

California Commission Releases Proposed Olive Oil Standards

The newly created Olive Oil Commission of California has made its recommendations for olive oil grade and labeling standards to the California Secretary of Food and Agriculture. The standards differ in some aspects from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and other organization's guidelines.

The Commission was created as a means for California olive oil producers and growers to self-govern their industry. The Commission's first board of directors was elected by their peers earlier this year with a mission of improving consumer confidence in olive oil quality and fostering growth in the industry.

The board held its first meeting in May 2014 and recently issued its report recommending grading and labeling standards applicable to California olive oil producers who generate 5,000 or more gallons per year. If the Commission recommendations become law, they will only apply to California oil but may eventually affect all U.S. and importer standards.

A few highlights for labeling standards include:

- Terms such as, "Pure," "Light," "Extra Light," and "Super Virgin" on olive oil labels should be prohibited because they mislead purchasers as to the oil characteristics.
- One hundred percent of the bottles of California oil should be from olives grown in California.
- If varietal names appear on the label, they should be listed in weight order.
- If the harvest date appears on the label, all oils in the bottle should have been harvested during the same harvest period.
- All labels should include information that allows for traceability of the oil throughout its growing and processing stages.
- Refined olive oil blend should not be labeled as olive oil.

Quality assurance measures are also detailed in the report. Some of the measures differ from other standards in use.

- There should be mandatory testing of olive oil using accredited labs. Grading will be based on test results. The recommended testing process is not yet fully developed.
- Free fatty acid content measures the quality of oil as affected by its fruit quality and care in handling. For Extra Virgin olive oil (EVOO), the free fatty acid content should be less than or equal to 0.5 (%m/m). The USDA standard and North American Olive Oil Association (NAOOA) standard is less than or equal to 0.8%.

- Peroxide values indicate levels of oxidation. For EVOO, the values should be less than or equal to 15.0 (meq O₂/kg oil). This is the same standard used by the Extra Virgin Alliance whereas the USDA and NAOOA standard is less than or equal to 20.0.

- "PPP," which measures oil degradation, and "DAGs" levels, which indicate oxidation or adulteration should be tested for EVOO. These measures are not included in the USDA or North American Olive Oil Association guidelines but are part of the Extra Virgin Alliance standards.

- Sensory analysis of EVOO must show zero defects and median fruitiness greater than zero. This matches the USDA and NAOOA but the Extra Virgin Alliance and the California Olive Oil Council require fruitiness greater than 1.0.

Kimberly Houlding, executive director of the American Olive Oil Producers Association, lauded the recommendations. "The standards put forth are sound, scientifically-based standards—standards that much of the industry is already meeting." She believes that if the recommendations are adopted, they will give consumers additional confidence about the quality of what is inside the bottle. Houlding also said that removing labels such as "Pure" and "Light" will improve purchaser understanding and clarity.

The Commission recommendations will be considered at a public hearing on July 15, 2014 in Sacramento, California.

Source : <http://www.oliveoiltimes.com/olive-oil-making-and-milling/california-commission-releases-proposed-olive-oil-standards/40420> (04/07/2014)