

International Olive Council
IOC Executive Director
Mr. Abdellatif Ghedira
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16th July 2020

Panel test: Questions asked to Ms. Yousra Antit

Dear Ms. Antit
Dear Mr. Ghedira

IOF - International Olive Foundation would like to thank you for your letter of 14 July 2020 and refers to the telephone conversation held on 16 July 2020 between our President, Silvan Brun, and your Head of Department "Chemistry & Standardisation", Ms Yousra Antit.

In your first written reply of 11 June 2020 to our complaint about the technical shortcomings of the Swiss Olive Oil Panel in conducting sensory analysis in "home testing", you made the following statement: «[...] Please note that this panel did not mention the conditions of home tasting in its documentation. In fact, following decision No. DEC-13/103-V/2015 regarding the IOC certificate for the recognition of laboratories undertaking the sensory analysis of virgin olive oils, point 1.2.3 states that laboratories must follow the provisions outlined in the current IOC method for the organoleptic assessment of virgin olive oils and the related standards. The official organoleptic assessment method (COI/T.20/Doc. No. 15) provides strict conditions that panels must comply with in a tasting session. Such conditions include the temperature of the tasting room and samples, adequate and continuous training for tasters, and the subsequent statistical processing of the results. What is more, the 'Guide for the installation of a test room' (COI/T.20/Doc. no. 6) explicitly states that a tasting session must take place in a test room. Otherwise, home tasting, which takes place under non-laboratory conditions, does not produce objective results, since the conditions are not strictly controlled. Given that organoleptic assessment must take place under laboratory conditions, and given the pandemic, measures should be taken in the laboratory as in any other chemical laboratory. [...]»

However, in our letter dated 18th of June 2020, we have informed the IOC that the legal department of the Zurich University of Applied Sciences interprets the statements of the IOC letter to IOF - International Olive Foundation in another way and claims that the Swiss Olive Oil Panel fulfils all requirements for the panel test set by the IOC.

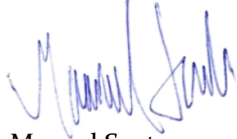
In other words, the Zurich University of Applied Sciences claims that laboratory conditions prevail at the home testing stations of the respective olive oil tasters, implying that the tests were carried out in full compliance with IOC guidelines and the regulation (EEC) No. 2568/91 in its current valid version. At this point, we refer once again to the photographic material forwarded to you, which proves the opposite.

Since IOF – International Olive Foundation is still missing an absolutely unequivocal statement made by the IOC regarding the home testing activities of the Swiss Olive Oil Panel or of home testing procedures of olive oil panels in general, respectively, we agreed in the telephone conversation we had with Ms. Yousra Antit that the IOC will answer the following technical questions by written means in a clear manner, in order to eliminate any further opportunity for random interpretations.

1. In the context of a sensory analysis of virgin olive oils according to IOC guidelines, is an IOC recognised olive oil panel allowed to carry out the sensory analysis of virgin olive oils in home tasting, i.e. not in the designated sensory laboratory, especially when the panels state on the panel report the analysis was carried out according to COI-guidelines as well as according to Commission Regulation (EEC) No 2568/91 in its latest version?
2. The IOC imposes laboratory conditions for the sensory analysis of virgin olive oils. Can the conditions prevailing in home tasting, i.e. when each panel member conducts sensory analysis of olive oils in his or her own home in an individual environment, be considered laboratory conditions?
3. In the context of a sensory analysis of virgin olive oils in accordance with IOC guidelines, is it allowed that panel members taste a corresponding oil sample in environmental conditions that are different from those at other testing stations?
4. In the context of a sensory analysis of virgin olive oils according to IOC guidelines, is it allowed that panel members taste a corresponding oil sample at different hours (including even different times of a day)?
5. In the context of a sensory analysis of virgin olive oils according to IOC guidelines, are IOC recognised olive oil panels allowed to serve their panel members the oils to be analysed in plastic cups?
6. In the context of a sensory analysis of virgin olive oils according to IOC guidelines, is it allowed to carry out the tasting without the test glasses and thermostatically controlled heating device described in ISO 16657:2006?
7. In the context of a sensory analysis of virgin olive oils according to IOC guidelines, is it allowed that the panel members wash and towel dry the official tasting glasses before use?
8. In the context of a sensory analysis of virgin olive oils according to IOC guidelines, is it allowed for panel members to taste directly from olive oil sample flasks?
9. In the context of a sensory analysis of virgin olive oils according to IOC guidelines, is it allowed for the panel leader to send the sample olive oils via courier to the individual home testing stations of the tasters?
10. In the context of a sensory analysis of virgin olive oils according to IOC guidelines, is it allowed for simple panel members to prepare the oil samples themselves?
11. In the context of a sensory analysis of virgin olive oils in accordance with IOC guidelines, is it allowed to pour the oil samples into the official tasting glasses without the aid of suitable measuring instruments (which can measure the quantity of the olive oil required for the sensory analysis)?
12. In the context of a sensory analysis of virgin olive oils according to IOC guidelines, is it allowed for panel members to fill in the Profile Sheet with a wipeable pencil?
13. In the context of a sensory analysis of virgin olive oils according to IOC guidelines, is it allowed for the panel leader to inform the panel members about the identity of the client before the sensory analysis is performed?
14. In the context of a sensory analysis of virgin olive oils according to IOC guidelines, is it allowed for the panel leader to inform the panel members about the background of the analysis before the sensory analysis is performed?
15. In the context of a sensory analysis of virgin olive oils according to IOC guidelines, is a panel allowed to let a panel member participate in the sensory analysis of an oil marketed by that same panel member?

IOF - International Olive Foundation thanks you for the prompt response of these important questions and looks forward to your reply.

Best regards



Manuel Santana
Member of the Board



Pierluigi Tosato
Member of the Board



Silvan Brun
Chairman