OLIVE ALIVE - PRESS KIT

WHAT IS OLIVE ALIVE?

Olive Alive is a five-year LIFE project (2015-2020), co-financed by the European Commission and coordinated by SEO/BirdLife. A pioneer initiative in the Mediterranean basin, the objective of its 38 actions is the establishment of a profitable model of olive farming that brings biodiversity back. Moreover, the project wants to position this production model as a recognised and profitable added value in the olive market.

In conclusion, Olive Alive is trying to create a viable model to bring back together olive oil and biodiversity.

The University of Jaén (UJA), the Provincial Government of Jaén and the Experimental Station of Arid Zones (EEZA-CSIC) are project partners, and the Spanish Olive Oil Interprofessional Organisation and the Foundation “Patrimonio Comunal Olivarero” are co-financers.
OLIVE ALIVE - PRESS KIT

FARMERS AS ALLIES

Olive Alive is supported by those who can actually **halt the loss of biodiversity in the olive grove: farmers.**

The project works in 20 very different olive groves, both organic and conventional, in over 3,600 hectares spread throughout Andalusia, with the exception of Huelva and Almeria.

A series of experimental measures have already started to be implemented in these demonstrative olive groves. These measures are aimed at fostering biodiversity, restoring soils and land fertility and better understanding the ecological role played by olive groves in the Mediterranean ecosystem.

To date, 57 local councils have also joined the Project as members of the recently founded Olive Alive Municipalities Network. In this way, they are committed to a nature-friendly olive farming model.
One of the cornerstones of the project is volunteering, which is a practical way of fostering participation and spreading knowledge of the Project.

Dozens of participants are selflessly giving their time to plant thousands of shrubs and aromatic plants of more than 50 different native species in road edges, field boundaries, erosion gullies, banks and brooks.

These might be seen as poor areas when farming is geared to productivity, but they become a true oasis for the wildlife surrounding the olive grove once they are restored.

The fauna of the olive grove matters, too. Ponds have been constructed for amphibians; water troughs and nest boxes have been placed for all types of birds, including barn owls and kestrels, along with perches for birds of prey.

Bats are also benefiting from the placement of bat boxes, while walls and cairns are being restored to shelter reptiles and small mammals. Not to forget insect hotels, which host a plethora of auxiliary fauna beneficial for the olive grove, such as pollinating bumblebees and several species of solitary wasps.
OLIVE FARMING FOR NATURE

Besides restoring unproductive areas of the olive grove, olive growers are committed to planting or keeping grass covers, thus seeing for themselves the ecosystem services provided by their new ally: biodiversity.

On the one hand, plants increase the organic matter in the soil and auxiliary insects, which find shelter in the grass, effectively control pests. In this way, olive growers save on fertiliser and insecticide costs.

On the other hand, the grass cover protects the soil, which is the farmers’ true capital, impeding the erosion caused by excessive tillage.

Finally, the scale is tipped in favour of farmers. These sustainable practices help them reduce the costs of production, while the social services of the olive grove are increased, as it becomes multifunctional. Moreover, they have a better prospect of receiving economic support for good farming practices.
INNOVATIVE AND PROFITABLE AGRICULTURAL MODEL

When it comes to farming, there is no sustainability without profitability. It is therefore essential that the model promoted by Olive Alive is profitable for farmers.

In fact, it is expected that the future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will provide economic support to the model promoted by Olive Alive.

Above all, though, the aim is to produce extra virgin olive oil (AOVE) with a new added value, biodiversity, and to position this value as a profitable asset in the oil market. In short, an oil that conserves wildlife.

However, consumers have the final say, which is why from 2019 onwards a brand will differentiate oils produced in the “Olive Alive way” and certify their contribution to the conservation of biodiversity.

With the purchase of this oil, consumers will not only benefit from the healthy, nutritional and taste properties of a high quality AOVE, but they will also be contributing to nature conservation. Thus, by choosing such a product in their shopping basket, they will be supporting a fairer, more ethical and sustainable production model.
THE SCIENTIFIC ENDORSEMENT

Behind Olive Alive there is a significant scientific basis that ensures the rigour of this demonstrative Project.

The final results will thus make it possible to establish proven and verified guidelines that olive growers should follow in order to achieve a profitable crop production that is also wildlife-friendly.

On the one hand, SEO/BirdLife is a renown scientific and conservation organization: it has studied and worked for the conservation of birds and nature for the past 60 years without interruption. It also has wide experience in dissemination, environmental education and working with volunteers.

On the other hand, the University of Jaén is involved, too, with a team of Ecology researchers with extensive experience in applied biodiversity conservation and restoration.

Moreover, the Experimental Station of Arid Zones is specialised in ecologic problem-solving that gives added value to society by balancing the rational exploitation of natural resources and the protection of the environment.

Finally, a team of researchers specialised in Marketing and Market Research at the University of Jaén is working to establish the best marketing strategy for Olive Alive extra virgin oils and to promote the brand and their contribution to the conservation of biodiversity.
COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION

At the same time, the Project comprises a long list of actions and tools aimed at the communication and dissemination of its results, such as the website www.olivaresvivos.com, social networks, videos, press releases and visits with journalists.

Informative and demonstrative actions of technical nature have also been programmed, as well as perception surveys aimed at the olive sector, and information panels have been placed in order to identify the olive groves participating in the Project.

In addition, the knowledge acquired is disseminated in conferences and scientific articles, and there is a permanent contact with prominent figures linked to the olive grove who attract media interest.

Likewise, the social value of the olive grove is taken into great consideration, thus an ethnographic publication on popular culture in Andalusian olive groves has been prepared.

With regard to leisure, demonstrative experiences of “olive tourism”, as well as apps providing interactive routes have been designed.

In respect of the agri-food market, the “Olive Alive” brand will certify biodiversity-friendly oils. Educational activities for students such as workshops, conferences and a learning notebook on the olive grove are also to be mentioned.

Several oleotourism actions linked to the demonstrative olive groves have been carried out, too. Finally, the scientific outcomes of the project will be used to publish guidelines that will bring biodiversity back to the olive groves of Andalusia.
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE OLIVE TREE

A well-managed olive grove is a strategic crop for the recovery of wildlife in Europe. The reasons are several: its attributes as a permanent forest crop (centennial trees are abundant), its distribution throughout the Mediterranean basin, which is the main biodiversity hotspot in Europe, and the fact that it is a native plant, as it descends from the wild olive tree that is abundant in much of the mountains of the Iberian Peninsula.

It is with good reason that this crop is either surrounding or included in many areas of the Natura 2000 Network; 12% of the total area of olive groves in Andalusia (over 200,000 hectares) is found within this network of protected areas.

In addition to that, the recent study carried out by the CSIC and UJA in the framework of Olive Alive reveals the great variety of wildlife that the under canopy of these trees is bustling with.

After a year of monitoring of the 20 olive groves included in the project, more than 165 species of birds belonging to more than 100 genera, more than 500 species of wild plants, more than 140 species of woody plants and around 60 different species of ants have been found. A true feast of biodiversity.