

# ACQUERELLO®

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## CASE HISTORY: ACQUERELLO

Acquerello is the rice grown and packed at the historical **Tenuta Torrone della Colombara** in Livorno Ferraris, in the province of Vercelli, the heart of the Italian rice growing area.

Acquerello is the result of a **complete production chain** that starts in the rice fields, moves through all the processes and is completed by in-house image management using cutting edge communication methods.

**1935** – **Cesare Rondolino** has always been interested in agriculture and focused his attention on rice culture, consequently he purchased Tenuta Colombara, famous for the fertile land and used for growing rice since the 1500s.

**1971** – **Piero**, Cesare's son, graduated in Architecture, but chose to follow his father's footsteps, dedicating himself to growing rice. He started with mix agriculture, but then he focused on rice growing. He was the first in Italy to develop important innovations, such as introducing lasers for levelling the land and refrigeration for storing the harvest.

**1991** – Having reached the optimisation of the agricultural production processes, in order to develop new horizons and free the company from the commodity market, Piero decided to set up a **short supply chain** with cultivation, production and sale direct to consumers, the three historical activities: agriculture, industry and sales.

– To ensure that the product would be successful and that consumers would be faithful, there was only one way: introducing a **superior quality standard** with respect to other rices.

– The first choice to be different was to choose to grow **Carnaroli**, a variety of rice that at the time was almost unknown, but which is best suited to Italian culinary traditions.

– The second choice to be even more different was to improve the quality, following the ancient traditions to **age** un-husked rice for at least 1 year storing it in refrigerated stainless steel silos.

– The third choice was a new and innovating way to pack rice into vacuum-sealed containers. He chose the most reliable type of container, a **tin**, in order to perfectly keep the product and also to make the image of the product different from other rices.

– The fourth choice was the name **Acquerello**. "Acqua" is the Italian word for "water", rice is the only agricultural product that is grown in flooded fields and water is the vital element. The most difficult and important job in order to grow rice is to be able to rule waters, the name Acquerello comes from Piero's care of waters.

– The image was a consequence, it was the first tin to have an image printed on only one side, to emphasise the reflection on the water. To contextualise the product, the **image** portrayed the area of production, the farmstead, the landscape and the mountainous backdrop.

**1993** – To facilitate storage in restaurants, it was decided to produce a package that even today is the most economic possible, the **2.5kg** vacuum pack.

**1994** – At the time, there were no packages of rice smaller than 1 kilo available on the market. To stand out from the competition and to encourage the first purchase, a **250g** pack was produced. This was an innovative test and the packaging was a simple plastic bag with a basic label, it was deliberately less attractive than the tin.

**1998** – The fifth choice was to rediscover a traditional process using helix, invented in 1884, to gently whiten the rice; nowadays the Rondolino family is the only one to use this method.

**1999** – Piero was one of the founders of the **Agenzia di Pollenzo** (at the time the dream was to create the “Accademia Europea del Gusto”) born with the aim of becoming the main reference point for enogastronomic culture and it became the first University of Gastronomic Sciences in the world.

**2000** – The products already available were joined by two newcomers: the **500g tin** and the **3 years** aged rice.

**2004** – Tenuta Colombara was chosen as a **teaching branch** for rice by the Slow Food University of Gastronomic Sciences of Pollenzo; since then the farmstead has hosted students from all the specialisations for residential courses.

**2004** – Inside the Tenuta Colombara there is the **Conservatorio della Riscoltura**, a themed museum on Italian rice growing was set up. The various workshops for metal, wood and leather, the workers’ apartments, the rice-weeders’ (Mondine) dormitory and the school have not been restored on purpose as if time has not passed by.

**2007** – The sixth choice was an invention: **restoring the germ** into the white rice, in order to preserve the most important nutritional qualities, otherwise found only in wholegrain rice. An application for a process patent was filed.

