled many Italians? If trade tariffs are erected between the UK and its European neighbours, it's likely that agricultural produce, traditionally the most protected of sectors, will be badly affected. Annette Mueller who looks after La Vialla marketing says: 'I'm curious about what is going to happen. It doesn't seem real at the moment. It would potentially affect us and our sales to the UK, but we'll deal with that if and when it comes. We live in the here and now and by the seasons.'



Harvesting olives on the estate (right); barrels of wine (far right)



“Twice a week everyone staying at La Vialla is invited to supper, which is taken on long communal tables outside – a bit like a Dolmio ad but rather more authentic”



(Clockwise from centre) One of the guest farmsteads; visitors enjoy a stay on the estate; the farm shop offers everything from cheese made in the dairy to the estate's pasta sauces; brothers Antonio, Bandino and Gianni run the business

