

Rancho Olivos promotes sustainable farming and a fun ag experience

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Shannon Casey knew she wanted to get away from an office job and spend her days outdoors, so when her and her husband John Copeland moved to the Santa Ynez Valley in the late '90s they toyed around with planting wine grapes.

After learning more about viticulture they decided to instead plant olive trees after Casey took a course at UC Davis about making olive oil. They now have more than 700 olive trees on their property in and sell their Rancho Olivos products to local markets and restaurants as well as through their website.

"I love olive oil and started cooking with it when I was a young girl. Cooking has always been a love of mine, and what better way than to grow my own olive trees and make fresh oil?" she said.

Olive oil contains monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFAs) which provide health benefits when they replace polyunsaturated fats in one's diet. Those benefits include lower total cholesterol and more blood sugar control, according to the Mayo Clinic, which is especially good for those with risk of diabetes.

Casey also loved the idea of sustainable farming because olive trees are drought resistant and they grow and produce fruit for hundreds of years.

"I think our culture is also becoming more about supporting local businesses and agriculture because they know where their food is being grown. They can talk to the farmer and know how they produce," Casey said.

Rancho Olivos has multiple varieties of olive trees, including five varieties of Italian, a Spanish varietal and a Californian varietal.

"It's important to have different kinds so they pollinate each other," she added.

The cycle of producing olive oil starts with pruning in the spring after the hard freezes and rainy season are over.

"A saying I follow is, 'Fruit grows on new wood'," Casey said.

They spend the late spring and early summer with weed and pest control, making sure the olive fruit fly doesn't damage any of their trees. Hot summer days are the best way to get rid of the pests because it kills them, Casey laughed.

The winter is spent harvesting the trees. They can average 14 tons of olives that immediately get processed and they let it rest for a few weeks before bottling.

"We primarily sell wholesale to anyone that wants to carry our label, but we also can sell direct to consumers on our website," Casey said.

They have opened their farm to anyone who wants to come for a free tasting, and they also have a farm stand with other produce they grow, including peaches, apples, tomatoes, peppers, and other seasonal items.

"We are hoping to get a greenhouse up in the near future to offer produce year-round as well as flowers and succulents. I just love when people come out to taste and learn about what we do. It makes it all worth-



Photos contributed

Shannon Casey, above, harvests an annual average of 14 tons of olives for her Rancho Olivos label. Casey says her four dogs are the most popular part of Rancho Olivos, her olive oil farm stand in Santa Ynez.



The most favorite part of the business besides spending time with her husband and getting to know those who come to their farm stand is her beloved dogs, two corgis, one Golden Retriever and an Australian Shepherd.

"My dogs are the most popular part of coming to the farm stand, one of our corgis has his own Instagram page even," Casey laughed.

If you'd like to follow him his handle is @oliveoilscout.

The farm stand at Rancho Olivos is open daily from noon to 4 p.m. located at 2390 Refugio Road in Santa Ynez. They are on Facebook and Instagram or you can contact Casey at info@ranchoolivos.com or log onto www.ranchoolivos.com.

while," Casey said.

Her favorite event is the Jazz and Olive Festival every June, hosted by the Los Olivos Rotary in downtown Los Olivos. She sells her olive oil and makes dishes for the festival's cooking contests, which she's won several times. This year's festival will be from 1 - 4 p.m. on Saturday, June 3, at Lavinia Campbell Park.

For more information about the festival, log onto www.jazzandolivefestival.org.



Rancho Olivos is open daily from noon to 4 p.m. for tasting and buying other seasonal produce available as well.