

Brazil on Its Way to Become Olive Oil Country

Written by Isaura Daniel

Wednesday, 03 April 2013 15:35



Brazil now has its name on olive oil labels that are sold in some of the main supermarkets in the country. The federal government has now decided to make an effort to transform Brazilian agriculture in a producer of olive trees, olives and olive oil and several initiatives are already being developed all over the country, mainly in Rio Grande do Sul.

This is the case with producers like José Alberto Aued and his son Daniel Aued, who grow 18,500 hectares of olive trees in the city of Cachoeira do Sul, in Brazil's state of Rio Grande do Sul, and make over 20,000 liters of olive oil per crop. Their brand, Olivas do Sul, is sold on the retail market in Rio Grande do Sul, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

"We are great importers of olive oil, we import US\$ 316 million in olive oil, US\$ 121 million in olives and the southern region has appropriate climate and soil for cultivation of olives," said the Agricultural Development and Cooperative department at the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply, Caio Rocha. According to him, Brazil is the third main importer of olive oil in the world and the idea is to make use of this market potential.

To boost production in future, the government included funds for the sector in last year's Crop Plan and is organizing the production chain and orchestrating the establishment of norms to be followed by producers, guaranteeing quality olive oil.

The Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa), connected to the Ministry, works in the development of adequate olive trees for the south of the country and will soon put into operation a laboratory for analysis of the quality of olive oil produced and consumed in the country.

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The target, according to Rocha, is to reduce imports of olive oils by 30% in four years. According to the Agricultural Chain Integrated Production coordinator at the Ministry, Marcus Vinicius de Miranda Martins, last year there were around 600 hectares with olive trees in Brazil, mainly in Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina and Minas Gerais.

Despite the country also importing olives, the ministry is fostering the production of olive oil, as the market in the country is greater. The processing is normally by farmers, who join forces and establish associations.

The Temperate Climate unit at Embrapa, in Pelotas, has already worked on agricultural climate zoning that identified the most appropriate regions for production of olives in Rio Grande do Sul.

"We found Campanha region, close to Uruguay. But there are several other regions, microclimates, that are appropriate. The greatest tendency, however, is for production to take place in the regions of Bagé, Dom Pedrito and Uruguaiana," said Rogério Oliveira Jorge, a researcher at Embrapa Temperate Climate.

Embrapa should also work on edapho-climatic zoning, which studies the joint soil and climate conditions. The studies should cover the characteristics of the olive oils under production in Brazil and should release, still this year or next, three varieties of olive trees appropriate for the Brazilian soil.

The Embrapa laboratories should not only analyze the quality of local oil, but also provide assistance to the Ministry of Agriculture in the inspection of olive oils consumed in the country.

"Between 75% and 80% of the olive oils consumed in Brazil are below international standards," said the researcher, who is leading the Embrapa project.

According to Jorge, the productivity reached in the soil in Rio Grande do Sul is similar to that in countries in Europe, around ten tons of olives per hectare, generating approximately 1,500 liters or kilograms of olive oil.

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He recalls, however, that production of olives starts in the third or fourth year of the tree's life and goes on to 70 or 80 years.

Between the eight and tenth year, however, production reaches its peak and stabilizes. Therefore, as production in the country is still recent, definitive results are not yet possible.

Olivas do Sul is a company that shows it did its homework for production of olive oil. According to Daniel Aued, the owner's son, the decision for production of olive trees was made by his father, who was interested in a culture that covered a small area.

He had bought 14 hectares of land and on $\frac{1}{4}$ hectare he planted grape vines to realize his dream of producing fizzy wine. He then started studying what to do with the remaining area. "He sought a culture that could bring high return on a small piece of land," explained Aued.

As the family used to consume olive oil, José Alberto Aued decided to research olive farming. He imported books from Spain, Portugal and France. "He studied to learn whether cultivation was appropriate in Rio Grande do Sul," said Daniel.

Aued then went on to convince himself that production was possible, visiting farms in Argentina and Europe. But it was in Uruguay that he found the most similar characteristics to those of the soil he had.

The first trees were planted in 2006 and were producing fruit three years later. "We imported the machinery and processed our first olive oil," said Daniel.

It was 2010, and 800 liters were produced. In 2011, production climbed to 6,000 liters and last year it reached 22,000. The 2013 crop is in progress and that is why the figures are not yet closed.

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Today, apart from the 12 hectares on which trees provide olives, another 6.5 hectares have been implemented and production should begin in 2014. Another 8.5 hectares should have production starting in three or four years' time. Sampling tests in Italy generated good results for the "Olivas do Sul" product, according to Daniel.

Putting products on the market, according to Daniel, is not easy. Competition is with imported olive oil, which, according to him, comes to Brazil with marketing and low prices. The producer criticizes the quality of imported olive oil sold here.

"It spends three to four years in drums, whereas good olive oil should be consumed in the year of the crop," he said. Daniel says that company marketing has been to inform consumers what a good olive oil is. Daniel is a civil engineer and his father is an electrical engineer.

Anba