



Pickled & Pressed Winter 2008

Hi Association Members

The 2008 harvest is all but over by now although I gather there are still some olives hanging on in there.

Most members I have spoken to seem very content with this year's harvest, and certainly a lot happier than last year. We find this is one of the busiest times of our year as the oil needs to settle and then be bottled and then it's time for pruning and spraying but also a time for reflection on how we will do things better next year.

In this edition you can read about our Seminar on 22nd June when Susie Moscovitch reminded us that olive oil tasting is about identifying its fruity, bitter and peppery qualities. She taught us how to train our palettes so that we can identify the main components of our oils and how to make a systematic assessment of their characteristics.

There are more great articles from members. If Alan Kohler can graph anything so can Paul Wainscott, look at his Olive Oil Optimisum Oscillation chart.

Thank you again to those who have contributed to this edition – much appreciated by me and other Members.

Irene Laing

Contact Details for Committee members

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We have lost Kaye so for the time please advise me of any change of address. Corresponding by e-mail is preferred.

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President's Report

Dear Members,

Harvest, Flavours, People and AGMs

I hope you have all had a good harvest, good fruit, and are now enjoying the prospect of selling lots of good oil with all the flavours which Susie Moscovitch would approve of! [There is a report from Susie's seminar later in the newsletter]

Irene and I had our first "real" harvest from our grove this year; so now we are bottling our oil – and will give some of it away to repay some of our debts from the four years of learning when we relied on help and advice from many other people. So the first picture shows me looking a bit worried as we filtered our oil. I didn't want a repetition of the sort of story we hear from bee-keeping friends – about being greeted by a tide of honey flowing out from under the shed door because a container had burst.



The second picture is of Kaye Ashton who has been the secretary to the GSOGA Committee "for a long time". She is now retiring to live on the Mornington Peninsula, and we want to recognize, and thank her for, the effort and cheerfulness and clear efficiency which she has put into helping the Committee and GSOGA more generally. She has made sure that we always had somewhere to meet as a committee and to hold seminars, and has kept our membership records in order in a world where people and addresses are always changing. Best wishes to Kaye for life further south!

Kaye is leaving us and the AGM is coming soon – so we have to think about next year's committee. We are looking for people to serve on the committee – so that we get new blood, new thoughts, and continued energy. We have some possible volunteers, but we need some more.

Our aim is to establish a regular rotation so that

people do not get "caught" in the committee for more than, say, say, two years – and we get new blood and new outside experience into GSOGA. So we are very much interested in new members and new olive growers because they bring those important perspectives into the committee. Please let me or one of the other committee members know if you could be a committee member – "Your Association Needs You!"

With best wishes for a warm winter,

Andrew



Oil Tasting Seminar – 22nd June 2008



Susie Moscovitch set up and ran the GSOGA Oil Tasting Seminar for us on the 22nd June. There were about 30 members packed into the hall at Gooram, and many of them brought their own oils for tasting.

Susie sees oil tasting as an essential part of the process of running an olive grove. It is the vital quality control process which makes sure that we know what we are selling, we avoid selling bad oil, and improve the quality of our oils to fit what the customer wants.

- Customers come back and pay a good price if your oil tastes good
- Good flavour in your oil depends on what you do in your grove and in processing and storage
- If you know how to taste oil you can work to make your oil better
- And you can fit what you sell to what your customers are asking for.

Susie started by talking about some of the things that can go wrong with an oil – which show through in the flavour. There is potentially a very wide range of faults – many of which are in practice uncommon in Australia. So the focus of the discussion was on effects of poor storage – in particular:

- Tainting from contact with unsuitable plastics or metals other than stainless steel
- Oxygen penetration through plastics during extended storage
- The effect of light
- Bacterial growth in the sludge which drops out after processing.
- Old age



The practical advice from this discussion was to decant the oil off the sludge as soon as possible and then to store the oil in stainless steel or to bottle it into dark glass bottles. If stored in a tank, the tank should have a floating lid or a gas blanket to exclude oxygen.

