

Australian National Olive Conference

Mildura, Victoria

14 – 16 September 2015

My thanks to the Executive for allowing me to attend the Australian National Olive Conference. There were a number of presentations extremely relevant to the New Zealand industry and the opportunity to attend the AOA Awards Dinner and visit to Boundary Bend a real bonus. It was excellent to be able to meet the team from the Oil Testing Service, a number of members of their organoleptic panel (who told me by the way that they had tasted some excellent NZ EVOOs this year!!), as well as my colleagues at AOA and various industry exhibitors. There were almost 100 delegates and 14 exhibitors. Kiwi attendees included Andrew and Delyth Taylor and Jocelyn and Sandy Black, Central Otago. Here follows the key points noted from the conference.

World Olive Oil Market Update – Nick Healey, Boundary Bend

Nick said that international consumption has typically been pretty equivalent to international production. The recent dips in production have been met from stock piled oil but have also resulted in an increase in price. The countries to have had a drop in production are Spain, Italy and Greece.

The EU market for olive oil has levelled and other markets increased. The average international price is AUD6.18 per litre.

Imports into Australia have been steadily reducing. The market currently comprised 43% local oil and 56% imported, whereas 10 years ago the figures were 7% and 93% respectively. The variation in international pricing up until the present time has not been reflected in supermarket pricing. There is either no profit in the supermarket pricing or the fact there is no price differentiation between EVOO and non EVOO is balancing out the pricing.

1/3 of Australian sales are outside of the supermarket sector, for example food service, specialty stores, direct sales. There is a move away from cans to glass bottles because of a perception that the latter is fresher and better. That is good news because the bulk cans retail at AUD5.67 per litre compared with bottles at AUD11.16 per litre. Retailers are moving to their own brands and supply channel rather than working with importers to cut out the middleman. The importers are not happy with this situation and retaliation may be expected!

It is critical that the local industry continue to focus on quality. The worst scenario would for the local industry to be caught out.

Latest Evidence on the Proven Health Benefits of the Mediterranean Diet – Dr Catherine Itsiopoulos

Catherine works at La Trobe University where there is a team involved in research on the health benefits of the Mediterranean diet. There is evidence of olive presses dating back to 5,000BC!

There have been various studies and over long periods of time all with the same results about the health benefits of the Mediterranean diet. In Australia for example, the Melbourne Collaborative Cohort Study proved that it reduces the incidence of heart attacks and strokes by 50%.

The key to the Mediterranean diet is 4 x plant foods to 1 x animal food. For example:
106g tomatoes + 466g other vegetables + 45g meat.

The keys to the Mediterranean food diet include foods high in polyphenols (legumes, EVOO) and herbs and spices (oregano, rosemary, thyme, marjoram and tarragon).

New projects underway include research into reversal of depression, type 3 diabetes, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease and cognitive decline.

Pest and Disease Management – Dr Robert Spooner

The biggest issues in Australia are black scale, olive leaf bug and anthracnose. The biggest issues internationally and threats to biosecurity are olive fly, olive thrips, olive moth, verticillium wilt and recently xfd.

The key to pest and disease management is to monitor your grove at least monthly and use a magnifying glass on your leaves. Pests and disease must be detected as soon as possible to be able to treat effectively as firefighting is too late.

Australian Smoke Point Research Project – Dr Jamie Ayrton

It is known that thermal degradation occurs but most of the data around olive oil is anecdotal not scientific. It is apparent that olive oil is well suited to shallow frying, sautéing and stir frying. Half of the conference attendees also indicated that they use olive oil for deep frying.

The aims of the project are:

- Measure the smoke points in Australian EVOO and VO
- Measure other factors (FFA, FAP)

The testing will be done using simultaneous evaluations using 2 different types of NIR machines. A report and fact sheets will be produced and the project is scheduled for completion by May 2016.

Rejuvenation in the Hunter Valley – Marcelo Berlanda

The drivers for the Hunter Valley project were:

- Low crop loads and yields
- Poor fruit, poor oil
- Alternate bearing/lack of consistent production.

Eight groves were initially involved in the project at a cost of \$20,000 plus expenses.

The strategies were:

- Pruning
- Irrigation
- Increasing organic matter in the soil
- Replacing/pulling out poor performing varieties
- Improving grove management (weekly monitoring of moisture levels, signs of pests and diseases)
- Effective spraying (equipment, timing, dosage, penetration)
- Monitoring tree nutrition requirements annually.

