

BEYOND EXTRA VIRGIN 2009

SOME KEY IDEAS PRESENTED

DEFINING EXCELLENCE

- Conventional wisdom often equates “extra virgin” with excellence. However, the grade of extra virgin allows for a wide range of quality - from unexceptional to excellent. The focus of *Beyond Extra Virgin* is on excellence: how it tastes, how to produce it, how to sell it, and how to use it in the kitchen. *Dan Flynn, executive director, UC Davis Olive Center, CA*
- Excellence in olive oil can only be achieved with a clear set of requisites that are clear, precise, relevant, consistent, rigorous and honest. TRE-E’s analytical standards (for example: 0.3 percent acidity, <7.5 peroxide value) exceed the international standards, but in addition, TRE-E seeks to have documented transparency in production and distribution, an excellent sensory profile, and adherence to ten critical control points of quality. *Dr. Claudio Peri, president, TRE-E, Milan, Italy*
- Chianti once was a poor area that made very bad wines in very small quantities. Bettino Ricasoli, who was born 200 years ago in Florence, decided that Chianti could make wines that could compete with the best French wines in the international market. Likewise Robert Mondavi decided that he wanted to make wines in the Napa Valley that would compete with the best wines in the world. These men did not say that they wanted to make a better wine, or a common wine. They wanted to be the best, to commit to excellence. The point is that if you want to build a pyramid of quality you should start from the top and not from the bottom, from excellence, not from common standards. *Dr. Claudio Peri, president, TRE-E, Milan, Italy*

HEALTH AND DIET

- A high degree of adherence to the traditional Mediterranean diet has been associated with a reduction in overall, cardiovascular, and cancer mortality, and also with the incidence of neurodegenerative diseases. High quality extra virgin olive oil, particularly with high phenolic compounds, offers the most health benefits. *Dr. Maribel Covas, Head of Cardiovascular Risk and Nutrition Research Group, Institut Municipal d’Investigació Mèdica (IMIM), Barcelona, Spain*
- Olive oil is more than a monounsaturated fat, as its phenolic content can also provide benefits for plasma lipid levels and oxidative damage. In studies virgin olive oil has shown to have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, act in the prevention of lipoperoxidation, induce favorable changes of the lipid profile, improve endothelial

function, and disclose antithrombotic properties. The Mediterranean diet, especially rich in virgin olive oil is associated with higher levels of plasma antioxidant capacity. *Dr. Antonia Trichopoulou, professor, University of Athens, Greece*

- The Greek diet, deeply rooted in culture and rich in tradition, is used as an example of combining different ingredients with health aspects to create a beneficial dietary pattern. Data also provides the macronutrient, antioxidant, vitamin, and mineral content of foods typical in the Greek diet as evidence of the diet's healthy attributes. *Dr. Antonia Trichopoulou, professor, University of Athens, Greece*
- Greece is the world's largest consumer of olive oil per capita. Olive oil is integral to Greek cuisine, from salads in which the oil becomes a sauce at the bottom of the bowl waiting to be sopped up by a piece of bread, to "ladera" (often one-pot, vegetable or bean olive-oil-based dishes) in which the oil is used both as the cooking fat and raw as a flavoring for the dish, to seasonal vegetables bathed in olive oil, to the wide range of sweets that incorporate olive oil. *Diane Kochilas, author, The Glorious Greek Kitchen, Athens, Greece*
- Since extra virgin olive oil, rich in monounsaturated fat and polyphenols, is associated with a lower mortality rates from coronary heart disease, it can be considered a functional food. Functional foods prevent disease, pump up performance, and promote overall wellness. Research that links diet to health and wellness is an important functional food driver that could optimize olive oil production. *Clare Hasler, executive director, Robert Mondavi Institute for Wine and Food Science, UC Davis, CA*

SENSORY PROFILE

- An Australian study shows that expert tasters are better able to differentiate among styles of olive oil (delicate, medium and robust) than olive oil producers are. The style of extra virgin olive oil determines how the oil is best used. So correctly communicating about style is crucial. Evaluating olive oil with consideration of polyphenol levels will assist in accurately identifying the style of the oil. *Richard Gawel, consultant taster and blender, Adelaide, Australia*
- IRTA and the Catalan olive oil industry represent two positive examples of the use of sensory analysis to drive innovation in the agricultural and food sectors and facilitate applied research and technology transfer. Research has affirmed the importance of understanding consumer behavior, attitudes, and acceptability of olive oil. Part of our sensory research is examining new descriptors for olive oil. Research also shows the importance of inter-laboratory comparison of studies and technological innovation in kitchen science. Spanish restaurants, ranked at the top levels in the world, have promoted olive oil innovations such as an olive oil-filled olive gelee. *Lluís Guerrero, manager of sensory laboratory, IRTA, Monells, Spain*