Susie then described the tasting process for an oil – based on assessing a few millilitres in the bottom of a glass small enough to be cupped in the hand. There are four stages:

1. **Fruitiness:**
Sniffing the oil – warmed by cupping the glass in the hand – to smell and note pleasant fruitiness – especially those which are grassy, fruity or nutty. Checking for the absence of any “off” aromas.
2. **Bitterness:**
Swallow a small amount of oil – coating the tongue to detect some bitterness in the centre of the tongue
3. **Pepper:**
Allow the oil to flow down the throat and assess the “pepperiness” of the oil in the throat, which may only emerge after some delay
4. **Balance:**
Form a view on the balance of the oil; does it have fruitiness, bitterness and pepper, or is one of these missing or overwhelming?



We then tried out our skills on seven of the oils from GSOGA members, and an eighth oil which was a bit “old & tired” to demonstrate how an oil can lose quality with age.

The GSOGA members who had produced each of the seven oils then described how their oils had been produced – and commented on how their management of the grove had affected the oil. In particular, early picking had produced an oil with a strong pepper, while there was a contrasting oil with soft “dessert” character.



Self reliant is best for a small organic certified olive grove

The following is a report from Carl Engel Rivermist Organic Olive Grove. (NASAA certified 3518)

This is the second year that we have pressed our own olives and because of the resulting independence, our olives are picked and pressed at our discretion. When originally planning the grove, it was decided to plant cultivars that had staggered ripening. Early ripening, mid season and late ripening. At the initial planning stage, I assumed processors could handle small runs through the season from the 900 or so trees planted...Wrong. Processors want all in one shipment and they specified when picking and pressing time was available.

While the first four or so years produced great tasting oil, it was obvious improvements could be achieved if we picked riper olives. This season our area in North East Victoria was fortunate as there have been no severe frosts. By delaying the picking of early and mid season olives, our oil developed a beautiful golden colour with fruitiness, slight bitterness and still the peppery finish. We have not picked the late season olives yet. (end of June 2008.)

How did we get improvements that allowed us to pick and press at our pace. Firstly last year we installed a 150 kg per hour press and this year realized we could not hand pick oil olives fast enough to get a decent days pressing. So hand held olive shakers were investigated. After asking around, I trialled a battery held Olivium with a telescopic shaft and found it ideal. It allowed us to strip up to 20 Kg of olives from a tree in under 7 minutes. Unfortunately the setting up time with our hand made 5 metre catcher was much longer. Now I need a catcher with a 6 metre diameter net that can be set up and emptied in under 4 minutes..... A project for me to design and build over summer.

By the grove being certified organic, I can only press for olives from our grove otherwise we have to pay to be a certified processor as well.. Maybe one day, this fee will be eliminated. Please check our web sight for more information

Carl Engel
Rivermist Organic Olive Grove, www.rivermist.com.au
NASAA Certified 3518

Harvest 2008 thankfully finished for the Towers family

After having a severe frost in Nov 2006 during flowering – hence no fruit in 2007 – it was rewarding to see we had fruit for 2008.

The continued drought had diminished our irrigation water to about 1 meg which was insufficient for the fruiting season. The trees and fruit showed very visible signs of stress during the hotter months leaving the fruit that survived quite small.

We decided to harvest in the first week of May. In hindsight we realised it would have been better to leave the fruit for another 2-3 weeks, but circumstances determined when the picking could take place. This year we decided to use Eberhardt from Milawa to shake, transport and process the majority of our trees. Great thinking and took a lot of the head work off our shoulders but we still had a group of hand pickers to organise as about 450 of our trees are still to young to shake.

The mechanical harvesting started on the Thursday with a wet, dreary and overcast day but fortunately the weather improved and by the weekend the weather was perfect and our faithful pickers – family and friends – worked diligently and we socialised over nets with our rakes in hand.

We mechanically harvested and handpicked around 7 tonnes.

The Frantoio and Correggiola averaged about 10 kgs per tree with the processed fruit yielding 17% oil, which under the circumstances we felt was quite acceptable.

Our previous oils have been slightly delicate with a hint of pepper but this years' oil has a slight bitterness with a hint of pepper on the back palette. Altogether a good slightly robust oil.

Providing morning and afternoon teas, lunches and dinners was the least we could do to help things go smoothly plus ensuring our helpers return again next year.

Every year is different and we look forward to seeing what next year brings providing the cockies leave any branches for fruit to set.

Hoping your harvests all went well this season.

Iain and Allana Towers.

