

# Following Olive Footprints (*Olea europaea* L.)

**Cultivation and Culture, Folklore and History,  
Traditions and Uses**

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### **Statements by the Editorial Board**

1. Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, popular medicine was far more common and advanced than treatment by a medical professional. Using olive oil for enhancing good health and as a remedy for many illnesses has been transferred over centuries from one generation to the next, especially in the Mediterranean basin. Science and research have been constantly proving its magical effects on health. However the prescriptions mentioned in the book manuscript under "Popular Medicinal and Cosmetic Uses" should be used in or after consultation with a physician.
2. The dates and places where olive cultivation started may differ in different chapters according to the scientific and archaeological information available in each country.

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**INTRODUCTION**  
**BY THE CO-SPONSORING AND CO-PUBLISHING ORGANIZATIONS**  
**AARINENA - IOC - ISHS**

Olive trees are deeply rooted not only in the soils in the Mediterranean basin but also in its civilizations for thousands of years. They are the most frequently grown of all fruit trees in this part of the world as far as cultivated areas and production are concerned. Without any doubt, these magnificent blessed trees, which are praised in the holy books of the three monotheistic religions and others, have left profound traces everywhere they have grown for centuries. They played a vital role in conserving the environment and in nutrition, economy, habits, traditions and the day-to-day life of the Mediterranean people. Some of these people migrated to the new world centuries ago and took with them olive trees to remind them of home. They withstood separation from their loved ones but they could not bear it to be separated from the olive tree. There in their new countries, the olive tree struck roots and set a new footing, taking with it many folkloric customs and manifestations.

Oliviculture is presently surfing on the cutting edge of scientific discussion due to recent technological innovations in olive growing and to the health benefits associated with the consumption of olive oil. It is a fascinating theme that combines agricultural history, cultural heritage, folk traditions and scientific knowledge, and attracts the attention of scientists and the general public.

AARINENA and ISHS have been working together for a few years on different subjects. Through the ISHS participation in the AARINENA 11<sup>th</sup> General Conference in Damascus, Syria in October 2008 the dream of this book was born. Two years later it started to become a reality, through planning at the International Horticulture Congress (IHC-2010) organized by ISHS in Lisbon, Portugal in August 2010 with AARINENA effective participation. IOC is the only intergovernmental organization in the world able to bring together olive oil and table olive producing and consuming stakeholders. It joined efforts with the two organizations to co-sponsor and co-publish this book. Not less than 24 of the 41 countries featured in this book take part in IOC deliberations and account for 98% of the world olive production, of which 23% is the share of AARINENA member countries. These countries have adopted IOC marketing standards for application in their international trade. IOC considers the other countries presented in this book as natural partners and members of the global olive family and hopes they will join the organization to strengthen its global activities and to serve them more within its mandate.

This book will open a new horizon of cooperation between AARINENA, IOC and ISHS and we all congratulate the authors and editors whose names appear on the first and third page of the book. We acknowledge their commitment in working so hard for so long to produce this veritable encyclopedia of the olive tree. We extend our special thanks to the Editor in Chief Mohamed El-Kholy, who has worked so hard with persistence to ensure that the book is taking its current shape and to Damiano Avanzato the Chair of the ISHS Section Nuts and Mediterranean Fruits who has been the prime mover of the book initiative. The editorial team was able to collect and edit a large number of diversified contributions that lead the readers along the olive route

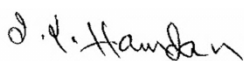
from its birth in the Mediterranean basin to remote destinations as far as South Africa, Australia, Latin America and Pakistan, Japan and China in East Asia.

The valuable information contained herein deserves fast and effective dissemination. AARINENA has published the Olive GAP Manual for West Asia North Africa Region in cooperation with FAO, and again under the leadership of Mohamed El-Kholy and Costas Gregoriou, and through its Olive Network this new book will reach different stakeholders in the WANA Region. IOC within its mandate and multiple projects will foster knowledge sharing and promotion of olive products with this book. By incorporating this book in its important *Scripta Horticulturae* series ISHS will make sure that it reaches its members and the horticultural scientific arena and be presented in each of its numerous conferences, symposiums and congresses.

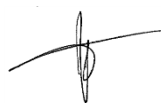
The book addresses a variety of olive-related topics that depicts the multifaceted knowledge accumulated along innumerable generations of people who built their lives around olive trees. Therefore this is a book focused on people, weaving agriculture knowledge and innovations with genetic resources and folk traditions across a diversity of cultures and geographic locations.

The various chapters are well illustrated and written in a clear and accurate language that is accessible to the general public interested in olives but also relevant to scientists and olive experts. They will find valuable and unique information here.

It combines tradition with modernity and opens new opportunities for olive trees to undergo faster economic and social development around the world. We are sure readers will be fascinated when they rediscover the world olive heritage and recognize the effort of those who have preserved the olive trees and carried on their valuable legacy to the forthcoming generations.



