

## **International seminar on geographical indications in the olive oil and table olive sector**

### **Introduction**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to give the introductory speech at this international seminar on geographical indications in the olive oil and table olive sector and to extend a warm vote of thanks to the Italian authorities, in particular the President of CONASCO, for their kind invitation to hold this important event in Reggio di Calabria.

It is made important by the fact that this is the first time that an intergovernmental organisation like the International Olive Council, created in 1959 under UN auspices with the remit of administering the International Agreement on Olive Oil and Table Olives, has focused its attention on the geographical indications or GIs for olive oil and table olives. These two products of the olive tree are key elements of the Mediterranean diet and are traded extensively on the international marketplace. This makes it essential to protect and showcase their attributes, and geographical indications are precisely the tools that are being used increasingly more to do so.

It was with this aim that the IOC Council of Members decided at its 95th session to entrust the Executive Secretariat with conducting a technical and legal review of GIs. At the following 96th session in November 2008 the member countries suggested that the Executive Secretariat set about this task on a solid basis by outsourcing a study on this subject and holding an international seminar to release the findings and listen to the recommendations of the seminar participants.

And so, in October 2009, the Executive Secretariat met for the first time with a group of experts from the IOC member countries to discuss the physico–chemical and organoleptic properties and varieties of the olive oils and table olives covered by GIs. Besides suggesting setting up a steering committee, the experts drew up a list of the technical conditions for inclusion in the specifications for a call for tenders, which they proposed issuing at the end of 2009. After being chosen to carry out the study, the firm Insight Consulting was

invited to attend the second meeting of the steering committee at which the general objectives of the study were fixed.

In a nutshell, those objectives were:

- To describe the legal framework of GIs in the IOC member countries and other producing countries;
- To ascertain the legal tools available in each country to protect GIs;
- To appraise the bilateral and multilateral negotiations on intellectual property issues;
- To provide a comparative analysis of GI specifications;
- To identify potential GIs in the producing countries;
- To assist the IOC in organising an international seminar by preparing a draft programme and list of possible speakers and to present the results of the study.

At this second meeting it was decided that the study would span 28 countries in all:

- **IOC Members:** Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Croatia, Egypt, European Union, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Montenegro, Serbia, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey
- **Other producing countries:** Australia, Chile, , Mexico, Palestine, Peru, Saudi Arabia and the United States
- **Consumer countries:** Brazil, China and Switzerland

The steering committee was submitted a time line for the phases of the study, which Insight Consulting kept to scrupulously.

The steering committee met for the third and last time in July of this year to analyse and approve the phases of the study and their proposed objectives:

- Phase I described the legal frameworks of geographical indications.
- Phase II drew up a comprehensive list of the olive oils and table olives covered by GIs in the 28 countries reviewed in the study. A detailed analysis was provided of each set of GI specifications as well as of the differences between the products covered in EU and non-EU countries and the cultural practices employed.
- Phase III identified approximately 100 potential GIs. As we will see today, more olive oils than table olives are potential candidates for GI status although the situation does vary significantly from country to country. While the legal frameworks for GI protection may not yet be in place in some countries, most have started to give thought to this matter. Among the IOC's Members, Tunisia has the most potential GI areas for olive oil (21), followed by Morocco (11). In the case of table

olives, Argentina is the country where the most potential GIs have been identified.

- Today we have now reached Phase IV of the study, the presentation of the results at an international seminar at which a long list of experts have been invited to speak. Representatives of Insight Consulting will present the conclusions of the study; specialists from the EU, Argentina, Morocco, Turkey, Tunisia and Israel will outline their views and report their respective experience in establishing GIs; and experts from WTO and WIPO will take stock of the multilateral negotiations in this field, all of which will be preceded by a description of the market conditions for GI olive oils and table olives.

Before wishing you productive discussions I would like to add that the steering committee made a further suggestion. It suggested that the IOC Council of Members envisage the possibility of tasking another expert group to use the findings of this GI study as the basis for drawing up a guide of good technical and legal practice for countries wishing to put in place GIs for their olive products. At the close of the seminar I hope to hear your feedback about this suggestion.

It is now a pleasure to give the floor to Mr Marcelo Zimbone, the Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Calabria, who has very kindly agreed to give an overview of olive growing in this magnificent olive producing region which is hosting the seminar.

Thank you for joining us.