

The people, places and events of the Santa Ynez Valley

VALLEY LIFE



Thursday, June 4, 2015

Olive oil comes of age in Santa Ynez Valley



Shannon Casey, owner of Rancho Los Olivos, checks out one of the 750 olive trees at her ranch in Los Olivos.

Daniel Dreifuss photos, Staff

The Santa Ynez Valley is an established destination for wine tasting, gaining a reputation as a "must stop" for foodies, and is on the cusp of establishing itself as one of "the places" to go for olive oil aficionados.

The Valley doesn't have the biggest production of olives. The latest available figures (2012) from the U.S. Department of Agriculture have just under 50,000 acres planted in olive trees statewide, with a mere 595 acres in Santa Barbara County. But as with grapes for wine, what the Central Coast lacks in quantity, it often makes up for in quality.

What epicureans are discovering is that there is really nothing quite like dipping a piece of freshly baked bread into a bowl of local olive oil or tossing it with some perfectly paired fresh Central Coast veggies.

Several of them will be available for tasting at Saturday's Los Olivos Jazz and Olive Festival.

Shannon Casey and John Copeland own and run Rancho Los Olivos from their 20-acre ranch on North Refugio Road in Santa Ynez. They have 750 olive trees on the property, source as needed from other local trees, and run a farm stand selling their varietal-specific and flavored olive oils.

The couple both worked in the entertainment industry in Los Angeles prior to moving to the Valley. "We bought the place in 1999 and planted in 2000," said Casey. "The olive oil industry here was still in its infancy then."

They had their first harvest in 2005, and opened their farm stand five years later.

"It's a growing industry. The consumption of olive oil is going up as



Shannon Casey and John Copeland, owners of Rancho Los Olivos, at their stand in Los Olivos.

The 411 on the Los Olivos Jazz and Olive Festival

Sat., June 6: 1-4 p.m. at Lavinia Campbell Park in Los Olivos. Taste olives, olive oil and foods made with olive oil. Listen to world class jazz and enjoy local wines. Sponsored by Los Olivos Rotary. For more information and tickets, call 325-9280 or visit www.jazzandolivefestival.org.

people recognize the value of good fresh oil. Consumers are becoming more knowledgeable. They want fresh. They want local."

Casey and Copeland are happy to educate those who stop by their stand. They'll explain the differences in their estate-bottled Italian and Spanish varietals, and give suggestions for the flavored oils.

"Shannon will take broccoli crowns, brush them with some of the garlic flavored oil and throw them in the oven," said her husband. "They're delicious that way."

Only 1 percent of olive oil sold in the U.S. is domestically produced. While the bulk of that comes from California, there are small quantities being produced in Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and even Florida.

See **OLIVE OIL**, B2

Olive oil

From Page B1

"Olive varieties like the sunshine. They like it dry and hot," explained Casey. "Our Mediterranean climate here in the Valley is ideal."

Shawn Addison's Figueroa Farms produces oil from his 4,300 olive trees in Happy Canyon and has a commercial milling operation used by himself and other growers, including Rancho Los Olivos.

"We've seen a huge increase in domestic olive oil since we started 15 years ago," he said. "People are starting to understand that the fresher it is, the healthier it is."

Shawn and his wife, Antoinette Addison, also own and run The Olive Oil Source, a website devoted



Global Gardens owner Theo Stephan during her 2014 olive harvest.

Contributed Photo

Campbell Park, the setting for this weekend's Festival. Rancho Los Olivos and Figueroa Farms are among the local brand names sold there, along with its own Olive Hill Farm oils.

"We opened in 2010 and our business has been growing ever since," said Gus Sousoures, who owns the business with his wife, Tanya Hill. "Customers

they ask. They're really interested in learning."

Theo Stephan owns Global Gardens, and operates a farm stand in front of her home in Los Olivos. "We were the first to plant olive trees specifically to make olive oil, in the mid-1990s," she said. She has about 60 trees on her Los Olivos property and close to 10,000 on property she

said Stephan, a former graphic artist who designs her own labels.

"You always want to buy from someone you trust," she added. "And supporting local farming is critical for so many reasons."

The olive oil business is not for the faint of heart, several of the local professionals pointed out