



Winemaker: Francesco Cucurullo
Generation: 2nd



Syrah Sicilia DOC

Favoring typicity over largesse, hands-on Sicilian producer Francesco Cucurullo chooses not to oak his elegant, high altitude, small-batch Syrah. After an early September harvest, the wine simply spends 4-5 months in concrete before bottling. The end result is a wine that is powerful in terms of structure, but nuanced in terms of fruit. Subtle, Mediterranean layers like oil cured olive, tarragon, fennel and tar add to the wine's intrigue and complexity. Only 400 cases made from just a single hectare of vines!

WINEMAKER BIOGRAPHY

Although they have degrees in economics and law, respectively, Francesco Cucurullo and his sister, Carolina, come from a long line of proud Sicilian farmers and have recently fallen back in love with the vine. Located in the high, rolling hills of Caltanissetta, north of Agrigento, they run an independent, organic farm that produces wheat, olive oil, apricots, peaches... and of course a fantastic array of small-batch, monovarietal wines.

ENOLOGIST

Emiliano Falsini

TASTING NOTES

Color Deep ruby
Nose Dark cherry and oil cured olive with touches of tarragon, fennel frond, hide, and crushed quartz
Palate Sophisticated, with great weight, bright fruit, and hint of tar
Finish Balanced and terroir-driven



VINEYARD & VINIFICATION

Vineyard Location	Sicilia DOC, Sicily
Vineyard Size	1 ha
Varietals List	100% Syrah
Farming Practices	Certified organic; indigenous yeasts; hand-harvested grapes
Elevation	480 m
Soils	Red clay and white limestone mix
Maturation Summary	In concrete barrels for 5 months and bottled for 4 months
Alcohol	14.5 %
Annual Production	5,000 bottles



REGION

SICILY

A Mediterranean crossroads and Italy's largest autonomia, Sicily has been home to winemaking for some 6000 years. In the 8th century BC, the Greeks brought more advanced viticultural techniques to the island, and a brisk trade with Phoenicians and Romans ultimately followed. In more recent centuries, Sicily has been known mainly as a bulk provider of wine grapes – with the focus primarily on quantity – but that reputation is swiftly changing. In the 1980s and 1990s, Sicily's unusual terroir and potential for fine wines finally began to garner attention. Much of the acclaim was initially directed at international staples like Chardonnay and Syrah, but starting in the 2000s, natives like Nero d'Avola and Nerello Mascalese began taking their rightful place center-stage.

A trio of red grapes in particular are driving Sicily's growth today: Nero d'Avola, with its brambly fruit, juicy acidity, and softer tannins, is the most widely planted and wines are often fresh, unoaked, and affordable; Frappato, another easy-drinker with supple tannins, is mostly used as a blending grape; Nerello Mascalese, the powerful, elegant, and sometimes spicy or mineral-driven baseline for Etna reds, is second in volume to Nero d'Avola, but has been rising along with the DOC's popularity. White varieties of note include Cataratto, the most widely planted and often a starting point for Marsala; Grillo and Insolia, a pair of medium-bodied grapes that provide dry but substantive wines; and Carricante, the lush but zippy force behind Etna Bianco. With its dry, Mediterranean climate, Sicily affords its 23 DOCs and single DOCG abundant sunshine, moderate winter rainfall, and constant coastal breezes. As a result, the island's also well-suited to organic farming and the natural wine movement.

SICILIA DOC

Spanning the entirety of the island, the Sicilia DOC was upgraded from the original IGT in 2011, with the primary goal of promoting Sicily's native varieties. Although internationals like Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon are technically permitted, there is an unspoken agreement amongst many producers that the appellation be applied to Sicilian natives like Nero d'Avola, Frappato, and Grillo (to name a few). For better or worse, the DOC Sicilia doesn't supply nearly as much information on terroir as the island's other, smaller appellations. For example, because producers may include grapes from anywhere in Sicily, there's no way to know offhand where they were harvested; on the windswept coast, up a volcanic mountainside, or Sicily's scorching interior? Further, winemakers are allowed to collect fruit from multiple zones and then blend, so grapes may not have come from a single area. Because it's so open-ended and inclusive, this DOC has been called a "wild west" appellation, although to be fair, it's also helped to reduce maximum yields and encourage quality over quantity on the island. Currently, the zone includes over 56,000 acres of vineyards (out of Sicily's total 261,000).

To qualify for the DOC, a bianco must contain a minimum of 50% Ansonica (Insolia), Catarratto, Chardonnay, Grecanico Dorato, and/or Grillo. Rossi and rosati must include a minimum of 50% Frappato, Nerello Mascalese, Nero d'Avola, Perricone, and/or Syrah. Along with a lengthy list of other authorized grapes, any of these may also display the varietal given a minimum of 85% in the bottle. There are no aging requirements, and both sparkling and sweet wines are also permitted.



MASSERIA DEL FEUDO

A century ago, Francesco Cucurullo's great-grandfather bought his first parcel of land from the local Marchese and began a pastoral, Sicilian career harvesting corn and wheat. 20-30 years later, his grandfather added dairy cows to the equation and, eventually, Francesco's own dad, Salvatore, began planting fruit orchards and then vines. Today, Francesco and his sister, Carolina, have 110 hectares of farmland: 70 are still devoted to a combination of grain, hay, apricots, plums, and peaches; 5 hectares are planted with olive groves and 15 are currently covered by vineyards. All their vines are certified organic, are planted on a gradual slope, and include one (recently planted) hectare each of Frappato and Nerello Mascalese. While he and Carolina both initially aspired to other careers, they have both more recently been called back to their family's land and fallen in love with enology. Ever patient, their father helped with their training and, as a family, they replaced all the international varieties once sold to the local co-op (except Syrah, whose spicy component they love), electing instead to bottle their own brand and focus almost entirely on local, Sicilian grapes. That said, wine remains just one part of Masseria del Feudo's vascular whole: "When people come," says Francesco, "we love to have them visit the whole farm, not just the winery... we love to have them taste our plums and peaches, and to understand that wine, too, is a product of agriculture, not industry."

While Masseria del Feudo's average annual production is 80,000 bottles, warmer temperatures have seen this number decrease in certain years (for example, in 2021, when the quality ran high but only 50,000 bottles were made). Located between the Valley of Temples in Agrigento and the Nissenti Hills of Caltanissetta, their high plateau only receives about 15 cm of rain per year... so working their land inch by inch, staying nimble in the field, and listening to the vines is crucial to their success as winemakers over time. We have no doubt in their heartfelt abilities, of course, and with a stellar Pet Nat already under wing, can't wait to see what artisanal, countryside creation they dream up next!