



Testimony by Selina C. Wang, PhD

United States International Trade Commission

Investigation Number 332-537

Hearing on Olive Oil: Conditions of Competition between U.S. and Major Foreign Supplier Industries

My name is Selina Wang and I am the research director of the UC Davis Olive Center. I have a PhD in Organic Chemistry and have provided primary oversight of the chemistry analysis conducted by the UC Davis Olive Center.

I will limit my remarks to the Olive Center's three reports on olive oil quality, which were funded in part by the California olive oil industry, and to our studies evaluating the chemistry of American olive oil, which were funded by the USDA.

Our studies on olive oil quality have analyzed a total of 207 samples purchased from supermarkets and food service distributors. These studies found that 65 percent of Mediterranean olive oil samples did not meet the IOC's minimal extra virgin standards, and that two of the samples were adulterated with canola oil.

The North American Olive Oil Association and International Olive Council have questioned the validity of the UC Davis studies. I will address four of their arguments here, and would be happy to respond to questions on others.

First, the NAOOA has disputed our findings by claiming that 98 percent of the samples that they have tested are in compliance with IOC standards. But we are discussing two different things. NAOOA conducted only IOC chemical analysis. UC Davis conducted both IOC chemical and sensory analysis. UC Davis found that almost every oil passed the IOC chemical standards

but most of the Mediterranean oils failed the IOC sensory standards. Even samples that were judged by sensory panels to be lampante grade, unfit for human consumption, were able to pass IOC chemical standards for extra virgin grade. So the IOC chemical standards overall are unreliable indicators of quality.

Second, the NAOOA has claimed that our studies reflect a bias in favor of California producers. Our studies were based on results from the IOC-accredited government lab in Australia. We used IOC-accredited sensory panels in Australia and Europe. Our methodology was scientifically rigorous, and our data was not always favorable to California producers. Our results are consistent with those found by Consumer Reports in the September 2012 issue.

Third, the IOC and NAOOA have criticized UC Davis for supplementing the IOC's chemical tests with the DAGs and PPP tests. The IOC claims that these tests are unreliable, UC Davis instead agrees with the International Organization for Standardization or ISO. ISO, the world's largest developer of voluntary standards, recognizes the DAGs and PPP tests as reliable.

Fourth, the NAOOA has inferred that UC Davis would not defend its results when a class-action lawsuit was filed. In fact, UC Davis stands strongly behind its reports. We were advised by campus counsel that it is the policy of the University of California not to participate in third-party lawsuits. The head of the Australian lab, Dr. Rod Mailer, was not bound by such a restriction, but he was not retained in the case. Eventually the case was dropped.

Now I would like to move on to UC Davis' evaluation of the chemistry of American olive oil. Over the past two years we have found that some American-produced olive oils do not correspond to the IOC's parameters for fatty acid and sterol profiles. Such oils would not even be considered olive oil under IOC standards, even though these are quality oils that were made solely with olives. We will release results and recommendations next year.

In conclusion, the Commission's report may wish to consider why the NAOOA's quality monitoring program does not include the IOC sensory standard. To improve testing, UC Davis recommends that the USDA add the DAGs and PPP tests to US standards. These tests do not correlate perfectly with sensory quality, but they are much better than the loose IOC chemical standards that allow lampante oil to be classified as extra virgin. Looking beyond these tests, the UC Davis Olive Center is collaborating with Silicon Valley firms to develop faster, better, and cheaper methods to evaluate olive oil quality.