

Southern Spain in January 2014

Last January Andrew, Delyth and Dylan Taylor, Geoff and Andi Crawford, Shona Thompson and Bob Marshall travelled to Spain to view the end of their olive harvest and processing season. The visit was centred on contacts in Seville, Cordoba and Ubeda in southern Spain.

In Seville we were hosted by Dr Fernando Martinez, Head Judge at the 2012 Olive New Zealand EVOO competition. Visits included three olive oil co-operatives (Trisasur S.L., Olivar de Huelva, Basilippo), Instituto de la Grasa (Gov't fats and oils research institute), a table olive co-operative (Cobelan) and a research laboratory which had 4 different makes of olive oil processing plants and did research on oil extraction and quality processes. The size of the operations was staggering to us – the combined table olive/olive oil cooperative we visited on the last day in Seville processed 15 million tons of table olives and 17 million tons of olives for oil annually! We also had an interesting visit to OFM (Olives and Food Machinery) who sell new and renovated table olive processing equipment.

After 4 days the group caught the train to Cordoba. The trip confirmed that we were in the middle of olive country – for 2 hours, all you could see were olive trees to the horizon. In Cordoba, Javier Moya (who presented at the 2011 ONZ conference in Kapiti) and Angjelina Belaj from IFAPA (a government research group similar to our Crown Research Institutes) took us to the World Olive Germplasm Bank, a 'library' (grove) of olive tree varieties (840+ varieties!) and showed us their DNA analysis and tree breeding programmes.

After 3 days in Cordoba Geoff and Andi left to fly back to NZ, and the rest of us drove to Ubeda, the Spanish centre for GEA Westfalia. On the way we noticed a grove being harvested and stopped to watch. The owner of the grove noticed us and invited us, with lots of arm waving and smiles (Geoff, where were you when we needed a Spanish speaker!) to come closer and see what they were doing. The entire grove was old piqual trees, with trunks 400-500 mm in diameter and 5-6 smaller (100-150 mm diameter) branches. Interestingly, none of the trees would have been more than 2.5 m high. They were using a combination of an enormous Pellenc tree vibrator as well as 3-4 people with sticks beating the branches to get the olives onto the nets on the ground. They looked to be averaging 30-40 kg/tree and this was confirmed (we think!) by the owner. In Ubeda we were hosted by Juan Vilar (who also presented at the 2011 ONZ conference in Wellington) and Jose Bautista of GEA Westfalia. Amazing range of processing plants – ever seen a malaxer capable of taking 8 tonnes at a time? In Ubeda we also visited a small processing plant – 70 tonnes per day, processing for one grower – it was the smallest line we saw in Spain.

Overall the trip was very useful, in that it confirmed that what we are doing here is in line with the best practices internationally. There were some interesting ideas in EVOO marketing and presentation, and in the structure of the co-operative businesses. On top of that, the people were wonderful and the hospitality and food fantastic.

The Spain Travellers