

Olive Oil: Facts and Perspectives

M. Fernandez-Albaladejo, Madrid/ E

The International Olive Council (IOC) is an intergovernmental organisation that was created in 1959 to administer the International Agreement on Olive Oil and Table Olives. This legal instrument was set up under the auspices of the United Nations to safeguard and develop olive cultivation and the produce of the olive. Its chief objectives are: to ensure regular international trading in olive products, to develop international cooperation and to improve olive production, to champion the quality of olive products and to encourage consumption of olive oil and table olives

One of the activities that the IOC has been assigned to expand international trade is to draw up and adopt trade standards for olive oil and olive-pomace oil, and for table olives, and to devise methods for testing the physico-chemical and organoleptic characteristics of these products.

Promotion activities are intended to cover all aspects of the products concerned; improvements in quality and cost efficiency, market growth and sustainability all through appropriate information delivery and dissemination, particularly to consumers of limited experience with olive oil consumption and its benefits.

Olive oil is an integral part of the cultural and culinary heritage of the Mediterranean countries and a product that is set apart by its undeniable organoleptic qualities. In addition to these sensory attributes, it has nutritional and therapeutic properties that are being increasingly corroborated by science.

Olive oil, as a fruit juice, is particularly rich in antioxidants which plays an important role in protecting against damage from free radicals and effects of ageing. The effects of olive oil-enriched diets on the plasma lipid profile have been extensively studied. The data available support a beneficial effect, lowering triglycerides and low-density lipoproteins cholesterol while raising the high-density lipoproteins cholesterol concentrations. Olive oil-enriched diets have shown beneficial effects in the treatment of hypertension, insulin resistance, diabetes and obesity. There are many potential implications of these findings, all of enormous impact on public health.

More recent data also suggest the antiinflammatory and chemopreventive effects of olive oil and can inducing apoptosis. Thus, a new avenue of great interest is opening up, concerning antiproliferative effects of olive oil's minor components and its possible applications in the prevention of some types of neoplasm.