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**STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE INTERNATIONAL OLIVE COUNCIL ON THE REPORT  
PRODUCED BY THE UC DAVIS OLIVE CENTRE**

A report issued by the UC Davis and Wagga Wagga laboratories concerning anomalies allegedly detected in olive oils imported into the United States has been brought to our notice by various associations and other information sources.

Speaking as the Executive Secretariat of the International Olive Council (IOC) we wish to begin by saying that the IOC is recognised to be the leading authority on all aspects of olive oil and table olives. The United States takes part in the work of the Organisation through the IOC quality control scheme and the meetings of the IOC chemists, and is kept permanently informed on these activities.

One of the most significant regulatory tasks of the IOC laid down in article 1(2) of the *General Objectives* of the International Agreement on Olive Oil and Table Olives, 2005 is to develop the definitions and analytical characteristics of all the grades of olive oils and olive-pomace oils included in the trade standards adopted by Members for compulsory application in international trade.

The standards drawn up by the IOC are trade standards. They are adopted by consensus of the Members, which pledge to incorporate them into their legislation. According to article 22(1) of the International Agreement, headed *Undertakings by Members*, the Members of the International Olive Council undertake to apply the designations prescribed in Annexes B and C of the Agreement in their international trade and to encourage their application in their internal trade. In addition, article 22(2) states that the Council of Members will determine quality criteria standards applicable to the international trade of the Members.

IOC standards are revised in the light of scientific advances that help to make testing methods more accurate, or of technological and commercial developments. Their aims are to enhance and control quality, as well as to ensure transparency on the international market for olive oils, olive-pomace oils and table olives, and to promote their consumption.

Every year the IOC assembles groups of expert chemists and sensory analysts from a range of countries, including the United States (USDA, AOCS), Australia and Germany, who study testing methods and revise them when necessary to determine the quality and control the purity of olive oils and olive-pomace oils. Methods are constantly being improved to adapt them to industry needs and technological developments.

Ever since it first started to be involved in the standardisation of olive products, the IOC has cultivated a solid cooperative relationship with a number of international organisations, including the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), the World Customs Organisation (WCO), the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) and the European Union. Its aim in doing so is to define the minimum compositional, quality and purity requirements of olive oils and to harmonise the methods of analysis in use. The Codex Alimentarius Commission is responsible for the joint FAO–WHO programme for the development of food standards with an eye to consumer health protection and fair trading. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) takes into account the standards and recommendations of the CAC in the application of the WTO Agreements on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement). The CAC standards for olive oils and table olives are currently under revision to bring them into line with the IOC trade standards, and all the producing countries that participate in IOC work are aware of the enormous efforts made to bring about such harmonisation.



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The IOC runs a quality recognition scheme for physico-chemical and sensory testing laboratories (tasting panels) aimed at increasing mutual confidence between testing facilities and heightening the confidence of the olive business sector in labs. Recognition is awarded on a yearly basis to labs and panels that fulfil the requirements stipulated by the IOC and which satisfactorily pass the proficiency check tests it holds every year.

In 2009/10 a total of 40 tasting panels obtained IOC recognition; 55 panels are currently taking part in the two check tests arranged for 2010/11. In the case of physico-chemical testing laboratories, 48 laboratories obtained IOC recognition in 2009/10 and 62 are currently participating in the 2010/11 ring test. The list of recognised laboratories and panels is posted on the IOC website and updated every year.

The test certificates issued by recognised panels can carry legal weight in disputes. Each country is responsible for official product control.

The IOC also sponsors a voluntary, self-regulatory scheme currently in place on a number of markets where exporters, importers and distributors of olive oil and olive-pomace oil are required to adhere to IOC standards in order to help achieve orderly market development and fair trading. In the case of North America (USA and Canada), this quality control scheme has been operating since 1991 under an agreement signed by the IOC with associations to undertake product quality control at recognised laboratories using updated methods of analysis and taking into account the designations and quality criteria specified in the IOC standards. Some 200 samples of imported oils sold in the United States are chemically tested every year by the IOC under the quality control scheme and the labelling is also checked to ensure that the product contents tallies with the labelling declarations. According to IOC findings, anomalies are detected in less than 10% of the imported oils analysed (the association concerned is notified the nature of the irregularities with a view to taking action).

To begin with, the UC Davis study reports results for only 52 samples of 19 brands, which is not statistically significant, and in some cases it does not provide customary details such as the date of collection, best before date, pack type, labelling information, etc. Also, when anomalies are detected in testing of this type, a second check test is usually carried out for confirmation purposes by another recognised laboratory; this has not been done in the UC Davis study. Moreover, it is important to point out that the methods used in the study (DGF and Australian standards) are not official chemical methods cited in international olive-oil-specific food or trade standards; they have however been adopted by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO). They were in fact presented to the IOC but were rejected after scrutiny because they were not reliable. This lack of reliability is the reason for their failure to be included in either the IOC trade standard or EU regulations, or consequently in the Codex Alimentarius standard.

Before a method of analysis is approved by the IOC it is necessary to conduct numerous ring-tests at laboratories to validate the reproducibility and repeatability of the method and to make sure that it does not give false "positive" or "negative" results which can have detrimental repercussions. The study also points to a correlation between UV absorbance and sensory analysis in some of the samples; however, it would be necessary to ascertain the method used for testing and to corroborate the results obtained.

It should be noted that the UC Davis study follows in the wake of recent reports of mislabelling of imported product in other countries based on similar work by the same team.



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To conclude, owing to the lack of data and the methodology applied, this study does not provide solid evidence that the oils tested do not meet US and international standards. We are clearly keen for this matter to be clarified and would be willing to cooperate in carrying out stringent, indepth testing involving the participation of a large number of laboratories.

We believe that the harmonisation and fulfilment of official standards, and the application of official methods, is of key importance in achieving greater transparency and fairer trading. It is important for the authorities of importing countries to harmonise and comply with the official established standards and it is their responsibility to guarantee product quality and protect consumers.

The IOC is a non-profit, intergovernmental organisation whose prime concerns include the prevention of fraud and the protection of consumers. As such, we intend to contact the US authorities to urge them to bring US standards even more closely into line with IOC standards in order to combat adulteration on a rigorous, scientific basis to avoid unfairly damaging the reputation of olive oil.

Madrid (Spain), 19 July 2010