

Statement of Bruce Golino

Before the

U.S. International Trade Commission

Inv. No. 332-537

**Olive Oil: Conditions of Competition between U.S. and Major Foreign
Supplier Industries**

My name is Bruce Golino. For the past ten years I have helped the California Olive Oil Council (COOC) develop quality standards for its membership. As a past COOC President I led the industry effort that resulted in a revised USDA Grade Standard.

I will focus today on the perishable nature of olive oil and the need for standards that accurately reflect quality based on freshness. I hope to convey the negative impact of the current grading criteria and the fact that a revised mandatory grade standard would allow high quality producers of olive oil to compete worldwide.

Olives and the oil they contain are perishable and begin to degrade or oxidize immediately after harvest. While similar to other fruits in this respect, olives differ in that it is the oil in the fruit that is the juice. And oil, as the chemists will tell you, has many and very often complex pathways to oxidation. The result is that a single measure is inadequate to assess quality.

The purposes of olive oil standards are twofold: First is to ensure that the oil comes from olives. Current methods are generally adequate to detect fraudulent mixing with other oils. Second the standard should provide adequate measures to differentiate quality into grades. Many including Dr. Christian Gertz, a well known and respected chemist of the German Society of Fat Research (DGF), believe that current methods and

limits allow for fraud. Dr Gertz was instrumental in applying new quality methods to olive oil.

Current olive oil standards use four measures of quality: Free Fatty Acid, Peroxide Value, Ultraviolet Absorbency and Medium of Defect. However, the first three are inadequate. In part this is because the limits for these measures are too lax and allow better grades to be mixed with lesser grades yet still qualify at the higher level. In addition the current methods are inadequate to measure the freshness of the oil. Better methods exist that account for freshness and have been validated and adopted by the International Organization for Standardization, such as the 1, 2 diacylglycerol (DAG) and pyropheophytin A (PPP) tests.

The problem is not our ability to determine freshness but the willingness of the industry to apply these methods. There is widespread support among producers for revised standards with stricter limits and the inclusion of new methods. If this were to occur poorer quality oils would not disappear but would need to be labeled correctly according to their grade. The price would then reflect the true quality. Currently the American consumer lacks assurance that the quality of the oil they intended to purchase is the one they receive.

Most standards today are modeled on that of the International Olive Council. It is important to point out that the IOC is a trade group that represents the interest of its main constituency; the olive producing countries of the EU. Much of the oil produced in these countries is of low quality, which is caused primarily by a lack of modern farming and infrastructure that would allow the olives to be harvested and processed while still fresh. Because the grade standards are lax there is no financial incentive to invest and spend to

produce a higher grade. It is worth mentioning that while the EU has mandatory grade standards for domestic sales, the standards for export are voluntary.

We at the California Olive Oil Council believe that a revised mandatory grading standard would address most of the problems with mislabeling and allow those who produce a high quality product to thrive. U.S. production could then grow significantly from its current level. Thank You.