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THE CHIANTI CLASSICO EXPERIENCE IN THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING A GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION FOR OLIVE OIL

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I. THE CONSORTIUM

1. The figures for the Chianti Classico DOP olive oil Consortium in 2008:

- Member olive growers 256
- Member bottlers 80
- Member olive mills 28
- Plants registered 372,340
- Potential output 11,120 quintals
- Certified litres 125,550 litres (as of 5/5/09)

II. HOW IS OUR OLIVE OIL IDENTIFIED?

2. If we were to imagine a drop of olive oil as somehow “human”, we would be looking at someone suffering from a real identity crisis. It’s a simple farming product, obtained through the “mechanical” pressing of the olives, a process resembling the squeezing of orange juice.

3. On the other hand, non-extra virgin olive oil is not a farm product but the result of a relatively complex industrial process during which oil that is defective chemically and/or sensorially is “corrected” and brought within the parameters established by law, so that it may be sold for consumption.

III. ONLY EXTRA-VIRGIN OIL IS OF INTEREST!

4. But who decides if an olive oil deserves the term of extra virgin?

5. After extraction from the olive, the oil is taken to a laboratory equipped to run chemical analyses on food, to check its compliance with the chemical standards set down in EC regulation 2568/91 and subsequent modifications.

6. There are 27 analytic parameters to be checked, plus an organoleptic tasting, required for discerning and describing the taste and aromatic characteristics of the oil before it can be marketed as extra virgin.

IV. AND THEN THERE IS ANOTHER IMPORTANT ASPECT TO BE STRESSED...

7. Oil tasters must express a group opinion (panel test) and individual comments or opinions have no value.

- To get good olive oils that deserve to be called extra virgin, you need highly professional olive growers. The oil is the result of a simple physical pressing of the olives and the law prohibits the addition of preservatives, additives or stabilizers.
- Knowing the acid content of an olive oil is important but it is not the only characteristic that defines its quality.

- Extra virgin olive oil is the only aliment consumed as is, and so it carries with it the features of environment where the olive trees grow. Paradoxically, we can find Italy again in the aromas and flavours of its olive oils.
- But to establish and guarantee the geographical indication of an olive oil you need stricter rules.

V. HOW DID WE ARRIVE AT CERTIFYING THE GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION OF CHIANTI CLASSICO OIL?

8. Let's look at a bit of Italian history.
9. The first step: the importance of the quality of the product used for edible oils. Royal Decree n. 2033 issued on October 15, 1925 (Law 562/1926).
10. "It is prohibited to sell for edible use oils that under organoleptic examination have disgusting odors, smelling rancid, putrid, smoky and wormy". And 40 years later...
11. *Law n. 1407 issued on November 13, 1960*
12. "An edible olive oil is an olive oil that contains no more than 4% of acidity, expressed as oleic acid, and that under organoleptic examination reveals no disgusting odors such as rancidity, rot, smoke, mold, mildew, worms and the like".
13. ... *Finally, EC Regulation n. 2568 of 1991*, which was a milestone for the sector because the legislator stated that "it is best to uniformly establish throughout the European Community the presence of characteristics of various types of oil, in order to establish Community methods of chemical analysis and organoleptic examination"....
14. In particular....
 - Attention was paid to defining identical test methods for Community member states, since chemical analyses cannot be compared if the same methods are not used.
 - Being an "individual opinion" the organoleptic examination was considered subjective and unreliable from the legal standpoint because lacking the basic principle of replicability.
 - A panel method of evaluation was defined, i.e. a group of persons previously selected through a system defined as check and verification, laying the basis for its legal function.
15. But as yet – even with these regulations – identifying product origin was still uncertain.
16. *Finally the DOP is created!*
17. EC Regulation 2081/92 and 510/2006 concerning protection of the geographical indications (IGP) and denominations of origin (DOP) of farming and food products (IGP and DOP). The protected denomination of origin (DOP) ties the product to its origin, to its production territory!

Therefore the Chianti Classico DOP oil taster must determine not only that the products contain no defects but also and ABOVE ALL that they offer particular aromas and flavours (artichokes, grass, bitterness, piquancy, apples, almonds and more). THESE AROMAS AND FLAVOURS SHOULD BE CLOSELY LINKED TO THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH OLIVES WERE CULTIVATED

18. DOP means a certificated product!

19. DOP is the real certification that the product is “handmade” olive oil to be distinguished from industrial oil.

20. The DOP seal is the highest expression of quality for olive oil – the complete opposite of industrial oil.

21. This oil is not made for long-term preservation, it has a finite shelf-life, and, like all things nature creates that grow, blossom and also perish, this olive oil too changes its character with time. The characteristics of the product are not constant. Similar to wine, there are good and bad years, with a variety of harvests, some plentiful, some not, with variations in colour, consistency, body and aroma.

22. This is the reason why DOP olive oil does not always show just one personality and trait, as every litre of oil stands for the area of cultivation – from the different olive varieties to the type of harvest – the time of preservation, the method of pressing and the special “hand” of the oil presser. Every bottle of DOP oil is a unique piece – even within its own category and classification of origin.

VI. THE CHIANTI CLASSICO OLIVE OIL BECOMES DOP...

23. The Protected Denomination of Origin (DOP) was given to Chianti Classico olive oil in 2000. Its relative “production regulations” were published in the Official Gazette of the Italian Republic on January 17, 2001.

24. The “Denominazione di Origine Protetta” or DOP, is the body that certifies extra-virgin olive oil of guaranteed quality and origin that will be known as Olive Oil from Chianti Classico.

25. This oil is exclusively olive oil, produced from olives, which are grown within the production area of Chianti and which correspond to the quality standard of special guidelines.

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