

**Project acronym:** INASOOP

**Project full title:** Integrated Approach to Sustainable Olive Oil And Table Olives Production

**Project duration:** January 2004 – April 2007

**Total budget of the project:** 1.513.765 €, partially funded by the European Commission (70%)

**Instrument:** Collective research, under the 6<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (PF6)

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Olive oil is one of the most important products of the European agro-alimentary sector, having evolved from the traditional alimentary fat used in the Mediterranean countries since thousands of years to the latest ingredient of a more healthy diet.

The European Union is the biggest world producer of olive oil in the world (80% of the world production), and employs more than 800,000 people. In the case of table olives, the European Union is again the main producer (40-45%), with figures for the last campaigns of between 400-500 tons out of a world total production of 1.0-1.3 million tons. This sector is integrated in the EU by about 600 companies.

Due to its recognized beneficial health properties, olive oil and table olives consumption is expected to grow worldwide. However, the extremely polluting residues generated by both industries (more than 10 million tons from olive oil and about 1 million tons from table olives annually in Europe) pose serious problems to the producers, especially in the case of small and medium sized companies. Indeed, the European sector faces nowadays increasingly restrictive environmental legislations and the need to be competitive against other Mediterranean countries and new producers (for instance in Australia, USA or South America). Therefore, it is an urgent topic to offer suitable alternatives to both olive mills and table olives manufacturers for their wastewaters and solid residues.

INASOOP intends to take an integrated and proactive approach to this problem: the aim is to develop harmonized European Environmental Quality Standards (EQS) for olive oil and table olives production and to facilitate the necessary support to their members for meeting them. As a result, the project seeks that small and medium sized olive mills and table olive producers are able to meet the environmental regulations in force and in the European Union, even optimizing the economic performance of their exploitation through valorization alternatives for their wastes, or if reducing their consumption patterns for water and energy. All these measures will lead to a better, cleaner olive oil and table olive production while obtaining the highest quality in the final product, thus ensuring the maintenance of the EU's leading role in the olive industry.

The consortium in INASOOP, 21 partners from Germany, Portugal, Italy, Spain and Greece, intends to comprise all the different actors involved in the problem and its solutions: on the one hand, there are olive industry associations, which are aware of the general situation of the sector in their respective countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece) and the presence of seven olive industries provide a closer look to specific cases and the opportunity to develop case studies. On the other hand, the consortium also comprises companies providing environmental services and research institutions with experience in olive oil residues treatment. Thus, all relevant sectors are represented: olive mills and their associations, research institutions with experience on the field and environmental services companies facing day-to-day the environmental problems caused by olive oil production residues. This allows to get together the necessary complementary expertise and to deliver valuable, adapted results for the SME olive mills sector.

The main tasks carried out in the project, which started in February 2004 and will run until April 2007, comprise a deep survey of olive oil production across the European Union Member States in order to define environmental threats and industrial needs of each of the systems implemented, and the development of harmonised Environmental Quality Standards, and an Expert System able to provide specific guidelines helping the olive mills and table olives

manufacturers complying with the proposed standards. These standards and the guidelines have led to the preparation of an Expert System, a software tool specifically prepared for helping the industrial associations and producers implement a more sustainable production scheme. Both the Standards and the Expert System are currently being translated into Italian, Spanish, Greek and Portuguese in order to fulfil correctly the next task in the project, training of the SMEs and the producer associations in the environmental problems associated to olive oil and table olives production, the possible solutions and the EQS. This stage is about to start, and it is planned that will be completed in the next months, when the partners will organise a series of training courses in Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece, for the associations and producers included in the consortium. The main objective of these courses will be to train the industrial associations and the producers in sustainable olive oil and table olive production practices and the Environmental Quality Standards developed during the project, as well as the use of the Expert System.

INASOOP has also a strong dissemination component, as the partners agree on that it is the first step for raising awareness on the importance of clean production solutions from the consumers to the producers. The INASOOP consortium has carried out activities oriented at the dissemination of the positive effects of applying production schemes aimed towards more sustainable concepts in the small and medium companies from the olive sector.