

1. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF OLIVE GROWING IN MALTA



Figure 1. Location of Malta (Source: UN)

1.1. Introduction

Olive cultivation is distributed all over the Maltese Islands. Many of the olive trees are scattered, used as wind breaks, or mixed with other fruit trees. The irregular distribution is a result of the small, fragmented nature of agricultural holdings. Olive groves vary in size and can be as small as 0.1 ha, with an average planting density of about 300 to 400 trees per ha. In 2010 there were 138 ha under olive trees.

(Source: IOC questionnaire)

1.2. Socio-economic indicators

- **Area: 316 sq km (UN, 2008)**
- **Capital city: Valletta (UN)**
- **Currency: Euro (EUR) (UN, 2009)**
- **Population: 414 971 (World Bank, 2009)**
- **Urban population: 95% (World Bank, 2010)**
- **Rural population: 5% (World Bank, 2010)**
- **Population growth rate: 0.3% (UN, 2010/15)**
- **Life expectancy: 82.0 years (men), 78.4 years (women) (UN, 2010/15)**
- **Main exports by quantity: maize (FAOSTAT, 2009)**
- **Main imports by quantity: maize (FAOSTAT, 2009)**
- **GNI per capita, PPP (current international \$): 23 160 (World Bank, 2009)**
- **GDP per capita, PPP (current international \$): 24 804 (World Bank, 2009)**
- **Employment in agriculture: 1.4% (World Bank, 2008)**
- **Employees in agriculture, female: 0% (World Bank, 2008)**
- **Employees in agriculture, male: 2% (World Bank, 2008)**

2. OLIVE INDUSTRY IN MALTA

2.1. Orchard resources

Olive cultivation is a young, developing industry in the Maltese archipelago where it has gained significance in recent years as increasing olive oil awareness among the Maltese population has led to the planting of many new orchards and the opening of new olive oil mills across the islands of Malta and Gozo. (Source: Oleiculture Unit, Department of Agriculture, Ministry for Resources & Rural Affairs)

According to figures released by the Maltese authorities, the area under olives rose from 86 ha in 2003 to 138 ha in 2010, with 71 ha intended for oil production and 67 ha for table olive production. Organic orchards growing olives for oil production accounted for only 2.39 ha of the total olive crop area in 2009. Taking the same year as a basis, olives were grown on 806 agricultural holdings, of which 786 were under 1 ha and 20 were between 1 and 5 ha in size. (Source: IOC questionnaire)

2.2. Varieties

The varieties currently grown in Malta are:

- Oil varieties: Frantoio, Cipressino, Pendolino, Leccino, Cazzinicchio, Tal-Bidni (local variety), Oglarola, Biancolilla, Termite di Bitetto, Ottobratica, Bosana, Nolca, Pasola
- Table varieties: Ascolana tenera, Bella di Spagna, Uovo di Piccione, Sant'Agostino, Gordales, Moresca, Giarraffa
- Dual-purpose varieties: Carolea, Nocellara Messinese, Coratina, Itrana, Picholine, Manzanilla, Nocellara del Belice, Kalamata, Ta' San Blas (local variety)

2.3. Production and yield

In 2009/10, crop yields in conventional olive orchards averaged 2 315 kg olives/ha, with no distinction made between table and oil-olives. In the case of organic oil-olive orchards, average yields in the same year were 2 096 kg/ha.

In all, Malta produced 25.4 t of olive oil in 2009/10. Table olive production has been moving upwards, although with some swings, rising from 72.1 t in 2008/09 to 125.14 t in 2009/10.

(Source: IOC questionnaire)

2.4. Processing

In 2009 Malta had a total of nine olive oil mills with an average production capacity of 3.2 t/h. Of these, eight were continuous-process facilities (two or three-phase) with an average production capacity of 3.6 t/h and one was a pressing unit with an average production capacity of 0.8 t/h.

The cost of processing oil-olives averaged €0.30/kg in 2009 at conventional mills and €0.40/kg at organic facilities.

Production of virgin olive oils in Malta has increased since 2004, going up from 21.8 t to reach 24.8 t in 2009/10. All of the virgin olive oil produced was extra virgin grade (up to 0.8°). Organic olive oil production fluctuates from year to year and is on a limited scale (0.6 t in 2009/10) although it is forecast to rise to 3.0 t by 2011/12. (Source: IOC questionnaire)

2.5. Marketing, domestic consumption and foreign trade

During the period between 2000 and 2009 Malta consumed 900 t of olive oil and 1 000 t of table olives per year. According to EUROSTAT figures for 2006–2009, Malta imported around 600 t of olive oils, of which 343 t came from Italy in 2009, and approximately 950 t of table olives.

2.6. Recent measures

The Oleiculture Unit, within the Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs, provides technical assistance to farmers setting up new orchards, and those already cultivating olives. Initiatives are planned for the near future to provide further assistance through training by invited experts.

At present, there are no ongoing modernisation programmes although research is underway to find better solutions for by-product management and reuse.

Some promotional activity has been carried out. In 2009, the Ministry applied to the IOC for a grant for a campaign to promote olive oil and table olives in Malta. The proposal was approved by the IOC, which awarded a grant of € 800 for the campaign. The financing released by the Maltese authorities for the campaign amounted to € 590. The chief goal of the campaign, which ran from October to December 2009, was to increase awareness of the beneficial properties of olives and olive oil and to highlight the importance of regularly consuming these products.

(Source: Viticulture and Oenology Unit, Agriculture Directorate)

3. SOURCES

IOC questionnaire

IOC database

<http://www.internationaloliveoil.org/estaticos/view/130-survey-and-assessment-division>

United Nations

<http://data.un.org/Default.aspx>

World Bank

<http://data.worldbank.org/country>

FAOSTAT

<http://faostat.fao.org/site/342/default.aspx>

Viticulture and Oenology Unit, Agriculture Directorate

http://www.agric.gov.mt/ou_stats?l=1