



Italian Fairs ... and Salami

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Rick Gush

Friday, March 13, 2009

Photo by Rick Gush

Hunter's products often end up among the exotic salami booths at the annual fairs. While we're waiting for it to stop raining, what we farmers in Italy do is go to the various fairs.

Last week there was one in my town of Rapallo and I went with my friend Richard, who is a retired English submarine officer.

Richard and his wife have a really nice home and small farm in the hills near the ultra-chic coastal town of Portofino.

This year Richard harvested a ton and a half of olives from his terraces and took them to a local olive press where they made 60 gallons of olive oil.

Richard and I are both fans of the hot sausage sandwiches available at these fairs, and we're both known to occasionally purchase delicacies from the exotic salami booths.

The principal farm pests in this area are the gangs of wild boar that roam the woodlands, often coming down at night to wreak havoc among the cultivated terraces of the local residents.

The young pigs are striped like big chipmunks and sort of cute when one encounters them while hiking in the woods, but the adults are grumpy, dangerous characters who can uproot an entire vegetable garden during an evening stroll. Italians call them chingiale (cheen ghee-awl aay).

Richard has trouble with the chingiale knocking down the rock walls that make his terraces, because the pigs like to root among the rocks looking for plant roots.

There are a fair number of locals who head into the hills with their rifles during the winter boar hunting season, and although the hunters often use semi-wild hunting dogs to flush their prey, the wily pigs escape more often than not.

But every year, many wild pigs are killed, and they are eaten with relish. Wild pig roasts, wild pig cutlets and wild pig hams are prized seasonal dishes in local homes and restaurants. But the most common wild pig products are clearly the salamis, and there are a number of small butchers who specialize in making wild boar salami.

I like the idea that the small farmers in Italy have turned one of their worst farm pests into a food source. Some sort of circular justice. Richard and I each purchased a chingiale salami at the fair this year.

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