



FICO Eataly World is more than just an amusement park for foodies. Andrea Tolu speaks to the team behind the world's largest agri-food park about its use of Ali Group brands Carpigiani and Esmach



FROM THE HEART

An amusement park for foodies" is an oft-used definition for FICO Eataly World in Bologna, Italy. No one, however, would embark on a four-year project investing €120 million on a 10,000m² area if it were just that.

The world's largest agri-food park has more to offer: a marketplace for fine food, an educational hub, a conference center, and an R&D lab. Or, to use Tiziana Primori's words, "a place where people can think about food."

FICO Eataly World is the world's largest agri-food park, receiving 1,250,000 visitors in its first six months





Primori is FICO's general manager and part of the group of founders together with the mayor of Bologna, an investment fund, Bologna's Agri-food Centre, and Eataly's founder Oscar Farinetti.

NOT JUST FOR 'FUN'

"At the heart of what we do there's a simple daily gesture like ordering or buying food," says Primori. "Our mission is to explain to visitors what happens behind it."

To realize such an ambitious vision, the management team recruited all sorts of partners from public institutions, the academia, and the business world. For Primori however, that was not the difficult part; the real challenge was "to make different realities coexist, from Sicily to Piedmont, from very small start-ups to large enterprises."

Every month, FICO will celebrate a craft, like cheese making, baking, or beekeeping. Around that theme, about fifty courses and thirty events show every day why food is culture and exactly how the agri-food chain operates.

Many of these events are hands-on workshops where anyone can learn how to make staples of Italian cuisine like pizza, tortellini, bread and so on. "It's great to see Chinese or Canadian visitors making tagliatelle or cheese," says Primori. "What makes us the proudest, though, are the curious looks of children and the fact that foreign visitors don't just come for the food, but for our lifestyle too."

These courses are for all those who eat food and live on this planet. In other words, anyone and everyone (not just 'foodies'): Italians and

foreigners, children and adults, those who are simply curious about the world of food and those with more of a vested interest in it.

Primori's hope is to send them home with more questions than answers, those questions we stopped asking ourselves: where does our food come from, and is it possible to produce food that is healthy, affordable and sustainable?

Six months after the opening, the results are very encouraging: 1,250,000 visitors and partnerships with tour operators worldwide.

Of those visitors, 30,000 were

"Our mission is to explain to visitors what happens behind buying food"

students, 2,000 of them coming from abroad. For Primori, there are no changes to the roadmap for now: "The priority is to complete the one-year cycle and have an overview of what each season looks like."

Keeping old crafts alive in today's world requires technology that respects traditional processes but makes them more efficient. That's where Ali Group marks its presence at FICO with its brands Carpigiani, within a traditional gelato shop, and Esmach, within bakery operator Forno Calzolari.

For FICO, keeping old crafts alive requires technology that respects traditional processes but makes them more efficient





FICO IN NUMBERS:

ABOUT €120 MILLION OF INITIAL FINANCE

MORE THAN 1,250,000 VISITORS DURING THE FIRST SIX MONTHS

MORE THAN 50 DAILY COURSES

MORE THAN 30 DAILY EVENTS

2 DAILY TOURS

Ali Group brand Carpigiani set up a transparent gelato shop at FICO Eataly World, while Esmach equipment is used in Matteo Calzolari's bakery

CARPIGIANI'S OBSESSION

Carpigiani, the world-leading manufacturer of machines to produce artisan gelato, soft serve and desserts, set up a transparent gelato shop, where the team of Sicilian maestro gelatiere Santi Palazzolo prepares fresh gelato and all sorts of chilled desserts every day. There are also daily workshops with teachers from Carpigiani's Gelato University, in a state-of-the-art classroom, where visitors can learn how Italian style gelato is made and how to taste it. Ultimately, they can learn how to make fresh gelato themselves using Carpigiani equipment or how to taste it properly following tips and tricks dispensed by skilled instructors.

"Our participation is a great way to promote the culture of gelato," says Carpigiani's market development director Achille Sassoli. The company has a unique position in the market: they already have the largest share, also thanks to their "obsession for product quality," as Sassoli calls it.

Their growth strategy is therefore to increase the size of the market itself with events and communication. And FICO turned out to be an ideal place for that.

Sassoli has a very clear idea of how gelato tradition and technology can work together: "For us, the traditional Italian gelato needs to follow a few classic but precise steps: pasteurization, aging and batch freezing" he says. "Then, each gelatiere can adapt it to the habits and tastes of clients in their part of the world."

AN ACT OF LOVE

Matteo Calzolari took over the family business when his father

fell ill, and the alternative was selling or shutting down. However, he soon realized that baking had lost touch with its roots: the baker didn't know where his flour came from, while the farmer didn't know where his grains would go. All they knew were the intermediaries.

The other missing link was stone-milling. Calzolari has a vivid memory of his first bread made with stone-milled flour: "It was an eye-opening moment for me. My dad saw something he used to know in the past but got lost. But I saw the future," he says.

"Our participation is a great way to promote the culture of Italian style gelato"

Eventually, he partnered with local farmers and stone millers, bringing the old farm-to-oven chain back to life. "It all starts with an act of love. It was for my dad, but everyone needs to work at this craft every day."

A bakery at FICO was an opportunity to showcase that. There, he organizes daily courses to show how ancient grains grow, why stone milling is different, how to refresh sourdough starter, and why the one they've been using for 17 years is called Gino. Calzolari works with Esmach equipment: an electric oven creates the same type of heat as a wood-fired oven, and a proofer machine specifically designed for sourdough starters.

As with Carpigiani, it's another case of technology dedicated to tradition, in line with FICO's philosophy. ■

