

New Zealand Extra Virgin Olive Oil Awards – 2012 Judging



2012 New Zealand EVOO Awards Judges

Jenny Birrell, Rachel Priestly, Raffaella Delmonte, Peter Olson, Shane Cummins, Fernando Román Martínez

The 2012 New Zealand EVOO Awards attracted an entry of 44 oils from across the country. This was a good entry considering the difficult season experienced and there had been feedback from many entrants that they were not as happy with their oils as in previous years. There had also been comments from people who chose not to enter because they did not feel their 2012 oils were up to the required standard. Our Australian judges reported a similar situation in Australia and gave as an example the Sydney Royal which had only attracted 80 entries.

The Judging Panel was comprised of trained EVOO tasters with international experience as follows:

Spain – Fernando Román Martínez (Head Judge)

Australia – Jenny Birrell, Peter Olson and Shane Cummins

New Zealand – Rachel Priestly and Raffaella Delmonte

Note that this was the first time any of the international judges had judged in New Zealand so they were all very enthusiastic at the prospect.

The venue was the Food, Nutrition and Human Health Faculty at Massey University's Albany Campus. This meant that the Laboratory Supervisor and assistants were all independent of the olive industry. The tasting room is used for a variety of national awards and has been specially constructed for food and beverage tasting with six individual booths for the judges and tasting trays presented to them via a hatch from a controlled laboratory. In the laboratory the oils are stored at a consistent temperature and then poured by 'flight' (order) into the pre-heated tasting glasses.

Kay McMath was the Facilitator for the 2012 Awards and ran a Judging Workshop prior to the start of judging. This included discussing the programme for the two days and the procedures. Kay checked with the Judges for any possible conflicts of interest and there were none. The Assessment System was discussed; particularly that judging should focus on the positive attributes of the entries as they had all been successful in Certification. The Judges scores and comments are entered into a spreadsheet by the Facilitator and differently from previous years, there was to be no discussion during the judging. Kay emphasised the importance of consistency in judging and scoring the oils.

Alex Twentyman sat in as an 'Apprentice Judge' on the Workshop. Alex has become only the second olive oil taster to achieve Associate status in the International Extra Virgin Olive Oil Savantes programme. Alex said he really enjoyed the experience of being involved with the Judging Panel.

Calibration of tasting was covered next. This involved the Judges tasting a variety of oils typical of the Awards classes and reviewing how scoring should work. This is necessary given the broad and different backgrounds of the Judges. So there was a lot of swirling, sniffing, slurping and sipping going on. It was interesting, whilst they scored independently, the Judges all scored very similarly. Initially the calibration was done round table and then a second done in the booths in judging conditions. Once again the scoring was very similar. Note that oils presented to judges during calibration and judging are 'blind' coded samples in blue tasting glasses, so identification of the oils is impossible.



Calibration Exercise left to right
– Alex, Rachel, Peter, Jenny, Shane, Raffaella, Fernando



Judging of the oils started in the afternoon with the Light and Intense entries. Feedback from the Judges was that they tasted some very nice oils. The following morning the Medium entries were judged. That left the afternoon to review the scores and confirm the highest scoring oils in each class. This was carried out round table but the judges again tasted and scored individually, then reported back whether they considered the oil should be Bronze, Silver, Gold or No Award. If there was a variation in the medal nominated, the total scores were compared and majority decision was taken.

Bright and fresh at the start of day two, heading into the booths

In summary the Judges said that they had tasted some beautiful oils, reflected in the medals awarded and Best in Show award was a clear winner. They said there was good aroma generally but some oils lacked balance and palate, and blending needs work.

At the conclusion of judging, Kay Mc Math thanked all of the judges for their participation and the way in which they had adopted the Mario Solinas judging system which was new to the Australians. The judges responded that they had all very much enjoyed the experience and that, despite the difficult season, they had tasted some beautiful oils. Fernando said that he had found the New Zealand Awards very professionally conducted, more so than he had previously experienced internationally.

Thanks to GEA Westfalia who extended the invitation to Senor Martinez to judge at the 2012 Awards and for their sponsorship of Olives New Zealand, which enables us to have international judges. Thanks also to Judges, our Facilitator Kay Mc Math and the Massey University personnel.



The Executive Officer is an APB (All Purpose Bird). The tally for washing and then sterilising blue glasses; Tuesday–200, Wednesday–250, Thursday–300+. And there were no breakages!