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## FOREWORD

By Kelly M. Harrison

International Agricultural Development Consultant

I was asked by the Editor in Chief, my friend and colleague Mohamed El-Kholy, to read and help with final editing for English proofreading of this wonderful compendium of olive production techniques, processing and uses around the world since the dawn of civilization. I was totally fascinated with the long history and diversity of olive cultivars and the myriad uses of olive oil and table olives in different cultures. For many millennia people in the Mediterranean basin held the olive in holy esteem, as indicated by numerous references in religious texts and ceremonies. Yet the vast majority of world citizens are only now beginning to understand the importance of olives and olive oil in a healthy and delicious diet; and in cosmetics and nutrition. While olive oil is not a medicine or a drug, it does have health-promoting attributes and, when regularly consumed, can help to prevent innumerable diseases. This book reveals the long history and more recent adaptations in cultivation of the olive tree in a wide range of countries. Indeed, it reflects the rapid expansion of oliviculture on all continents, while highlighting the rapid expansion into new production areas. It will find readers among olive scientists as well as those with little knowledge of the industry.

This book presents informative material about olive production history and usage along with the current status of olives in 41 countries on every continent. Over more than 7,000 years the olive has been man's companion, first in the Mediterranean basin and now around the globe. Common proverbs about the olive tree and its fruit abound in almost every country with a long history of cultivation. Some of the most interesting are: "Who plants an olive makes a fortune", "I'm suffering the black of the olives", meaning to show the heavy burden of life, "I don't have even a drop of oil to tint my eyes", implying one's poverty. Some olive proverbs were enshrined in popular ballads like the "The olive of tears", a ballad about wives watching their emigrant husbands travelling by boat to the Corfu Island, the first station of their trip. In olden times it was believed that burning the leafy twigs in the chimney near Christmas time inside a living room removes bad spirits from the house.

But even today most people around the globe have yet to learn about the wonders of olives and olive oil. I was one of them. I grew up on a farm in the northern part of Texas, USA. In the 1950's olives were only produced in one State - California in very small quantities, if at all. At that time most of us knew little more about the amazing olive and olive oil than what we had seen in the Bible. Our preferred cooking oils were animal fat and hydrogenated vegetable oil, used in our predominant diet of fried potatoes, chicken, beef and pork. That diet is now recognized as extremely harmful to human health. There was no recognition at all of the many other benefits of olive oil. Table olives were available, mainly green and stuffed with pimento. They were used as a kind of curious garnish in a few culinary presentations or with sandwiches. My own reaction after tasting green stuffed olives was repulsion: it was way too bitter for my sensitive young taste. After traveling in most of the countries around the Mediterranean Sea and living for extended periods in Jordan and Egypt I have become a huge partisan of olive products, consuming table olives and/or olive oil at every single meal. The positive impact on my health has been amazing.

It seems inevitable that more and more citizens of the world will discover the benefits of olive products. And given the onslaught of global warming, the increasing scarcity of water in many countries, the relatively low water requirements of the olive tree and the rapid increase in demand for olive products, we can expect even more rapid growth in olive production and trade in the coming decades.

This compendium of information about olive growing in 41 countries may well be a primer for growers, processors, marketers or consumers who will inevitably seek to know more about the history of olive trees and their remarkable products, their culinary uses and healthy attributes as well as current cultivation practices in different parts of the world and their impact on economy and environment.



## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

By the Editor in Chief

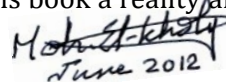
A few months after we started this book, some 21 months ago in October 2010, I started addressing all contributors as the “Big Family of Following Olive Footprints”. My motive for that was that we had reached over 100 persons in addition to a huge number of unknown soldiers, whose contribution with images has been so valuable to this book; and like most families, our days were not always full of joy and understanding. We had our hard times. I must apologize to some members of this big family who were annoyed that I had to rush their work, never stopped asking for additional information or different images in a way that might have been overbearing at times. So I sincerely thank all authors and photographers, whose names are declared under images’ captions, as well as my colleagues and dear friends Damiano, Juan, Kostas, Facundo and Enzo, members of the editorial board for the excellent and hard work you have all done with a team spirit.

It is not me who is going to acknowledge your efforts and memorable work, but rather your readers who, I believe, will enjoy and appreciate this book. From day one I had the vision that this book should serve the olive industry in a different way; as a documentary and have chosen the pivotal theme to be “Olives and People”. As some of you wrote to me “at the beginning we could not understand, but it is your persistence that made us finally comprehend”.

Now that we understand one another so clearly and have made a great team, I hope that you are all geared up for our forthcoming book following this one, the topic of which is already discussed and of course it will be on olives. Without exception, all of you have shown great passion in what we have together done. That is what made this a unique volume highlighting the olive story from more than 7,000 years ago. A hearty thank you to all of you, my dearest ones of the “Big Family of Following Olive Footprints”.

This acknowledgement would not be complete without thanking my family for standing beside me, never complaining about the time I have stolen from them; my mother the lady of 84 who lives all by herself and whom I have not seen for months, although she is just 7 km from where this book has been compiled; my wife and children and my grandchildren who have grown up in this period without me noticing it.

Thank you again in person to all who have managed to make this book a reality and to our readers I hope you will enjoy this book written with passion.



June 2012