**2008** – The company produced the **250g tin** to replace the previous prototype in plastic. It had the same illustration as the other tins and completed the family of four packages with the same image and different weights.

**2010** – The aging of the paddy rice was increased from 3 to **7 years**, no other rice is aged for so long.

**2012** – The **process patent** presented in 2007 was accepted, recognising at international level the process of restoring the germ as an Acquerello exclusive.

– Alongside the rice aged 1 and 7 years, rice aged for **9 years** destined exclusively for the Chinese market, was added to the product range.

– Acquerello is the **utmost rice** because it unites the most precious nutritional values of wholegrain rice with versatility and perfect performance in the kitchen.

**2013** – Tenuta Colombara sponsored the photographic book “**Il Racconto del Riso – An Italian Story of Rice**” with the photographs by Gianni Berengo Gardin, the only Italian to have won the Lucie Award, the Oscar of photography. The artist lived at Tenuta Colombara between 2010 and 2011, bearing witness to the past and the present of the farmstead in his images. The following year, it was awarded the Bastianelli Award as the best photographic book of the year.

**2015** – To teach children that rice is good, the Tenuta Colombara organised an educational project for the fourth-year classes of all European schools. The aim of the project was to encourage eating rice at least once a week, on Wednesdays; this gave the project its name **Mercoledì Riso - Rice on Wednesday**. The project was organised in cooperation with the International Association Slow Food, attained official recognition of the school projects at Milano Expo 2016 and was mentioned amongst the Best Practices of the Milan Charter. On October 21<sup>st</sup> at Expo Milan the children who won the Mercoledì Riso contest, IV class Collodi Treviso, signed the first version of the Junior Milan Charter thought by Feltrinelli who forwarded it to Onu. Official website of the project: [www.mercolediriso.it](http://www.mercolediriso.it).

**2015** – The **Club des Chefs des Chefs**, the most exclusive gastronomic society in the world, which accepts only the chefs of reigning sovereigns and heads of state, chose to spend a day’s study at Tenuta Colombara in order to understand the production process of Acquerello. On this occasion, they prepared a special dish with Marco Stabile: “Acquerello CCC”. Amongst the 20 chefs present

were the President Christian Garcia from Monaco, the Vice president Mark Flanagan from Buckingham Palace, Cris Comerford from the White House, Fabrizio Boca from the Quirinale and (to mention only a few) chefs representing France, Germany, India and China.

**2016 - Slow Food** chose Acquerello to celebrate its 30th anniversary, since it is a product that represents the organisation's philosophy of "good, clean, fair". The product was awarded the Snail of Approval which appears on the packaging.

**2018** – At the Tenuta Colombara the new book "**Storia di un libro**" has been created as the sequel of "Il Racconto del Riso – An Italian Story of Rice". The backstage shooting has been taken by Cele Bellardone and Dino Boffa during the period in which Gianni Berengo Gardin was creating his book. An amazing story of rice fields, work and tradition. There are 94 pictures and 7 authors' memories about moments they spent together. Never before an entire book has been dedicated to a photographer work.

**2018** – Acquerello obtained 5 international Certifications: ISO 22000 – ISO 22005 – Global Gap – IFS – BRC

**2018** - Acquerello was already present in **59 countries**. The cultivation surface is of 280 hectares and the production reached 850 tonnes with a turnover that in 2018 is supposed to reach 5 million euro. Since 1991, the year in which production of Acquerello began, sales have increased on average by 20% per year. 55% of the product is sold abroad (half in UE and half Extra UE), almost exclusively to restaurants; 45% is sold in Italy and is shared between small shops (60%) and restaurants (40%).

Working with Piero Rondolino in the company are his wife Maria Nava, who is responsible for the commercial area, their sons Umberto and Anna, who oversee the image and Rinaldo, head of production. Apart from the **Rondolino family**, 20 employees passionately participate to the Acquerello project, of whom 11 are women and the average age is just 39.

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