The “Mother” of all Rollercoaster Rides

After a disappointing 2007 season when we harvested our crop with a pair of tweezers and a paper bag, we were hopeful that 2008 would show a vast improvement. We inherited 486 trees (now 9 years old) when we purchased the property, filled 150 gaps with adult trees & planted a further 500 low vigour trees with a view to eventual overhead harvesting. Varieties include Frantoio, Coreggiola, Verdale, Kalamata, Mission, Jumbos plus a small number of Koroneiki and three Volos presumably for experimental purposes, either that or all the others died.

All varieties flowered well and the “fruit set” was very encouraging. Whilst the rainfall, apart from 1 day in December, was light and sporadic its timing was excellent and the fruit development was as good as

pre-2007 seasons. We were finding it difficult to subdue our optimism especially as we had very useful rain in January after the Kyoto Agreement had been signed and, to that point, had not irrigated except for fertigation reasons. However.....!

February was declared a rain-free month in our area so we had little option but to commence a little irrigation, it should have been a lot of irrigation, but for that one needs a lot of water – not 3 mgl left in a 12 mgl dam! I was out of Australia during the first part of March and when Jane picked me up from the airport she let me know that our Olives looked more dehydrated than I did at that point.

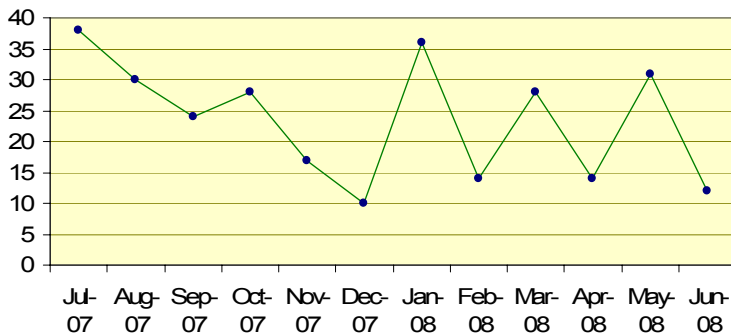
Sure enough a couple of varieties were starting to shrivel and we immediately threw caution to the wind and irrigated every 2nd day for a fortnight when finally rain reintroduced itself to our area. The fruit had re-hydrated & optimism returned, we saw signs of colouring, took on board the early ripening of grapes in the area and concluded that we should harvest around the 1st week of May. The Harvesting Contractor was therefore booked for around this time.

In 2007 parrots had queued up for weeks to eat our green Olives and of course when they had ripened it was just too good to be true This year we had invested in electronic bird protection, overall this appeared to work because the birds were around in only small numbers and not for long.

In the latter half of April The DSE having been asked not to come back to Wilsons Prom and North East Victoria, decided to have their annual “fry up” upwind of our property. (Let’s not be too hard on the DSE, they are the only one’s we know of who are actually doing anything about Global Warming, by blotting out the sun with smoke and ash). Our grove was deprived of proper sunlight for almost 2 weeks and along with earlier than usual foggy mornings I believe significantly slowed down the ripening of all varieties.

When the Contractor arrived the only variety showing real colour was the Kalamata. The others were either green or under-ripe and were completely ignoring their assigned characteristics for early, medium or late ripening. The shaker was getting disappointing results so we decided to postpone it for a further 4 weeks. During this time we delivered a tonne and a half to the processor from hand picking activities and Jane successfully pickled green & slightly coloured olives for our own use and peace offerings to our ex-friends.

Olive Oil Optimism Oscillation



The Contractor returned 4 weeks later at the end of May, but the results were again very disappointing - blamed mostly on under-ripe fruit My misplaced optimism for the 2007 season had seen me purchase 2 pneumatic rakes, one still in it's box. Along with an erstwhile friend, (I'm a bit worried about Andy – he says he enjoys olive harvesting), we honed our techniques with these on a couple of trees. At first the Olives were going everywhere, except in the net, with a couple actually going into orbit; - we watch them going overhead Glenburn at 9:46 every evening, (except Public Holidays).

With a ground crew of 2, busily arranging and emptying nets we found we were able to get virtually all the olives off the trees within a reasonable amount of time. When I get back from my shoulder reconstructions I intend to prune the trees so that this method of extraction is even more efficient in the future.

In retrospect we were pleased with the season, we have 6 different Batches, 5 of which are very palatable oils, the other one may come good with some filtering and/or blending, if not I will run the Ute on it!

