

# Kiev's Stop on Sunflower Oil Alarms Industry

Italy will run out of its sunflower oil stocks within one month. This represents a huge problem for the Italian food industry that uses it for the most varied food products, from cookies, mayonnaise, and spreads, to stuffed pasta, sauces, and fried foods. The alarm was already sounded, arriving from Assito – the Italian association of the oil industry – in recent days! But the risk turned into certainty yesterday, when the Ukrainian government officially decided to suspend exports of certain foods, among which sunflower oil.

Holding 60% of production and 75% of exports, Kiev is the leading sunflower grower in the world. The Italian pressing industry, on the other hand, produces only 25,000 tons of crude oil. Thus, our country depends on Ukraine for over 60% of the imports. According to Coldiretti, out of 570 million euros of agri-food products that Italy imported from Ukraine in 2021, sunflower oil is the most important item with 260 million euros. This is why stopping oil ships from arriving from the Black Sea is a serious problem for the Italian food industry, and some say an even more severe issue than that of the wheat.

Natasha Linhart, CEO of Atlante, the Bolognese group that supplies over 1,500 Italian products to large foreign supermarket chains such as Walmart, Sainsbury's or Migros, 'Some of the foreign companies to which we supply fresh pasta and sauces already informed us that their sunflower oil stocks will only last for two weeks. After this, they will no longer be able to guarantee production – she says – even large retailers are worried about not being able to procure many products as early as next month. Since there has been a strong public opinion campaign in Italy against the use of palm oil, many companies have pounced on sunflower oil.' But the problem, this time, is not only the price increase; it is actually product availability. Ivano Vacondio, chairperson of Federalimentare, is expressing the concern of his associates, 'The confectionery industry will certainly suffer the repercussions - he says - even tuna producers are on alert. In the short term, we risk not finding oil-packed tuna anymore, only water-packed. The shortage of Ukrainian sunflower oil will then go on medium term. With sowing at risk this spring, there won't be any production next year either.'

The industry is already looking for substitutes: rapeseed, coconut, and soy. 'But, on one hand, we have to understand if they work just as well for recipes - says Natasha Linhart – and on the other hand, we still need to solve the label issue. Usually, industries print them once for the whole year, but if we change the oil in the contents, we need to put that on the packaging as well.' For this reason, there are thoughts of requesting a temporary dispensation from competent authorities to allow the use of alternative oils without having to change labels.

—Micaela Cappellini  
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