



October 20, 2008

Oleum Viride Extra Virgin Olive Oil

Producer: Oleum Viride

Region: Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park, Cádiz, Spain

Employees: 3 full time, 7 seasonal

Authenticity

The product or recipe is native to the producer's region and has historically been part of the regional food culture.

Cultivation of the olive tree is a tradition in Spain that goes back thousands of years. During the Roman Period, olive oil was exported from Spain throughout the Roman Empire and used for everything from cooking, to medicinal solutions, to skin and hair treatments. In the Cádiz region, there are ancient symbols reminding us of the history of the olive in this beautiful land. Century old millstones are scattered throughout the land, and working antique mills are still found in many areas.

In the Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park of Cádiz there is a unique variety of olive that grows nowhere else, the Manzanilla de Zahara. In the 17th Century, men tried to domesticate the wild mountain trees of this region with tree grafts from the Sevilla Manzanilla olive trees. Through centuries of adaptation to the local climate, soil characteristics, and the host trees, a new variety was born. Attempts to transfer its cultivation to other regions have not been successful. Local farmers continue to graft this variety to other local trees, even wild ones, because the quality of its oil is high. This is the olive used to produce Oleum Viride.

Board Feedback & Questions:

Incredible! Strong commitment to biodiversity by using the Manzanilla de Zahara olive.

Local Sourcing

A majority of all ingredients are purchased within the region in which the company is located (region is defined as bioregion or country depending on the size and geographic make up of the area), AND is either grown directly by the producing company or is purchased direct from the farmer or a farmer organization at fair prices.

Ingredients: 100% organic extra virgin olive oil from Manzanilla de Zahara and Lechin olive varieties

The company cultivates approximately 25% of the olives and the remaining olives are purchased direct from local farmers. All of the olives are cultivated by five small family producers of organic olives from the two counties of Zahara de la Sierra and Algodonales in a mountainous ecosystem inside a natural park.

Oleum Viride offers a 10% higher price per kilo than the local cooperative as long as the farmers procedures and product satisfy the strict Oleum Viride quality standards:

(1) all the olives must be harvested directly from the tree, never from the ground, (2) olive varieties must be harvested separately, (3) harvest must occur when the olives are at the proper maturation, and (4) the olives must be transported to the mill on the same day that they are harvested.

Board Feedback & Questions:

Very unique and authentic propagation of ancient olive trees. Long-term relationships, premium prices linked to quality, guaranteed volumes, linked to capacity of the natural environment. Excellent product.

Local Ownership

The producing company is privately or worker-owned with a majority of the owners actively participating in the company.

Oleum Viride is a Limited Association, which is similar to an LLC in the U.S. The company was founded in 2005 by Reyes Garcia Villalba and Luis Lucero Hernández, both of whom actively participate in the company.

Board Feedback & Questions:

Request for more information on the background of the owners.

Company Response: The mill is owned by Luis and his wife who are from the local region. Luis has a Forest Engineer degree as well as an MBA. He moved back to this area after his studies to teach the local young people about environment conservation. They purchased their first orchard with the goal of promoting organic cultivation in the area, but soon realized that that it was equally important to promote the preservation of the ancient trees and the local varieties. Eventually they were able to establish the mill to give local farmers an outlet for their olives at a fair and sustainable price. Their hope is that through quality and transparency, their olive oil will be able to demand a higher price in the market to support these goals.

Social Responsibility

The company's social and financial practices and policies are designed to ensure maximum benefit to the company's employees and to the local community and economy.

The extreme climate of this mountainous land causes the trees to produce low volumes of olives, which translates into an extremely high quality concentrated oil. Although this produces a supreme olive oil, it also means that yields are low, making it difficult to make a living off of these mountain groves. In addition, yields are further reduced because the trees are spread out and not irrigated, unlike regular intensive groves. Production costs are understandably much higher, yet the price offered by the market does not differ.

Oleum Viride was founded to improve the viability of life in the Sierras, to preserve the farming traditions, and to protect the local environment. Oleum Viride adds value by ensuring organic cultivation, improved milling techniques, product traceability, and improved packaging. This ultimately increases the price paid back to the farmer.

Employees: The Company has 3 full time employees and brings on an additional 7 employees during the harvest. All employees, including seasonal, are from the local community. They are covered by the national health system, and their wages are set through collective bargaining with the unions. Employees are encouraged to attend training throughout the year on such subjects as organic farming.

Community: The Company is a member of the Andaluz Committee on Organic Agriculture and the Rural Development Center of the Sierra de Cádiz. They participate in conferences, debates, and trainings through these organizations. The Company purchases all of their machinery from a local innovative company, and their mill was built by a local construction company. They also purchase all packaging locally as well. Oleum Viride also sponsors local cultural events in the surrounding villages, such as painting competitions and sports activities.

Board Feedback & Questions:

They are seemingly very community driven, from decisions about wages, to conferences about organic farming and other community involvement, the employees and members of the collective are actively bringing themselves together for the good of the land and people.

Environmental Stewardship

The company's environmental practices and policies are designed to minimize environmental impact through the elimination of chemicals and waste, and the reduction of resource use.

Cultivation: Oleum Viride oil is produced on the Haza las Lajas estate located in the Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park, a pristine environment in the province of Cadiz, the most southwestern province of Spain. This natural park, which has been declared a Biosphere Reserve by Unesco, stands 500 meters above sea level on steeply sloping lands, and enjoys a unique climate, having the highest rainfall in all of Spain.

Oleum Viride and all of the farmers they work with are certified organic by certifying agencies in Europe and the USA (NOP certified). In addition to reducing their impact on the environment through organic practices, supporting the more costly cultivation of the mountain olive tree preserves a valuable buffer zone that provides animal habitats and a necessary firebreak in the Natural Park where fire is a very real threat.

Harvest is from mid-November to mid-January and is carried out by hand due to the difficult topography of the land. Large cloth tarps are placed under the trees and large poles are used to shake the branches of the trees causing the olives to drop. The olives are processed in the mill on the same day of the harvest to avoid fermentation or oxidization.

Production & Facility Management: The production process is 100% natural and does not use any chemicals. At the mill, all the olives statistics are recorded (farm and farmer, sanitary conditions, ripeness, variety, arrival time, etc.). The olive is then monitored all the way through to bottling (and is available to the final consumer through the lot # and website). The mill is modern and stainless steel, and works with a two-phase extraction system all controlled automatically. The final oil is stored in stainless steel tanks and is bottled at the time of the order. Waste water from the press is used for irrigation and the waste products from the pressing is used to produce electric energy. Edible waste is used as food for the farm animals.

Packaging: All containers are either glass or tin, with cardboard for outside packing. None of these are made from recycled materials at this time. The inks are petroleum-based, although the company is searching for local producers of more environmentally friendly packaging materials.

Board Feedback & Questions:

They are not over planting, they are using natural methods to prevent wild fires and they are not over irrigating because of the unique quantity of rainfall. The company is also supporting animal well-being and repurposing waste from their plant as feed and electric energy. Would like to see improvement on the materials used in packaging.

Overall Board Assessment

"Poster Child" for Rooted Foods program.