Paul & Jane Wainscott
Glenburn



Peppering to reduce bird pests

Many members complain about the devastation caused by animals and crop loss due to birds. They experiment with various ingenious methods to deter and get rid of them. Biodynamic farmers practice peppering to rid themselves of weeds, animals and birds. Here is what they do – I am giving it a try, perhaps you'd like to have a go and report back – you don't have to be a naked virgin painted in wode at full moon – honestly!

You need only one animal or bird but if the animal is large such as a rabbit, wallaby or wombat it is best to use only the skin. The exact species of animal is required. Burn species separately e.g. cockatoo and rosella, but you can mix them together as peppers when spreading the ashes in the area where the weed, animal, bird or insect is a problem. If for example birds are attacking your trees then sprinkling their ashes around the perimeter of your grove or around trees they roost in, can work effectively for up to two years.

Method for burning: You need a hot fire (e.g. hole in the ground). Put the whole bird or animal straight onto the fire, and cook until it is all ash. Then mix and crush and grind well with wood ash until lump free. Walk or drive around the paddock dribbling handfuls of ash out all around the border to keep birds out. Our NASAA inspector told us her daughter hasn't seen a brown or black snake since she peppered.

Mmmmm says Andrew????!!

Irene Laing



Report on the Field Day convened by Ian Dwyer of Taggerty Property Maintenance and Contracting (incorporating Olive Grove Management & Consultancy) on Sunday April 20, 2008

Twenty or so clients of Ian's met at Clearstream Olives Taggerty at 0830 on a perfect Autumn day for a day of grove visits, machinery demo's, and a look at a local processing plant. The day ended with a grove tour and excellent alfresco lunch at Ghin Ghin's Farmhouse Café. It was a terrific day.

Clearstream at Taggerty



Ian has managed the grove at Clearstream for some years. He was involved in the planning, lay out and management of the 30,000 tress planted. He now runs his own business and contracts back to Clearstream. Over the past 9 years he has also established other groves in the area and they are all achieving excellent results.

Ian firmly believes that correct management strategies are essential for optimum returns and the results seen on the day say it all.

We had a look at an eight year-old grove of Frantoio/Corregiola which has been pruned to an open vase, four-branch scaffold and a metre of

clear trunk. While under water-stress this year, some of these trees have already yielded 25 kilos of fruit.

We also spent some time looking at some trees badly affected with black scale and discussed effective strategies to eradicate the little buggers.

Take-outs

- 1 Look for ants. As they love the honey-dew from the scale, they're a good indicator of scale presence.
- 2 White oil is only partially effective, as like pyrethrin, it works on contact and has little residual effect. A systemic insecticide is best for bad infestations, but seek good advice before applying anything.



Ian and his off-sider Darryle Robinson (Taggerty Odd Job Services) demonstrated Ken's DiMasi harvester and the big Silvan mister. Check out the pic's of the mister. Ian ran it at 500 litres per hectare then at 1,000. Dramatic stuff.



The DiMasi has worked very well for us at eildon hills when the trees were five years old. Now at eight, we are getting 95% of our Frantoio off at the turning-colour stage, an excellent result. It's unique in that the clamp is above the catching umbrella. This means that the energy is being transferred to the tree at nearly a metre up, so the canopy gets the shake, not the roots. You can see from the pic that the harvester can handle a leaning tree – see how the head can tilt to align itself to the trunk axis? Not all shakers are created equal!

Take-outs

- 1 Agronomy needs to be looked at in terms of the opportunity-cost of a low yielding grove, versus perhaps achieving double the fruit volume for a small incremental cost in effective grove management.
- 2 Mechanical harvesting costs around \$3 a tree for smaller groves - less than 200 trees - and includes transport of the machine. Ian will quote on larger groves individually. After your family and friends have decided to be somewhere else the second year you suggest a wonderful day in the country, try the DiMasi. Even for our tiny grove, the economics were clear.

Tom Stianos' Grove off Glendale Lane, Taggerty



Tom's grove was a revelation. He planted four hectares or so in 2004 with Frantoio, Leccino, Picual and Picholine in alternate rows. Ian has managed the grove from the initial site selection stage through to planting, agronomy, and now harvesting. If ever there was an example of what can be done with proper planning and execution, this is it. Tom and Ian are confident of delivering yields of 25 kilos per tree at 5 to 6 years and of 45 to 50 kilos per tree at 8 to 10 years!

Tom gave a hard-hitting presentation on the real costs of grove establishment and future cost projections. It showed yield performance as a critical metric. Thanks for sharing the numbers Tom. The pic shows Tom in front of his 4 year-old trees.

