

After Pro-Family Remarks, Pasta Maker Finally Bows to Homosexual Agenda

Italian pasta maker Barilla has reacted to the global storm caused by its chairman's comments that he would never use a gay family in his advertising by saying it planned to make the company more diverse and run a more inclusive TV ad campaign.

Guido Barilla's remarks to a radio interviewer in September led to calls by **gay rights** groups to boycott the products of the world's biggest pasta maker, a company more than 130 years old based in the provincial city of Parma.

Social media quickly spread the comments that gave rise to numerous Internet satires, including one widely posted on Facebook and Twitter showing the trademark blue Barilla pasta box with the letters "Bigotoni" on it rather than "Rigatoni."

Chairman Barilla, the 55-year-old great grandson of the company's founder, has since held at least eight meetings with gay organizations and activists both in Italy and in the United States, a market where it is counting on for growth outside its crisis-hit home market.

"Italy is a very insular country, and in cities like Parma it's even more so," company spokesman Luca Virginio told Reuters, saying the firm had been shocked by the global backlash.

"The meetings have helped open our eyes and ears to the evolution taking place in the world outside Parma."

He said the shock could lead to a shift in focus from rosy depictions of traditional Italian family life that have always been the staple of Barilla advertising campaigns.

“We are already working on new advertising concept that will be much more open and much more inclusive,” he said, without elaborating.

The pasta maker plans to introduce an advisory board that includes American gay activist David Mixner to improve “diversity and equality in the company’s workforce and culture”, according to a statement posted on its website.

However Carlos Dews, a gay English professor at Rome’s John Cabot University who has boycotted Barilla products and urged his Facebook friends to do the same, was sceptical.

He said the measures were a step in the right direction but it was too soon to tell whether they would bring any real change. “It may all be window dressing,” he said.

As well as the internal advisory board, Barilla will participate in the Human Rights Campaign’s corporate equality index, which rates companies’ policies relating to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employees.

Privately owned Barilla, which had almost 4 billion euros in sales last year, declined to say if the boycott had hurt sales but it cannot afford to offend consumers in the United States, now its second-biggest pasta market.

Last year net profit fell more than 21 percent to 60 million euros as Italy struggled through its worst recession in six decades.