



## **Veronica Foods and Ultra Premium Olive Oil in the News!**

*Learn more about our olive oils from Veronica Foods at [The Spicy Olive](#) below!*

On a recent broadcast of *NPR's Morning Edition*, Allison Aubrey took a look at the health benefits of extra virgin olive oil and the role freshness plays in maintaining those benefits.

Aubrey reported that according to a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, a Mediterranean diet rich in olive oil could actually reduce the risk of heart attacks and strokes by as much as 30 percent.

But there's a catch. The olive oil must be fresh and full of polyphenols, a naturally occurring chemical found in many plants and loaded with antioxidants, which gives the oil a bitter and peppery taste you can feel in the back of your throat.

Finding fresh olive oil—measured in months, not years—isn't always easy. But one Oakland-based company is on the front lines of the battle to change the international olive oil business.

Veronica Bradley, CEO of *Veronica Foods Company*, says the standards for extra virgin olive oil are set so low by the International Olive Oil Council that the market is flooded with bad oil, making it incredibly difficult for consumers to make informed decisions.

"We've been on a mission to find the best of the best in olive oil," Bradley said. "Because the standards are so low, we're not going to join olive oil councils, but go on our own way, looking for the best olive oil in the world."

The *Veronica Foods Company* was founded in 1924 by Bradley's grandfather, Salvatore Esposito. Esposito immigrated to United States from Italy and began to import cheese, tomatoes and other Italian produce—including his own Delizia olive oil—to New York. By the 1930's, Esposito had moved his family and his company to Jack London Square before settling in its current location along Oakland's Embarcadero.

When Bradley and her husband Michael took over the company 20 years ago, they phased out the dairy and produce portions of the operation and focused strictly on its Delizia brand olive oil, which at one time had a loyal following in the Bay Area, recognized by its tin can emblazoned with the bay of Naples.

But a little over a decade ago, the game changed for the Bradley's, and for the *Veronica Foods Company*.

Towards the end of his book *Extra Virginity: The Sublime and Scandalous World of Olive Oil*, Tom Mueller tells the story of Michael Bradley's time traveling in and around the Mediterranean during much of the 1990's, looking for the highest quality olive oils in the region. After establishing what Michael thought to be a definitive list of quality suppliers, he received a wooden box filled with olive oils from Australia.

According to Michael, it was late May or early June when the box arrived, a time when most European and California olive oils are beginning to lose their freshness. Much to his surprise, the oils from the box were fresh and crisp, and in many cases a higher quality than the oils he had tasted for the last decade.

“The significance is that now we understand and appreciate that freshness trumps everything else, including where it’s produced,” Veronica Bradley said. “If you don’t know when or how it was made, where it was made doesn’t make a difference. From the moment it’s made it’s slowly heading for the cliff.”

High quality olive oil is now being produced in Australia, Chile, Argentina, South Africa, New Zealand and Paraguay from the same strains of European olives but at opposite times of the year. Every six months, **Veronica Foods** switches back and forth between suppliers in different hemispheres, buying the freshest oils they can get their hands on, produced to their own specifications.

Their search to find the highest quality olive oils anywhere in the world has led the company to come up with its own grade of oil they call Ultra Premium Olive Oil. It’s a strict standard, and they test for freshness by the taste and chemical composition of every olive oil they buy, sending over 100 samples a year to a lab in Australia.

“Testing for polyphenols is not part of any standard, but it’s one of the most significant pieces we consider,” Bradley said. “A high polyphenol count produces a robust, pungent bitterness. It’s not for everybody, it’s an acquired taste, but the more you taste it the more you want of it.”

To get the highest polyphenol count possible, Bradley insists olives must be green when they’re harvested and pressed in a mill within six hours of leaving the tree. “When you make olive oil this way, cost goes up because yield goes down, but quality goes through the ceiling,” she said. “When you understand the chemistry the way we do it’s compelling. It’s the chemistry of the oil that dictates the shelf life, the health benefits and how its holds up to cooking.”

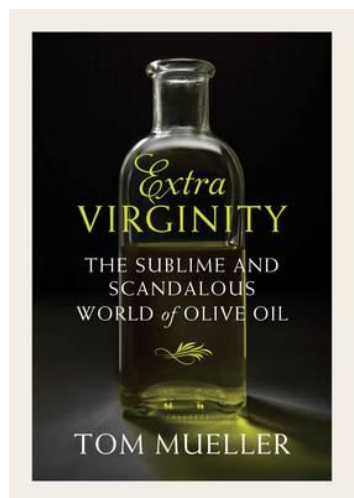
But Bradley isn’t expecting the olive oil business to change simply because of the new standards her company has created. Instead, she’s looking to change the olive oil supply by altering demand.

“We decided to change the face of this industry though educating the consumer, she said. “We’ve taken this directly to the consumer with 400 stores where customers can try before they buy and speak with someone we’ve trained about the significance of what they are buying, including the chemistry.”

At stores like Amphora Nueva in Berkeley, customers can select from dozens of different olive oils all produced to ultra premium standards. The olive oils are stored in stainless steel fustis, topped with chemical information and harvest dates, and bottled only after the customer decides which oil to take home.

But beyond educating their employees and customers, the Bradley’s are also pushing the limits of olive oil production. At their state-of-the-art mill along the coast of Tunisia, Veronica Foods is working on oil made with de-pitted olives in hopes of increasing the polyphenol count and the quality of the oil.

Whether you’re a health conscious chemist or an amateur foodie, Bradley says the bottom line is that olive oil is a fresh fruit juice. “If people hear this enough, people will start looking for when it’s produced not the bottled or best buy date,” she said, changing the way we think about olive oil in the process.



Copies available at *The Spicy Olive* of Tom Mueller’s “Extra Virginity: The Sublime and Scandalous World of Olive Oil”

For millennia, fresh olive oil has been one of life's necessities-not just as food but also as medicine, a beauty aid, and a vital element of religious ritual. Today's researchers are continuing to confirm the remarkable, life-giving properties of true extra-virgin, and "extra-virgin Italian" has become the highest standard of quality.

But what if this symbol of purity has become deeply corrupt? Starting with an explosive article in *The New Yorker*, Tom Mueller has become the world's expert on olive oil and olive oil fraud-a story of globalization, deception, and crime in the food industry from ancient times to the present, and a powerful indictment of today's lax protections against fake and even toxic food products in the United States. A rich and deliciously readable narrative, *Extra Virginity* is also an inspiring account of the artisanal producers, chemical analysts, chefs, and food activists who are defending the extraordinary oils that truly deserve the name "extra-virgin." 25 black-and-white illustrations