Take-outs

- 1 Don't skimp on the up front preparation of the ground and installation of the infrastructure – it will repay you downstream.
- 2 Define your marketing strategy.
- 3 Do the numbers and understand the real costs of operation.
- 4 Choose appropriate cultivars to suit local conditions, soil and micro-climate.
- 5 Yield per tree is a critical success factor. Every kilo you lose in yield has a profound effect on cost of production and ultimately, profit per kilo or litre.
- 6 Conduct regular soil and leaf analysis to determine water and nutrient needs and keep a watch on soil Ph.
- 7 Maintain critical infrastructure regularly and often – pumps, filters, drip/sprinkler heads.

The Macaulay Family's *The Healthy Olive Partnership* processing plant at 1409 Whanregarwen Road, Molesworth

Craig and Robin, along with their son James Macaulay as Processing Manager, have established a start-of-the-art Alfa Laval two-phase decanting plant at the family property on Whanregarwen Road. It can handle 500 kilo's an hour with a minimum of 300 kilo batches. It is one of the few plants we've seen that can de-pit the olive before the paste goes to the malaxer. Apparently the oil from the pitted fruit is finer and more delicate than that from the traditional paste.

All the fruit going into the mill is thoroughly washed; I mean thoroughly. Washed after de-stemming and leaf separation and rinsed again before entering the crushing stage of the mill, all with filtered and sterilised water from the Goulburn.

Particular care is taken during malaxing to keep the paste at a temperature which will facilitate oil extraction without compromising flavour and freshness.



James can handle fruit in 25 kilo crates right up to the standard 500 kilo vented pallecon.

James happens to be the chair of the VOC sensory panel, so you have the added benefit of sound advice on your oil quality and style.

At last we have a properly set up processing plant close to the centre of our membership base! What we need to do now is ensure that the plant is well supported; then we can look forward to a long term relationship with someone committed to producing the best possible quality oil for his clients.

Take-outs

- 1 PLAN your harvest – have Modern or another lab check your fruit for oil accumulation and water content four weeks out from your own harvest-date estimate to narrow down your optimum harvest date. Don't be like the two individuals who rang Modern for a processor recommendation AFTER they had picked the fruit on the weekend! Unbelievable, but true.
- 2 COMMUNICATE with your chosen processor, transport guy and bin supplier and agree a processing date and the logistics.
- 3 DON'T deliver diseased or fermenting fruit. Any responsible processor will turn you away. Better you pick earlier or later by a week to deliver wholesome fruit to the plant. Wholesome also means neither nuts and bolts, nor dirt and stones from the ground.
- 4 DO try and get your harvested fruit to the processor within 24 hours; better, the same day. Remember, as soon as the fruit is off the tree, it's all downhill from there quality-wise. James for one will do everything to accommodate you, given some notice to plan his intake.

Rates this year, 2008 - for GSOGA members only - are a minimum \$320 (plus GST) a tonne for start-up or part thereof. Rates for processing more than 5 tonnes are by negotiation. You can contact James on 0407 840 877.

ghin ghin farmstore and café, 4 km south east of Yea



Scott Lawrance and Frank Schoenemann set up their grove of some 650 trees in 2001. They have a mix of Frantoio, Manzanillo, Nevadillo (bad idea they say), slow to produce and reduced crop loads

For a few years the grove languished (under cocky and roo attack) while they focused on building the Farmstore, (under willful builder attack). They eventually decided to get professional help and appointed Ian to consult and help manage the grove. The budget was tight, so the approach was to start with a soil analysis and implement some cost effective strategies. Much of the grove has responded to this care and attention, so within a couple of years they'll be back in business.

Chef Frank produced the best potato (eggs and cream!) salad ever and some savoury pastries for a great alfresco lunch. The place is well worth a visit before they scale back some in winter. You can reach them on 03 5797 2734.

Summary

The whole day demonstrated that there is a very convincing case for professional support for your olive enterprise, large or small. As a very small grower, the extent of our uptake of agronomy services at Eildon Hills is pretty minimal. Even for us, Ian's good advice on soil chemistry, nutrient and watering

needs has been at the heart of our oil quality and success with both retail and food service clients. Those of you with 250 trees or more will find the cost-benefit clear and compelling.

You can contact Ian on 0421 404 452

Cheers...

Peter & Susie Hill
eildon hills

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