- Sensory evaluation can be a useful tool in describing and communicating excellence in olive oil. The role of this evaluation must be re-thought in order to give way to more of an emphasis on the sensory diversity among oils. This can be done by means of descriptive analysis, more attention to consumer affective responses to olive oil in relation to culinary usage, more attention to their sensory functionality, and finally more attention to the relationship between oil sensory profile and culinary use, according to chef's creativity within and across food cultures. *Dr. Erminio Monteleone, professor, University of Florence, Italy*
- Studies by Instituto de la Grasa demonstrate how analytical chemistry techniques can be used to correlate the volatile compounds to the sensory attributes of extra virgin olive oil. These biochemical applications can further be used to explain the origins of olive oil defects, improve the designation of extra virgin olive oils, and predict the quality and sensory attributes of the olive oil before processing. *Dr. Ramón Aparicio, research professor, Instituto de la Grasa, Seville, Spain*
- Making extra virgin olive oil is relatively easy when you use good fruit, handled carefully, processed quickly on clean equipment, stored well and sold within one year. Almost all California oils are extra virgin. Defects come from extremes such as severe olive fly infestation; frozen fruit; dirty processing equipment; severe fruit damage in harvesting, transport or storage; poor storage of oil. Many imported oils have defects such as rancidity and fustiness. To make the best oils requires attention to irrigation, climate, stress, maturity, handling, processing, and varietal influence on olive oil flavor. *Paul Vossen, farm advisor, UC Cooperative Extension, Santa Rosa, CA*

MARKETING

- In our studies consumers demonstrated the skill to describe commercially available extra virgin olive oils using 40 words/attributes. Among the oils evaluated sensory differences among extra virgin olive oils were independent of the country of origin. Our studies also revealed that there are a wide range of preferences for extra virgin olive oils among consumers. Some elements of success in the marketplace identified –premium, type, pricing, country of origin, and a clear communication language. *Herbert Stone, president, Tragon Corporation, Redwood City, CA*
- Olive oil faces several obstacles in the American food service industry. There is no culture of olive oil, the oil is often served with bread and cheap balsamic vinegar, and the oil is often rancid or otherwise defective. For the food-service operator olive oil is currently a cost to be minimized, not a source of profit. The Culinary Institute of America will confront these obstacles by offering visitors super-premium olive oil stored under pristine conditions at a new tasting bar. Through this initiative the CIA seeks to create a national reference point for olive oil excellence in the food service industry, and to transform olive oil from a cost center into a profit center for food-service operators.

Greg Drescher, executive director of strategic initiatives, Culinary Institute of America, St. Helena, CA

- Quality olive oil can be a profitable venture if approached as both a business and an art. Villa Campestri resort in Tuscany has successfully created an enchanting experience around olive oil by combining science, mythology, and the culinary arts. Through the *oliveTolive* system developed at Villa Campestri we are able to earn 120 euros from every liter of olive oil we sell by offering a flight of three excellent olives oils, stored under optimal conditions, for a cost of 5 euros at the resort's restaurant. *Paolo Pasquali, owner, Villa Campestri, Vicchio, Italy*
- When marketing olive oil, avoid talking as if you are preaching to the converted. It's not what you mean, but what the customer hears that matters. Each demographic group needs a different use of the language to resonate. You need language to build trust, not fear or ridicule (the wine industry describes wine with terms like "cigar box" and "umami," which scares most people or makes them feel inadequate). You need to sell the benefits, not the features. You need to answer the question of "what's in it for them," although consumers do not always know what they want unless they see it, or how it can be used is made clear to them. Test in small steps to see what language works, then reinforce what works over and over again. Does the term "super-premium extra virgin olive oil" resonate with target customers? There's only one way to find out – by testing it. *Dan Strongin, president, Edible Solutions, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and Green Bay, Wisconsin*