

A bowl with a wide rim, a simple cloth napkin, and a silver fork. Paolo Barilla does not need anything else to present his product. Wearing an open-necked shirt, sweater, elegant blue sports jacket, and analogue watch on his left wrist, he is showcasing something typically Italian at his Academy—pasta made with his family’s top-secret recipe. The culinary institute, which is a cooking studio, is located in Pedrignano, Italy, north of Parma. Back in 1877, great-grandfather Pietro opened a bread and pasta shop (the first factory was built in 1910). The Barilla name quickly became synonymous with pasta. Paolo Barilla (58), a former race-car driver who won the 1985 24 Hours of Le Mans in a Porsche 956B, leads the pasta empire with the blue logo in what is now the fourth generation. Its products are not only the number one pasta in the kitchens of Italy. The company has twenty-eight production sites—half of which are located outside of Italy—and currently ships to around one hundred countries. Bakery and sweet goods have been added to its portfolio under a number of brand names, as well as sauces.



**Pure enjoyment**  
Paolo Barilla with the company’s classic products (above). Chef Roberto Bassi conjures dishes out of ingredients that are discarded in many kitchens.

The heart of the company is located right outside Parma: the world’s largest pasta factory. Over 2,000 tons of durum wheat arrive at the company’s own rail station every week. The grain is ground around the clock and then combined with water, and in some cases with eggs, to make pasta. No spices, flavors, or other substances are added. The quality is ensured by three factors. First, the ingredients: Barilla sets high standards, which are reflected in the contracts it signs primarily with local suppliers. Second, the shape: this determines which sauces go best with which products. For the world-famous Bolognese sauce it is not spaghetti, by the way, but fresh tagliatelle. And third, the drying process: classic spaghetti—product number five—spends fourteen hours in the oven at constant levels of heat and moisture. Barilla has long since perfected these parameters. One might think that pasta offers little leeway for innovation. But Paolo Barilla would beg to differ.

At the Academia Barilla, chef Roberto Bassi is preparing two unusual dishes today. He puts almond milk into the sauce instead of cream. And he is using the parts of artichokes, leeks, and celery that most people would throw away. The pasta itself is made of red lentils or chickpeas instead of durum wheat. These plants return nutrients to the soil and thereby help reduce the use of chemical fertilizers. The message behind today’s menu is clear: our meals need to become more sustainable and environmentally aware. The innovations



**“I’m an epicurean. But my pleasure should not come at the expense of our environment.”**

**PAOLO BARILLA**  
Vice Chairman of the Barilla Group

**Paolo Barilla**  
and his brothers Luca and Guido are the fourth generation to head the Barilla family company.

regarding vegetable pasta form a huge step for the Barilla Group on its mission to produce food while respecting the people and the planet.

“Quality is not only a question of taste but also of meeting people’s needs,” says Barilla in explaining his company’s philosophy. After the Second World War, the priority was on providing the population with as many calories as possible. Attention later shifted to offering more balanced nutrition. In the 1980s, the company turned its attention to the issue of product safety. The following decade saw an ever greater focus on nutrients. And today environmental issues play a role. “We want to make products that are good for people as well as the planet,” says this very courteous and charming Italian. His seriousness of purpose is immediately evident as he demonstrates how the carbon footprint of a meat-based meal is nearly three times as great as that of a vegan meal and requires almost twice as much water.

“I’m an epicurean—but my pleasure should not come at the expense of our environment,” says Barilla calmly. And his focus thereby is on the environment. Working together with scientists, he is trying to find ways to make pleasure sustainable. With the Barilla Center for Food & Nutrition, the company has not only created an independent think tank for food sustainability but also committed itself to using the resulting knowledge. “We have to listen to the scientists,” says Barilla. The company has already had to change its course as a consequence. “We gave up one of the best durum wheats we had ever procured. But producing it in an extremely dry part of Arizona simply required too much energy and water.” Barilla complied with the recommendation of his advisory committee to no longer use the wheat. That was in keeping with the ideas of the founder, who had wanted his company to be a force for good. This also means doing the right thing, even when no one knows about it.



