

## Rome stages big cheese bailout for Parmesan

By Peter Popham  
IN ROME

PARMIGIANO REGGIANO, Italy's King of Cheese, is in trouble. Robust in flavour and crumbly, it is a classic of Italy's artisan food traditions, made by hand by 430 craft producers around the city of Parma. But with Italian consumption falling as costs soar, almost a third of producers now face bankruptcy. Now Italy's Minister of Agriculture, Luca Zaia, has come to the rescue, promising to buy 100,000 Parmigiano Reggiano cheeses, and also 100,000 of its less costly competitor, Grana Padano.

This is Italy's big cheese bailout. Essentially, the government will be gobbling up 3 per cent of Parmesan production at an estimated cost of €50m (£44.7m) and distributing it to the

needy. Each 35kg wheel of Parmigiano costs between €8 and €8.50 to make, but the wholesale price has declined for the past four years even as the cost of milk and energy has soared.

"We just need a bit of time to reorganise ourselves," said Giorgio Apostoli of Coldiretti, Italy's agriculture lobby. "This is a historic product with an ancient tradition. There ought to be policies to safeguard those who produce it."

But Professor Giuliano Noci, of the Milan Polytechnic, said a better solution would be for the government to

"launch a sustained marketing campaign in the emerging markets such as Brazil, Russia and India, to educate consumers to appreciate the quality" of the cheese.