The results have been an increase in crop loads, yields and consistency.

The Olive Route Project – Chris Mercer

The aim of this AOA project is to increase consumer demand for Australian EVOO in China. The focus is premium quality at premium pricing. The \$1.2m project includes:

1. Export Certification (Exporters Handbook produced and workshops underway)
2. Establish competitive advantage
3. Raise consumer awareness.

A consumer survey was conducted in China of affluent and upper middle class people. The key fact for this group is safe food. Food is very important, accounting for a spend of 1/3 of their disposable income. China is seen as an unsafe environment for food production because of pollution of land, water and air. The survey showed that 92% use olive oil for cooking, 49% use olive oil for beauty. Considerations in buying EVOO include certification, country of origin and original packaging.

There is an ambitious plan including social media and e-commerce. More ambitious is the Event Centre Concept at an estimated additional \$500,000. This would include tasting and event centres in 2 locations including a showroom and retail sales.

The project will also look at authenticity technology in the labelling which can be checked via a smart phone.

The Effect of Phthalates in Olive Oil – Paul Miller/Claudia Guillaume

The issue is the contamination of food, including oil, by the DEHP compound used in plastics. There is random testing of imports into China and already shipments of olive oil have been rejected.

Tests of supermarket olive oil have shown levels of 0.5 – 3.00ppm. The limit in China is 1.5ppm. Tests have been carried out of storage tanks and all exceeded the allowable limit, with smaller tanks having a higher level. DEHP has been detected at all stages of processing, including in the washing water. DEHP migrates from water to olive oil and increases over time in stainless steel storage.

Contamination happens at all production stages as below.

Before	During	After
Fertilisers	Equipment	Storage tanks
Sprays	Water	Cleaning agents
Water	Cleaners	Water
Environmental	Environmental	Time
		Packaging including plastic, tins, pourers

Modern Olives Laboratory has developed and tested a methodology for detecting the level of phthalates and this is to be verified by other laboratories.

Biological Growing Methods – Rowan Berecny

This presentation was about growing methods with Queen Garnett Plums. The goals are to reduce the use of chemicals and fertilisers and use healthy predators to manage pests and disease. There is a focus on plant nutrition using compost to balance major nutrients and get the soil working. Weed control is managed with mulch and using clover as ground cover.

Nutritional Needs of Olive Trees – Leandro Ravetti

Soil nutrition is a most important factor in growing trees including calcium, nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium and magnesium.

Techniques of Selling – Panel discussion

This included case studies of Farmers Markets, farm gate sales, specialist cafes and stores and website sales.

Boundary Bend Field Trip

This was the highlight of conference for me.

Boundary Bend was established in 1998 and comprise two key groves plus other smaller groves. Boundary Bend covers 3,500 hectares with 1.3m trees, Bort covers 2,550 hectares with 900,000 trees.

Rob McGavin, CEO, gave an excellent presentation to start, including observations on the imported products. Unfortunately I left my notes in the motel room, and it is a shame that this presentation has not been made available to attendees. However, some key points were:

- Backward integration – tree nursery and harvester development
- Forward integration – Modern Olives Lab
- All batches produced have three tests to determine shelf life and the lowest of these is used.
- “No other plant food has more proven health benefits than EVOO” – this quote was referenced.

Claudia Guillaume also gave a presentation on olive oil quality, defects and causes.

The field walk included looking at planting methods, grove rejuvenation, pruning and irrigation. Impressive harvest data includes 8kg from 4 year old trees, 65kg from Picual and 45kg from Arberquina.

The processing plant tour was incredible because of the size and sophistication. Trucks deliver 22 tons of fruit and within one hour of arrival, the oil is processed and in the preliminary storage tanks. The pips are used to fuel the plant and the other waste goes into a settling pond and then used as compost.

Photo Gallery

Australian National Olive Conference - Delegates



Conference – Writing Activity



Conference Exhibitors

Constante Imports





Boundary Bend Field Day

Pruning Demo



2 year old tree – 4kg harvested



Picual Fruit



Irrigation Pond



Irrigation Pump Room



Malaxers and Centrifuges



Separators



Malaxer and Centrifuge



Soft Waste Settling Pond