# From Field to Fork: The Mega-Pasta Factory

The world's largest pasta factory is located in northern Italy. Its highly automated production processes were made more efficient with the help of Porsche Consulting.



**Video**  
In the world's largest pasta factory:  
[next25.de/EN/barilla](https://next25.de/EN/barilla)

Paolo Barilla also believes the company should take responsibility for improving the food situation of the world's growing population. "The industry needs to find solutions," he insists. There is already enough food to feed everyone, but it is not distributed everywhere. One-third of the food produced worldwide is discarded. "Our goal has to consist of making food affordable and available for everyone," he says. Accordingly, the company has come up with a simple appeal: "Eat less. Eat better. Food for all."

Another major issue, of course, is how food is produced. For example, Barilla has eliminated palm oil from its product range. The cheap and versatile ingredient used in many sweets is criticized by the European Food Safety Authority. Barilla has replaced it by a healthier saturated fat.

But Paolo Barilla is not neglecting the forest for the trees. "Everyone is talking about how plastics are affecting the global environment right now. But the plastics problem is only the tip of the iceberg," he says. The company has long since opted for cardboard packaging, but this is not nearly enough. All members of its value chain, from farming to distribution, are required to help attain greater levels of sustainability. "It won't work without cooperation," Barilla notes. The company wants to sign long-term contracts with its approximately five thousand farmers and thereby encourage sustainable production, despite the enormous price pressure in agriculture. Barilla offers fair remuneration for high quality products produced with less impact on the environment. Along with having lowered its overall water consumption by one-third and its greenhouse gas emissions by one-fourth, the company can show impressive environmental results. Cutting-edge technologies have played a role, for example, at the modern sauce factory in Rubbiano, which is located not far from company headquarters.

But Barilla goes far beyond producing food. The company places a premium on cooperation with distributors, advises them, and develops new shop concepts for them. For this, the Food Experts use digital technologies, for example in their 3-D theatre, where shop concepts can be experienced virtually.

The company is right at the center of the food industry's transformation, which is marked by ever greater availability of data throughout the supply chain and individualization of products and customer relationships. The former race-car driver is impressed by the speed of these changes. "Transformation means that we're one thing today and something else tomorrow," he says. He knows that his company has to put considerable effort into keeping up with start-ups and the speed of their innovations. "New companies don't have to first make changes; they can just get straight to work," he notes. Yet with 140 years of experience in his back, he is confident about the future. Barilla's bowl of pasta is now empty. Meals made from traditional family recipes disappear in a flash.

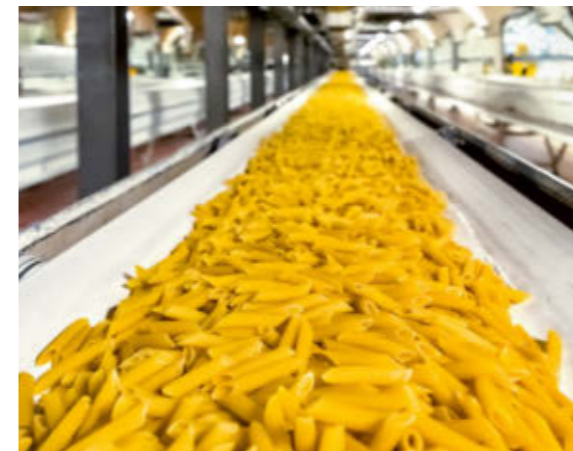


Photo GIAMPAOLO RICÒ PHOTO STUDIO

Barilla makes 25 percent of its pasta in the northern Italian town of Pedrignano (Parma) and ships it to more than one hundred markets worldwide. Wheat is brought straight to the factory by freight train, where it is ground into the main ingredient of every Italian pasta: durum wheat semolina.



Barilla stands for quality. A worker at the company's own laboratory examines the durum wheat semolina (large photo right). Employees constantly monitor production (right).



Production is largely automated. Robots and driverless transport systems handle the packaging processes (above). Data are analyzed in real time (center). Around 350,000 tons of pasta leave the factory every year.