



## Country of Origin Labelling Taskforce

### *Submission by* **Australian Olive Association**

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The Australian Olive Association would like to specifically address an issue raised about the use of processing aids (enzymes and talc) in producing olive oil and the proposal that if these processing aids are not made in Australia, then the olive oil products cannot be claimed to be 100% Australian.

#### **The olive fruit and its oil**

Olive fruit is roughly made up of the following components:

- ▶ 50% water
- ▶ 20% oil
- ▶ 20% carbohydrates (pectic, cellulosic and hemicellulosic substances)
- ▶ 10% Organic acids, pigments, phenolic compounds and minerals

Most of the olive oil (96-98%) is found in the mesocarp (flesh) and the epicarp (skin) of the olive fruit; the remaining oil is located in the endocarp (stone).

In the plant cell, the major part of the oil ('free oil') is located in vacuoles, while a small part ('bound oil') is found in the cytoplasm in a dispersed form. This oil, which is bound to various substances with emulsifying properties, e.g. lipoproteins, is extremely difficult to access in the extraction and separation processes and is therefore lost with the waste. Those substances can also affect the separation properties of the free oil and make processing difficult, with a negative impact on yield, plant capacity and grower profitability.

### **Why are processing aids used?**

Processing aids have been used in the olive oil industry for more than 30 years in order to improve the extractability of oil from olive paste and decrease the loss of oil in pomace (remnant solids after oil extraction) for certain olive varieties.

Talcum powder and enzymes are some of the most commonly used processing aids. The use of these processing tools has been reported to improve oil extraction between 10–30 per cent.

The use of talcum powder and enzymes as processing aids has been also reported to reduce the pollution potential of the processing waste water stream by up to 30 per cent.

### **Enzymes**

Olive oil comes from olive paste after crushing - from the juice of the olive fruit – and is directly consumable after olive processing. For decades, industrial pectolytic enzymes produced by microorganisms have been used in fruit juice production as part of the extraction processes. Numerous studies have been carried out at international olive oil research institutes and in the olive industry in the main producing countries to show the beneficial role of enzymes as processing aids in the olive industry. Enzymes are used by nearly all olive oil processors in Australia, as they are internationally, to help separate the oil from within the aqueous part of the emulsion immediately after milling.

### **Talc and calcium carbonate**

Olive varieties with high fruit-moisture levels tend to produce oil/water emulsions during the crushing step of the extraction process and solid aids such as talc, microtalc and calcium carbonate (in doses lower than 1.0 per cent) have been useful in breaking down those emulsions thus provided higher paste-extractability with no impact on olive oil quality

### **Benefits of industrial enzymes and talc in the process**

It has been estimated that the current industrial efficiency of the Australian olive oil industry ranges between 75 and 87 per cent.

For the industry, each additional percentage point of improved efficiency through the proper use of processing aids would represent approximately \$500,000 worth of oil per year at current production levels.

The use of processing aids can give the following benefits:

- ▶ Improves extractability of oil from green (early harvested) fruit.
- ▶ Increased yield due to the release of 'bound oil'.
- ▶ Improved storage stability.
- ▶ Helps to process batches of olives with high moisture content.
- ▶ Reduced amounts of oil in the waste phases.
- ▶ Better returns to olive growers.

***Both talc and enzymes DO NOT end up in the olive oil; they are strongly hydrophilic and are discarded with the olive oil processing waste (pomace).***

#### **Australian Standard for Olive Oil and Olive Pomace Oil (AS5265-2011)**

The issue of processing aids was discussed extensively at meetings at Standards Australia during the development of the Australian Standard for Olive Oil and Olive Pomace AS 5264-2011. The following representative organisations provided advice and achieved consensus on the document which was published in 2011.

- Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry (Government)
- Rural Industries Research Development Corporation (Government)
- Industry & Investment NSW (Australian oils Research lab) – NSW Government
- Private Labs (private)
- Australian Olive Association (Industry)
- New Zealand Olive Association (Industry)
- Australian Olive Oil Association (Importers)
- Australian Customs (Government)
- Australian National Retailers Association (representing Coles & Woolworths)
- Food & Grocery Council NZ
- Consumers Federation of Australia (private)
- Choice (private observer)
- ACCC (Government observer)
- Food Standards Australia & New Zealand (Government observer)

It was accepted by this committee that talc and enzymes are processing aids and **NOT INGREDIENTS**. Processing aids are permitted under AS 5264-2011 (section 9.3) to the extent allowed by the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code. There is no

requirement to include them on the label of the olive oil products and they are not present in the final consumable product.

## **Concerns**

We are concerned that if as proposed the use of processing aids means that a grower cannot legally claim that their olive oil is 100% Australian, when it is grown, harvested and processed in Australia, this may cause loss of market share and increased confusion in the olive oil market place. In fact it will mislead consumers.

We are concerned that if growers are made to declare, by way of a new symbol, the proportion of the product that is "imported" then (a) it can't be done because there are no processing aids that end up in the final consumable product, and (b) growers could be forced to have multiple types of labels as the amount of processing aid used is different with each batch of olives processed.

We are concerned that if this proposal goes ahead it will cause "labelling anarchy".

We are concerned about the possible extra costs this could add on to olive growers for no valuable gain to consumers.

As talc and enzyme cannot be "tasted" in the final product, and as they are not present in the final product and so cannot be tested for, this could not be policed.

As far as we are aware, there are no existing Australian producers of suitable talc and enzymes. If growers are not able to use these products for fear of not being able to claim their product is 100% Australian, then grower profitability could be in jeopardy and olive oil quality could be compromised to the detriment of Australian consumers.

## **Recommendation**

We strongly recommend that the olive oil processing aids - permitted in the extraction of olive oil under AS 5264-2011 (section 9.3) to the extent allowed by the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code – be exempt from consideration under the proposed Country of Origin labelling. This will allow olive oil that is 100% grown, processed and delivered to consumers in Australia to be called what it is – 100% Australian, This is in the best interests of the Australian consumers and producers of olive oil.

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