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Jay-Z effect: white truffle traders hope for boost after rapper's endorsement

Hip-hop star and friends spend €15,000 on truffles on visit to northern Italy



Jay-Z, who has a history of making and breaking the reputations of luxury brands such as Cristal.

Photograph: Matt Rourke/AP

Tom Kington in Rome

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First it was Cristal champagne, Hennessy cognac and the prohibitively expensive Mercedes Maybach. Now, white truffle traders in northern Italy are wondering whether their rare, pricey and prestigious produce will be the next to see demand soar thanks to an endorsement from the hip-hop artist Jay-Z.

The multimillionaire rap star headed for Alba over the weekend with a group of friends to eat dishes such as egg, truffle and spinach ravioli and spend around €15,000 on more than three kilos of the precious tuber, according to the Italian daily La Stampa.

The rap star, who grew up on the tough streets of Brooklyn, even ventured into the woods of Piedmont with a local farmer and his dogs to search out specimens of the pungent truffle, which has made Alba famous among gourmets.

Jay-Z has a history of making – and breaking – the reputations of luxury brands. After rapping about the merits of Cristal champagne until it became the required tippie for rappers and sales boomed, he boycotted it when makers appeared to bemoan its association with the world of hip-hop.

Big spenders on white truffles currently include Chinese millionaires and Gulf sheikhs, who vie with each other to bag the biggest specimens in satellite-linked auctions.

But the managing director of Tartufi Morra, an Alba truffle retailer visited by Jay-Z this weekend, welcomed the prospect of a hip-hop clientele. "It would be a pleasure," said Alessandro Bonino.

Jay-Z and friends also visited local vineyards to taste variants of Barolo and Barbaresco, two highly prized local reds, and drank €10,000 worth of the wines in one local restaurant, reported La Stampa.

"I was really impressed by his knowledge of wine," said Luca Currado, who runs the Vietti di Castiglione Falletto winemaker visited by Jay-Z and treated him to truffle ravioli at dinner.