

# Heat on Meloni to avert pasta trade war

## Italy

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Giorgia Meloni and Donald Trump have made a habit of having friendly chats at gala events, but if they cross paths at dinner in Washington next week and pasta is on the menu, the conversation could get tense.

"Forget Ukraine, China and the Middle East, people in the room will be thinking about fettuccine," Francesco Galietti, an analyst at the Policy Sonar consultancy in Rome, said.

The Italian prime minister is under growing pressure at home to persuade Trump to call off planned 107 per cent US tariffs on Italian pasta, which producers have called a "devastating" threat to their livelihoods.

The critical moment could be the dinner they may both attend on October 18 hosted by the National Italian American Foundation to honour Italian culture and strengthen Italo-US ties. "Meloni will go if Trump goes, and the elephant in the room will be the pasta saga," Galietti said.

"Pasta is a symbol of Italy and these tariffs are an affront to national pride. Italian food producers will be telling Meloni, 'You said you had Trump on speed dial, so do something.'"

Meloni's office said she was yet to confirm whether she would attend the annual event in Washington, which was addressed by President Biden in 2023.

"We think Meloni and Trump may both be there and it must be the moment to discuss America's attempt to push Italian pasta makers out of the US market," Ettore Prandini, head of the Italian farmers' lobby group Coldiretti, said.

Trump's 15 per cent tariffs on European goods were already blamed for a 21 per cent decline in Italian food

exports to the US in August.

Then came US allegations against two Italian pasta producers of price dumping, a policy whereby products are exported at a deflated price to a country to the detriment of local producers. This prompted Washington to impose a punitive 92 per cent extra tariff on Italian pasta exporters, pushing the total to 107 per cent.

Prandini claimed the dumping "never happened" and said the move would now double the price of Italian pasta in the US and "practically cancel" annual exports worth €671million (£580million).

Massimiliano Giansanti, head of the farming group Confagricoltura, said: "The US market accounts for 12 per cent of Italy's production so if we lose that it will be like a bomb going off in the economy of southern Italy where durum wheat for pasta is grown."

The tariff is a tough challenge for Meloni, who has prided herself on her close relationship to Trump. Elly Schlein, head of the opposition Democratic Party, said: "Who knows if once again Meloni will stay silent in the face of Trump blackmailing our firms to shift production to the US? Overall it's more proof of the fake patriotism of the Meloni government."

Meloni's position is further complicated by her championing of Italian food around the world as a cornerstone of national identity.

Her government has lambasted the European Commission for restricting the freedom of Italian farmers with red tape but is now appealing to the commission to help overturn Trump's tariff.

"The European Commission, in close co-ordination with the Italian government, is engaging with the US on this investigation, and will intervene as necessary," Olof Gill, the commission's trade spokesman, said on Monday.

Pressioni sulla Meloni affinché eviti una guerra commerciale sulla pasta

