School of International Letters and Cultures
Arizona State University

"Biocultural Diversity at the Table: Italy and Global Food Cultures"

The Week of Italian Cuisine in the World 2026
Thursday, November 19, 2026 | 6–8 p.m.
GFL Auditorium, Walton Center for Planetary Health, Arizona State University

How do the foods we grow and share connect cultural traditions, human health, and the environment? Arizona State University's Italian Program invites the university community and the public to explore these connections at *Biocultural Diversity at the Table: Italy and Global Food Cultures*, an interdisciplinary conversation followed by a reception.

Presented as the inaugural Arizona edition of the Week of Italian Cuisine in the World, the event brings together perspectives from sustainable food systems, nutrition, Italian cultural studies, and the food industry. The international initiative, promoted by the Italian government, celebrates Italian cuisine as an expression of cultural heritage and an opportunity for dialogue about food, health, and sustainability. ASU's event is organized in collaboration with the Consulate General of Italy in Los Angeles and the Italian Cultural Institute of Los Angeles.

Panel. At the center of the discussion is the relationship between biological and cultural diversity: the connections among ingredients, landscapes, agricultural practices, culinary knowledge, and community traditions. Taking Italy and its food cultures as a starting point, the panel will consider broader questions about how food practices shape identities, sustain communities, and influence our relationships with the natural world. The Mediterranean lifestyle provides a framework for examining food as both a source of nourishment and a cultural practice with social and environmental significance.

The one-hour panel, conducted in English, will feature four guests:

- **Sara El-Sayed**, Arizona State University's Swette Center for Sustainable Food Systems and the Biomimicry Center; Slow Food International and Slow Food Phoenix.
- **Chris Wharton**, Professor of Nutrition in Arizona State University's College of Health Solutions.
- **Pietro Brembilla**, CEO of Sogno Toscano.
- **Grazia Menechella**, Associate Professor of Italian at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Reception. A reception following the discussion will feature catering by Sogno Toscano, complementing the event's exploration of Italian food cultures and offering opportunities for continued conversation among students, faculty, community members, and guests.

The event builds on the Italian Program's sustained engagement with food as a pathway to understanding Italian culture. Its course on the Mediterranean lifestyle serves approximately 300 students each semester, using Italian food as a connecting thread to explore cultural and environmental questions. This gathering extends that conversation beyond the classroom, connecting academic inquiry with community interests and professional experience.

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Biocultural Diversity at the Table is presented by the Italian Program in ASU's School of International Letters and Cultures, in collaboration with its Italian institutional partners and with support from Consulate General of Italy in Los Angeles, Italian Cultural Institute of Los Angeles, Humanities for the Environment, Global Futures Laboratory, and Humanities Institute.

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