

The „Harmony value“ as an improving factor for private label quality of EVOO in the EU

Dieter Oberg, Association for care and support of the value of Extra Virgin Olive Oil e. V., Germany, Founder and Deputy PSV German Olive Oil Panel.

Low price private labels and some low price brands of extra virgin olive oils generally offered in the European market have a bad image due to their sensory quality. But the market share of these buying sources is estimated to approx. 70 – 80 %. In Germany private labels have a share in the olive market of about 75 %. An olive oil belongs to the category EVOO if it has no defects and fruitiness higher than 0 in the sensory assessment by a COI accredited panel. This regulation does not take into account the wide range of possible sensory results between premium class EVOO and the ones of private labels in the super- and discounter markets.

Therefore the German Olive Oil Panel developed since 2002 an additional sensory test criterion called „harmony/balance“ which allows to differentiate all qualities within the category „EVOO“ as excellent, very good, good, standard, sufficient, not acceptable and really defect. This methodology was optimized and validated together with the SOP Panel of the HSZW in Wädenswil (CH).

In the actual project 67 samples were collected from various countries all over Europe. All samples belonged to the low price offers in supermarkets/discounter and were labelled as EVOO. The shelf life did not expire before October 2015 some of them were valid till October 2016. The samples have been tested by five panels in 5 different countries (4 of them COI accredited). Additionally, the main important analytical parameters have been determined by NIR. The results show a wide range of qualities in high quantities (private label brands with up to 10.000 t per year and more) in the low price segment offered in the European countries. And it shows that so called „borderline quality“ in most cases are familiar with the category „virgin“. The study as well can prove – taking the country Germany as an example - that intense controlling of the quality also of large quantities are extremely helpful for reaching certain quality benchmarks. Thus while using just one additional parameter at the end of the organoleptic assessment which is able to objectively differentiate Private Label Qualities. As a consequence it became possible to improve the dialogs in the Olive Oil quality chain in order to produce price relevant qualities of EVOO or generally to increase quality in mass markets.