

**Testimony by Rodney J. Mailer**

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**United States International Trade Commission**

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

My name is Rodney Mailer. I have worked for over 30 years as a Principal Research Scientist with the New South Wales Government in the Department of Agriculture in Australia. My expertise is in oil chemistry and quality and for the last 15 years much of my research has been related to olive oil.

When olive oil production began to develop in Australia, I relied heavily on the knowledge and methodology of the International Olive Council (IOC). They provided Australia with methods and expertise to help us to develop our laboratory. My laboratory has been accredited by the IOC for several years to carry out chemical analysis on their behalf. Our sensory panel has also been accredited by the IOC to carry out sensory analysis. Most countries trading olive oil continue to rely on IOC standards and their limits.

*Discrimination against new world production:* My first concern with olive oil standards were at a time when the IOC decided to reduce the allowable level of linolenic acid in olive oil from 1.5% to 1.0%, claiming that this was necessary to avoid adulteration. Linolenic acid is a nutritionally important omega-3 unsaturated fatty acid. Olive oil often exceeds 1.0% and now, olive oil that does not meet the new limit, is officially called "fruit oil". Our protests to the IOC have been rejected with suggestions that we don't know how to test the oil or we are growing the wrong cultivars in the wrong environment. Codex Alimentarius has adopted virtually all of the IOC standards. Our applications to Codex over many years to have the level of 1.5% linolenic acid reinstated have failed due to objections mainly from Mediterranean country members.

Further research has shown that not only linolenic acid, but virtually all of the fatty acids vary when they are grown in different environments. The existing limits for olive oil fatty acids have been designed around oil produced within the limited Mediterranean environment and based on a few traditional cultivars. The modern industry includes far reaching environments and new cultivars with a wide array of flavours and aromatic qualities.

The IOC limits are too restrictive. Countries such as USA, Australia, Argentina and New Zealand produce excellent, high quality olive oil but it often fails to meet those limits designed for oil grown in Mediterranean countries. International standards of IOC and Codex are therefore discriminatory and don't take account of natural variation within this product.

The olive industry continues to expand outside of Europe although most countries still rely heavily on European exports, particularly from Spain, Italy and Greece. My laboratory and others have carried out numerous surveys over many years of oil in supermarkets in Australia and in the USA. The quality of imported olive oil, in up to 75% of cases, was found to be unacceptable. Years of research have shown that current systems of screening olive oil are failing to stop these imported oils which are below international acceptability.

The existing restrictive standards discriminate against good quality olive oil but do nothing to prevent unacceptable products being sold in our supermarkets. Current testing methods don't adequately measure the age or deterioration of olive oil over time. To overcome this, Australia has introduced new methods to detect old oil which has past its use by date. These methods include diacylglycerols and pyropheophytins. Both have been

exhaustively studied and shown to clearly identify old or poorly stored oil that has lost its quality. These methods have been rejected by the IOC.

The IOC represents its own members which are almost entirely within the Mediterranean region. It is illogical that the non-members and competitors of the IOC members should be required to conform to those IOC standards. National standards are vital to ensure the limits are not discriminatory and cover the range of the products produced within the country.

It is difficult to believe that European exporters and local importers and distributors could not aware that many of the leading brands they distribute are consistently below acceptable quality. Despite repeated claims that they are concerned with quality, the majority of the olive oils in supermarkets do not pass IOC analysis. It is our intention to continue to carry out surveys to expose these products.

The IOC standards do offer some protection against olive oil which has been adulterated with other products but even this is unsuccessful due to the limited surveillance of products on sale. We have found canola or pomace oil in bottles marked extra virgin olive oil, undetected until recently due to lack of testing. Governments need to increase the surveillance of olive oil in supermarkets and to put in place methods to overcome this ongoing corruption.

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