

U.S. CONGRESS DIRECTS FDA TO TEST IMPORTED OLIVE OILS

OLIVE OIL SCAM

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According to a University of California at Davis study, more than two-thirds of common brands of extra-virgin olive oil found in California grocery stores aren't what they claim to be. The oils were either spoiled or made from lower quality olives unfit to be labeled "extra virgin." Even worse, some were outright counterfeits, made from soybean, hazelnut, and even fish oils mixed with low grade olive-pomace oil. North American Olive Oil Association is sending samples every year to independent labs for testing.

Olive oil scams are profitable because making it right is hard. The olives should be ground and pressed as soon after harvesting as possible, and the process must be gentle—because friction raises the temperature of the olive pulp, which is bad for the flavor. That's the big deal about cold-pressed olives, which must be kept below a temperature of 27°C (80.6°F) to earn the label.

Extra-virgin olive oil has less than 0.8% free fatty acid and no tasting defects. **Virgin olive oil has between 0.8%-2% free fatty acid** and may have a defect. The label should say the estate the olives came from, or even the olive varietal.

OLIVE VARIETAL IDENTIFICATION: Differences between the thousands of varieties can be very subtle. It is now possible to use DNA fingerprinting to identify specific varieties. Some of the laboratories listed on our Testing Laboratories page provide this service.

US Customs regulations on "country of origin" state that if a non-origin nation is shown on the label, then the real origin must be shown on the same side of the label and in comparable size letters so as not to mislead the consumer. Yet most major US brands continue to put "imported from Italy" on the front label in large letters and other origins on the back in very small print. These products are a mixture of olive oil from more than one nation and it is not clear what percentage of the olive oil is really of Italian origin. This practice makes it difficult for high quality, lower cost producers outside of Italy to enter the US market, and for genuine Italian producers to compete.

Imported oils account for more than 95 percent of olive oil consumed in the United States and olive oil fraud brings in an estimated \$16 billion annually.

The U.S. Government Wants to Crack Down on Olive Oil Fraud. The House Agriculture Committee decided to take steps to address olive oil fraud in the U.S. as appropriators working on the new Fiscal Year 2017 FDA spending bill called for tests on all imported olive oil.

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