

This past year has been a year of consolidation for Olives New Zealand. It has not been an easy year for a largely new Executive elected at last year's Annual General Meeting. But it has been a year of development and a year where we have seen successes that I believe will set us in good stead for the year ahead.

At the beginning of our term the Executive agreed that 2010 would be a year of consolidation. The previous year had been rather tumultuous for Olives New Zealand and with a good number of new Executive members and a new Executive Officer required, we intended to be cautious. We began by reviewing the health and position of the organisation to which we had been elected. We developed an action plan at our first meetings, created sub-committees, delegated responsibilities to executive members and commenced a long process of settling, renewal and bridge-building between the various factions within our organisation.

One of the priorities set by the Executive was to meet with and be accessible to growers, particularly bearing in mind that we needed to hear member concerns and consider the various opinions and strategic suggestions offered from within the membership. With this in mind I have visited Marlborough, Canterbury, the Waiheke Island olive festival, the New Zealand Olive Festival at Hastings and met with growers from the Wairarapa, Hawke's Bay, Bay of Plenty, Wanganui, South Auckland, North Auckland and the Far North. The only region I have yet to visit is Otago.

The Executive remain open to receiving critique and we are certainly open to member suggestions, however, it is imperative that members take an active part in their local associations. Regional chairs add impetus and value to the Executive in both formulating our strategies and in implementing our goal of providing value for your membership fee.

The Regional Chairs met together yesterday and we held a combined meeting of Regional Chairs and the Executive today. Both meetings were extremely constructive and cohesive. So may I please encourage all of you to dialogue with your Regional Chair, but not only that, also to actively participate in your regional organisation. Olives New Zealand and the branches are voluntary organisations that derive benefit from member participation.

By December 2009 it was apparent our organisation was very constrained financially due to a number of factors, but mainly due to two previous consecutive conferences running at significant losses and ongoing commitments to SFF Research. The financial stability of the organisation was, and continues, to be of concern to us. We have set about increasing the priority of financial viability, therefore our Olives to Oil Processors Course ran at a surplus, our Certification process has run at a surplus and our Awards competition has run at a surplus. By surplus I mean anything from breakeven to “small, but positive cash inflows” – we are not making any significant cash surpluses from these activities, however, neither are they a drain on our already depleted financial resources.

It was with this in mind that we were faced with the unfortunate, but I believe realistic, decision to cancel this year's conference. We cancelled the conference due to low registration numbers as we could not under any circumstance afford to have any conference run at a loss. The Executive and Regional Chairs have discussed member feedback and reasons for the lack of member interest in the proposed conference at length yesterday (and...).

From the outside looking in, this has not been a year of great achievements and one of our major hold backs was the unfortunately long period of time it took to appoint a new Executive Officer. I cannot stand here today and expound the number of things we have succeeded in. But, I can and do hold hope for the future. Progress has been made in a number of directions and it is of great benefit to Olives New Zealand that the same Executive are available and continuing in the coming year. Our foundations are reasonably solid and we have begun to make progress in some areas such as the:

- Food safety plan
- Standards for Olive Oils (with Australia)
- Red dot – promotion and possible re-launch and virtues
- A new website
- Olive processors & growing course – held to improve our products
- Restoring our relationship with Plant & Food
- Promotion of our awards.

Some of these areas will become obvious (such as the new website when it is launched at the end of next week) and some will not be so apparent at membership level. You may have noticed also that some of these things are new and some are a re-working and review of previous processes. This reinforces my belief that we must first as an organisation have a strong and sustainable base to work from.

At present membership stands at 200. Am I disappointed? No. This organisation has had some ups and downs. We are working at creating and restructuring the value in being a member of this organisation and this cannot be done overnight, but, we intend to persist in the coming year.

On a lighter note, it is my pleasure to be able to offer congratulations to this year's award winners. It is pleasing to see the number of entries to both Certification and the Awards up this year and good to see such a wide array of regions represented in the awards list. I hope that you are all able to use the Awards and the Certification processes to your market advantage, and as we continue to develop our "red dot" that consumers continue to see benefit in the New Zealand certified product.

A very big thank you to the certification and awards panellists who freely give of their time, and to Plant and Food for their input into the certification processes. The judges and panellists have a difficult job and we are extremely appreciative of their input and skills in both processes. This year approximately 200 oils were certified and 100 oils entered in the ONZ awards.

Also I would like to mention Ross Legh's effort in this years awards & certification processes. These have both been time consuming and as Executive we believe Ross has done a fine job on our behalf. Our certification and awards processes are becoming more robust and able to stand up to scrutiny. This year the awards judging was held at the Kermadec Restaurant in Auckland and we thank them for their hospitality.

As I look back over the year I think it is important to acknowledge the input of the entire Executive in the operation of the organisation "Olives New Zealand". Each member of the Executive brings a different and yet complementary set of skills to the table and gives of their own time in a voluntary capacity. The addition of Lesley in February this year as Executive Officer has been hugely beneficial, especially as she has sought to bring clarification of previously recorded data and update systems.

I believe we are well poised for the coming year and I ask that you members participate in making 2011 a successful year for our organisation and in the production of our products.