

Olives New Zealand

AGM 18 March 2024

President's Annual Report

Membership

Membership numbers this year dropped to 157 from 181 last year. A number of groves changed hands and we had hoped that the new owners will join ONZ but, unfortunately many did not. The decline in membership numbers is concerning because the concomitant reduction in revenue places a burden on remaining members. It also reduces our ability to be proactive in promoting our industry and fund activities. The executive has spent a lot of time discussing how we can address this and make joining our organisation attractive.

Harvest

For the second year in a row, many growers experienced the wettest summer growing period for some time. Many groves even became inaccessible by vehicles or machinery for long periods. The 2023 harvest season was again a difficult and variable one for many growers with the lowest tonnage harvested since 2015.

28% of groves reported no harvest and the average harvest rates for those who did was 9.2kg/ tree.

Certification

ONZ continued to use the Modern Olives Laboratory in Australia for 2023 certification and this worked well.

The quality of oils submitted continued to be excellent with all but four oils submitted being classed as Extra Virgin. The intensity of oils in 2023 was quite different from last year and much lower with most in the medium and mild category. Unfortunately, total litres certified was only 77k compared with 120k in 2022.

New Zealand Extra Virgin Olive Awards

This year we had 119 oils entered (compared with 152 last year). We returned to centralised judging this year. Results were again excellent with 32 (47) Gold medals, 74 (83) Silver and 6 (12) Bronze medals awarded (last year in parenthesis). The Wairarapa, which has the most growers of all regions, received 49 in total.

The Awards evening was held in the Hawkes Bay this year just for a change but we did not have as many attend as we'd like so it appears that Wellington is the most suitable for members.

Grove Census

Based on those who responded to our request for data, we have 286,000 trees recorded. The ability to have data available and to draw comparisons over the years is extremely useful for members and for when we make submissions to MPI or are required to represent our industry. Auckland now has the largest number of trees followed by Hawkes Bay, Northland and Wairarapa and there is now a more even spread across the regions. Unfortunately, some of the largest groves in Hawkes Bay are being replaced with other crops.

The top producing region this year was Nelson (13.6kg/tree) due mainly to the kinder weather. The national average dropped to 9.2kg/tree, 10.2kg/tree last year.

There were almost 3 tons of table olives produced in 2023, down from the 6 tons in 2022. The largest production came from the Auckland area followed by Hawkes Bay, Waiheke Island and Canterbury.

Productivity and Polyphenols Project

The start of our new project was unfortunately delayed by MPI after their change in focus following Cyclone Gabrielle. The project has been approved though and will get underway in 2024.

Courses

During her visit as Head judge for the annual awards, Reni Hildenbrand held 5 tasting courses in different regions. She encouraged members in regions to get together periodically to hold informal tastings to develop their skills.

The Arataki Road field day after the awards was hosted by Telegraph Hill with Stuart Tustin and Garry Burlace of Horticulture on hand to offer advice and answer questions from members. These walkabout days are always extremely valuable.

Regional branches

The branches continue to be active around the country but attendance at activities is generally disappointing. Please discuss with your local committee what is of interest to you because getting together and sharing knowledge and experiences is invaluable.

Marketing

The New Zealand based study on the health benefits of a Mediterranean style diet, known as the High Value Nutrition Project or He Rourou Whai Painga and lead by the University of Auckland, continued during 2023. A promotional photo shoot and filming has been carried out by their marketing team and ONZ has been given access to this content. The first participants have finished the study with the last due for completion in May 2024. After that the data will be collected and results published but at this stage we are not sure when that will be.

Facebook is also used to interact with the public and promote articles of interest around Extra Virgin Olive Oil, especially from New Zealand.

We reviewed our sponsorship offering and were delighted that the HortiCentre Trust became our principal sponsor and Modern Olives an Industry sponsor. Our sponsors are hugely important to our operation so please support them whenever you can.

The ONZ website was reviewed for an upgrade and refresh but this turned out to be more complex and costly than we can afford. As an alternative, Emma will update content and imagery and build a site in-house.

ONZ entered the JOOT awards as an alternative to the New York competition but this was not particularly successful and we will look at a different International competition in the future.

Future Direction

There were some changes to the Executive Committee this year with Neil Smith being co-opted on to the committee and Hamilton McConachy and Chris Moore joining as branch chairs for Kapiti and Canterbury respectively.

A big thank you to our hard working Executive Secretary, Emma and members of the executive committee for their valuable time and input during the year. Special thanks to Charles Chinnaiyah who steps down as Treasurer today.

Craig Leaf-Wright

President

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