

Can cannabis gelato change Italy's attitude to weed?

By **Pietro Lombardi**, for CNN

🕒 Updated 1006 GMT (1806 HKT) March 1, 2016



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The flavor is named after Bob Marley. Probably not because the reggae legend loved gelato.

Story highlights

Italian gelato shop Perleco makes a gelato using shelled hemp seeds

Perleco's owners and activists say it can help fight cannabis stigmatization in Italy

Other local food stores to offer cannabis pizzas and liquors

(CNN) — What's Italian for munchies?

A town on Italy's Riviera coast has begun selling a weed-infused gelato that campaigners hope could change the country's attitude to cannabis.

[Perleco](#), a gelato parlor in [Alassio](#), recently launched the gelato -- named Marley after reggae legend Bob.

But while it sounds like a weed fiend's dream, its makers say the frozen treat isn't going to get anyone high.

"Cannabis has a very intense flavor," Aldo De Michelis, who created the flavor with son Mauro and wife Emanuela Baudana, tells CNN.



Marley is among the best-selling flavors, according to one of its creators.

"At first it tastes like nuts, but the aftertaste is strong. That's why it took us a month to find a good recipe."

The gelato is made with shelled hemp seeds, which De Michelis says contain minimal and legal traces of tetrahydrocannabinol, the psychoactive ingredient in Cannabis.

Surprisingly, De Michelis says the shop's weed-infused range of treats, which includes chocolate bars and ganache, came about for health reasons.

"I'm a runner and I love competing in marathons," he says. "But I am a vegetarian too. Therefore I needed food rich in protein to replace meat.

"Cannabis is one. That's how I started using extra-virgin cannabis oil and similar products, and how the idea of this gelato flavor came about."

Perleco also produces chocolate bars and ganache with hemp seeds.

"We wanted to create something tasty and healthy," he adds.

In an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic country like Italy, cannabis is a controversial issue and legislation is complicated.

Recreational use is punishable but medical marijuana -- often sold at 10 times the price of illegal pot available on the street -- has been legal since 2013 for patients with a prescription.

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The arrival of a weed-infused gelato has caused a stir.

Other local food stores have boarded the hemp-seed train selling extra-virgin cannabis oil, cannabis liquor and pizzas.

"When we announced the new flavor, we received up to 10 phone calls per day," De Michelis says. "Some kids even came thinking they could get high with our gelato."

De Michelis's family hopes its invention will help spread the nutritional benefits of cannabis, freeing the plant from its notoriety.

"Time has come for Italy to rediscover the versatility of this plant, including its medical and, why not, recreational use," De Michelis says.

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"We connected the shop with the seed sellers," he tells CNN.



He points out that Italy was one of the world's main producers of cannabis for industrial use until the 1960s, before it became stigmatized and linked almost exclusively to recreational drugs.

His group campaigns for the legalization of cannabis and promotes its benefits as an economic resource and a healthy nutrient.

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"Initiatives like [the gelato] can help people understand that cannabis is not just a drug,"

he says.

"Things are changing in Italy. People and institutions have a more open approach to cannabis, but in some sectors the resistance is still strong."

Cultural change may take time, but the De Michelis's product seems to be melting resistance.

So much so that they're adding a marijuana sorbet to their range.

Other local food stores are also getting involved, offering cannabis pizzas and liquors.

"Marley is one of our best-selling flavors," Aldo De Michelis says. "Some customers come to Perleco just to enjoy it."

Perleco Il Gelato di Alassio, Via Torino 46, 17021 Alassio Italy;

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