



Survey: Chinese consumers are not aware that health benefits of extra virgin olive oil often come with “strong” taste

Consumers in Mainland China and Taiwan need to be better informed about the taste and nutritional characteristics of extra virgin olive oil, according to a consumer survey conducted by experts involved in the TAICHI project.

“If you let a Chinese person try some good extra virgin olive oil, they will only tell you that it tastes too strong”. That’s the verdict reached by a new consumer survey exploring market potential for European olive oil in Mainland China and Taiwan. The survey was conducted by Italy’s three major olive and olive oil producers - CNO, UNASCO and UNAPOL - as part of the TAICHI project, an informational programme co-funded by the EU.

The survey, aimed at consumers and key actors in the supply chain in Mainland China and Taiwan, - investigated the respondents’ levels of awareness around the taste of olive oil, as well as their motivations for consuming olive oil.

The data collected offers a very interesting insight on consumers' perception and attitude towards olive oil and its use in traditional local cuisine. The majority of consumers found it difficult to distinguish between different types of olive oil and identify those characteristics that make the product high quality compared to lower quality ones. However, experts from CNO, UNASCO and UNAPOL say this is not surprising, given that only 5% of Italian consumers are able to pick out these defining characteristics.

On a more optimistic note, the survey found that consumers in both Mainland China and Taiwan believe that the most important characteristics of olive oil are its health benefits. However, many are unaware of the fact that healthy elements (polyphenols) in extra virgin olive oil are often associated with bitter taste. Since extra virgin olive oil is not a traditional part of Asian food culture, many consumers perceive its flavour as “too strong” compared to the condiments they are used to.

Based on the survey outcomes, CNO, UNASCO and UNAPOL concluded that people in Mainland China and Taiwan need to be better informed about the nutritional and commercial characteristics of olive oil. The three consortia are determined to increase consumers’ knowledge of the organoleptic characteristics (taste, smell and liquidity) of various types of olive oil, its production process and European quality standards. These objectives are among the priorities of the TAICHI project, and are indispensable for those looking to seize opportunities for product commercialisation in rapidly developing Asian markets.



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The survey methodology

The survey methodology included:

- Desk research on collecting and comparing data;
- Conducting questionnaires / interviews addressed to market operators (importers, wholesalers, retailers, intermediaries) and consumers;
- A qualitative survey among 15 focus groups (10 in Shanghai and Guangzhou, and 5 in Taipei).

The need for improvement in the commercialisation and export of European extra virgin olive oil is enormous. Even Italy, which enjoys a very positive global reputation for its food, wine and olive oil, currently exports less than 50 million euros' worth of extra virgin olive oil per year to China and Taiwan – a small number in relation to the size of those markets.

For more information on the TAICHI project and European olive oil, visit www.ouroliveoil.com



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