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**New Study Finds Consumers Paying a Premium Price  
For Cheap, Adulterated, Imported Olive Oil**

Tests Prove 69% of Imported Oils Mislabeled As Extra Virgin Olive Oil

**BERKELEY, Calif. (July 15, 2010)** -- Given America's ongoing love affair with food, it is no surprise that sales of extra virgin olive oil in the U.S. have been surging. However, a new study just released concludes that consumers are frequently being ripped off when purchasing imported extra virgin olive oil as all too often the oil fails to meet the internationally-accepted standards because it may be oxidized, of poor quality, or adulterated and mislabeled as extra virgin olive oil.

In tests of imported olive oils labeled as extra virgin and sold in California supermarkets and big box retail stores, 69% of the samples failed to meet internationally-accepted standards to be called "extra virgin olive oil" since the oils were deemed to be too old, poorly made and/or adulterated. The study was initiated to investigate a number of unconfirmed reports that imported olive oils available for purchase in the United States as "extra virgin" were actually lower quality oil. The University of California, Davis Olive Oil Chemistry Laboratory collaborated with the Australian Oils Research Laboratory to evaluate the quality of extra virgin olive oils sold on retail shelves in California.

"Extra virgin" is the highest grade of olive oil and must be extracted from the olive without heat or solvents. International and U.S. Department of Agriculture standards also require that extra virgin olive oils meet specific criteria for chemical makeup and sensory qualities including flavor and aroma. Because of these required standards, extra virgin olive oil commands a top price. Federal law prohibits a company from not disclosing that it is selling a blend of oils on the label. Yet, olive oil can be exported to the United States and labeled as "extra virgin" even if the same oils would not meet the standards for "extra virgin" in Europe. In 2007, the United States imported more than 261,000 metric tons of oil branded as "extra virgin" – up from 163,000 metric tons ten years earlier.

Each year in the U.S., consumers spend more than \$720 million on olive oil. The California olive oil industry and many retailers have long been worried that consumers may be purchasing bottles labeled extra virgin olive oil but actually receiving something quite different.

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“Falsely branded olive oil is a very real threat to our industry. This is why we established a certification program to ensure that when consumers buy a California-produced olive oil with the Certified Extra Virgin seal on it, they know they are buying real extra virgin olive oil,” said Patty Darragh, executive director of the California Olive Oil Council.

This is the first study of its kind by an American academic institution and the report details the study’s findings and names of the brands evaluated. In conducting the study, researchers bought fifty-two samples of 14 readily-available imported brands and 5 California brands of olive oil sold under extra virgin olive oil labels in supermarkets and big box stores throughout the state. The oils were divided and tested at the UC Davis Olive Oil Chemistry Laboratory and the Australian Oils Research Laboratory for a number of different sensory and chemical tests

“The oils that failed our tests were defective such as rancidity and many of these oils did not taste good,” said Dan Flynn, executive director of the Olive Center at U.C. Davis. He added, “Before this study, we had anecdotal reports of poor quality olive oil being sold as extra virgin but now we have empirical proof.”

It is hoped that studies like this can educate consumers on what to look for when making their purchasing decisions. Demand for extra virgin olive oil has soared in recent years thanks in part to cable food channels, celebrity chefs and the health benefits of the popular Mediterranean Diet. Food savvy American consumers are reaching for extra virgin olive oil to combine great taste and healthier choices. As a result, according to the latest figures, more than 75 million gallons of olive oil was sold in the U.S. in 2009, up from 47 million gallons just ten years ago.

“This pivotal research will help the consumer know what real extra virgin olive oil is,” said Linda Sikorski, senior buyer at the Pasta Shop in Oakland, California. She added, “Consumers can always ask their specialty retailer for more information as well as trust the COOC seal for assurance of extra virgin olive oil produced in California. Hopefully this report will motivate the federal government to adopt tougher standards similar to the COOC to protect both American consumers and olive oil producers.”

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### **Note to Media:**

The report is available online at <http://olivecenter.ucdavis.edu/>

**For important consumer purchasing tips visit the California Olive Oil Council:**

<http://www.cooc.com/tp:>