

Review of the 4th International Olive Oil Award - Zurich 2005 & OLIO 2005

Objective Sensory Evaluation vs. Consumer Opinion

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In 2005, at the International Olive Oil Award – Zurich and OLIO, experts were asked for the fourth time to give an objective evaluation of a total of 143 “extra vergine” olive oils (from the 04/05 harvest), while consumers were also able to state their subjective impressions and preferences.

The variety was again extraordinary – oils from a total of 11 countries were represented in the contest. They included both oils which were “unmixed”, i.e. pressed from a single variety of olive, and those pressed from several carefully harmonised varieties to create outstanding products. There were oils produced with special methods, such as DOP (GUB), IGP (GGA), or bio, as well as strictly conventional methods. And there were also oils which had been filtrated before bottling for sale, and others which had not.

On the occasion of the International Olive Oil Award 2005 in Zurich (www.oliveoilaward.ch) there were a total of 45 awards, including 6 of the coveted Golden Olive, 10 of the Silver Olive and a further 29 as a recognition of excellence.

In October 2005 at the Gourmesse Zürich (www.gourmesse.ch), where the same oils were tested by the public, 15 favourites emerged. 564 consumers, 290 women and 272 men, expressed their preferences at this event. About half of the consumers were aged between 31 and 50, but children older than 10 (8) and persons aged more than 70 (8) also enjoyed evaluating the olive oils (Figure 1). About 85 % of the survey participants came from Switzerland, another 10 % from Germany and the remainder from Austria, Italy, Spain, France, the Netherlands and even the USA. Independent of nationality and age, most of those surveyed said they used olive oil 3 or 4 times (22%) or even 5 or 6 times (14%) per week. The “heavy users” – those who use olive oil daily or several times a day – were actually in the majority, making up 49% (Figure 1).

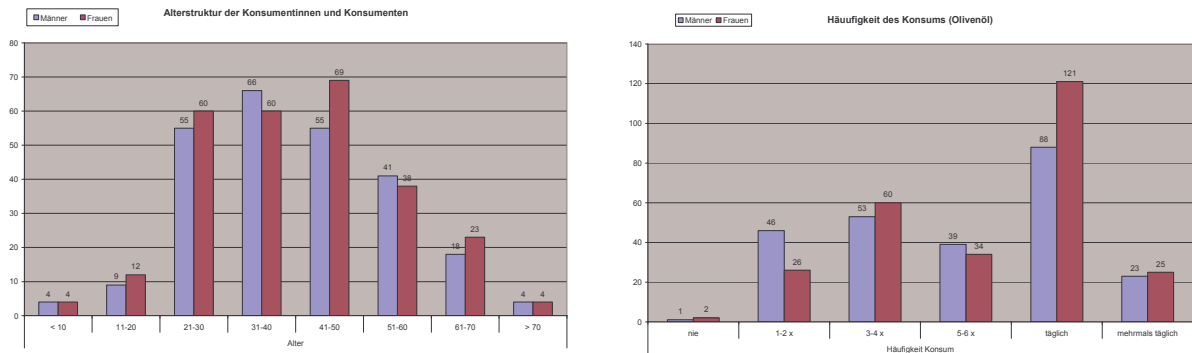


Figure 1: Age distribution of consumers at OLIO (left) and consumption habits (right)

Around 70% of the consumers surveyed stated that they preferred olive oils from Italy, followed by Greece at 25%, Spain at 16% and French oils at around 7% (selection of more than one preferred country of origin possible). Astonishingly, about 14% of participants said that they had no clear preference for a particular country of origin.

If we now directly compare the results of the objective evaluation (IOOA) and the consumer test (OLIO), we find some interesting facts:

The public favourite (Oil No. 75) – a moderately fruity oil from Italy / Sicily, made from 100% Cerasuola olives, was also evaluated by the objective panel from the University of Applied Sciences (HSW) as an excellent oil sensorically, with outstanding harmony and a well-balanced interplay of the attributes “green olive” and “grass”, together with further accents from the areas “nut” and “fruit, vegetable, herbs”. It was awarded a Silver Olive.

Another oil, an intensely fruity oil from Italy / Tuscany, made from a variety of Tuscan olive varieties, was clearly rejected by the public (last place). Interestingly this oil was also judged by the HSW Olive Oil Expert Panel as only average in terms of harmony. The dominant attributes in this case were “bitter” and “green olive”. No other positive attributes were identified and this oil was not awarded a prize.

You will find further information on this topic, together with tables and graphics, at: www.oliveoilaward.ch (in Menu: ... / History / 4th International Olive Oil Award).