

Equal Exchange Organic Extra Virgin Palestinian Olive Oil FAQ

From which farmer group do you get your olive oil?

Equal Exchange is sourcing the oil from small farmers through PARC, or the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees. PARC is a non-profit, non-governmental organization in the West Bank and is a member of the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO) that works to increase the economic viability of small-scale farming. PARC's projects include: helping olive farmers establish infrastructure and farming techniques to enable them to compete in the olive oil export market; supporting women's economic empowerment through projects like the couscous co-operative; and improving soil and sustainable growing practices.

Is the olive oil Fair Trade certified?

The Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee (PARC), is a member of the World Fair Trade Organization and has FLO certification. Some of the community level cooperatives they purchase from have fair trade certification while others are in the process of pursuing it. At this point we don't have a fair trade certification on the label, but we hope to have IMO fair trade certification printed on the label for the next harvest.

Why Palestinian Oil? Why is Equal Exchange not sourcing from Israeli farmers? or poor olive growers in other developing countries with less problematic situations? or U.S. olive growers for that matter?

Equal Exchange believes that purchasing high-quality certified organic olive oil from small Palestinian farmer co-operatives is highly consistent with our practice of 25 years of trying to build social and economic justice through the marketplace. While perhaps many origins could meet this criteria, we have pursued this relationship in this part of the world to help farmers with few other options to stay on the land and earn an independent living for themselves and their communities. We believe this is a positive step in a part of the world facing a multitude of seemingly intractable challenges.

What are the political affiliations of the communities, farmer groups and exporters that Equal Exchange is working with?

Consistent with our trade relationships in many other countries, Equal Exchange does not screen small farmer organizations for political affiliation.

What variety of olives are used to make the oil?

PARC oil is pressed from Nabali olives, an indigenous Palestinian olive variety also known locally as Baladi. They grow in the western region and are considered by many experts to produce one of the highest quality olive oils in the world. The farmers have since been awarded international prizes for quality. The latest prize, for "best organic extra virgin olive oil" in the Palestinian Territories, was earned in 2011 in an Italian competition called Biol Prize.

What does Extra Virgin signify?

Cold pressed: extra virgin olive oil is derived from the cold pressing of olives without any refining, Extra Virgin Olive Oil has a distinctive aroma and taste and intense fruity flavor. It's also low in acidity (less than 0.8 percent).

What's the best way to store olive oil?

Olive oil has a “best before” shelf life of 2 years from the date of harvest. Keep it in a dark, cool place, like a cabinet. It does not need to be refrigerated; however, refrigeration does no harm. The dark green glass bottle helps protect it from light. When using, replace the cover promptly to avoid oxidation, which will affect the flavor.

Is olive oil healthy for you?

Olive oil contains polyphenols which are antioxidants in plants that many believe have a substantial amount of health benefits. Among the most well known of the polyphenols are the flavonoids, which are a grouping of several thousand individual compounds. These compounds are found together in many different foods, all contributing in a unique way to an individual's overall health. They are most commonly introduced to the body through the consumption of fruits and vegetables.

Is olive oil fattening?

Olive oil has 120 calories per tablespoon (9 calories per gram of oil) - no more than any other common cooking or salad oil. But because of its greater flavor and aroma, you'll probably use less olive oil in cooking than other oils, thus helping you cut fat calories. Olive oil does not contain cholesterol.

Is Palestinian olive oil as good as Italian olive oil?

Most of the world's olive oil comes from the Mediterranean region, which has a history of olive tree cultivation that stretched back more than 6,000 years. Most of the world's finest olive oils come from this area. To say which in particular is best is often a matter of taste, since, like fine wines, the flavors, colors and aromas of olive oils vary according to the type of olive grown, as well as climate and soil conditions, and so forth. Extra Virgin Olive Oil is highly regarded, as it offers the widest varieties of flavors and aromas, with a perfect “fruity” flavor.

How do you use olive oil?

You can use oil in cooking, on salads, and perhaps best of all, drizzle a generous thread of it onto hot baked potatoes, roasted or grilled veggies, raw garlic-rubbed toast, or a platter or sliced ripe tomatoes.