

Producer profile: Olio Bello

A gourmet's paradise



Olio Bello owner Jack Witkin (right) and farm manager Adrian Spelt.

The Margaret River region of Western Australia has won international acclaim in the past two decades for the production of excellent wines. Immaculate vineyards line the roads. High quality restaurants abound. It is a gourmet's paradise.

This thriving wine industry has attracted the development of other gourmet food ventures in the region. One new and exciting development is Olio Bello Extra Virgin Olive Oil.

Olive oil production has a long history going back to biblical times. The oil is well known for its beneficial health qualities and as one of the most important ingredients in many culinary experiences.

In 1984 Jack and Sue Witkin bought a 130-hectare, run-down dairy farm on Cowaramup Creek, with the vision of rehabilitating it into a flourishing eco-system.

They began by re-vegetating the property with thousands of native trees and shrubs in 1989, and have established this majestic property, Cowaramup Creek Farm, with a passion and commitment to organic production and a quality product.

In 1992, Jack and Sue began planting olives. There are now, in 2005, 7000 trees of 14 different varieties. The first harvest was in 1998 and since that time Olio Bello has gained industry recognition by receiving over 31 awards for their extra virgin olive oil.

The property has been carefully planned and lovingly rejuvenated to present an outstanding example of a meticulously run, organic production system.

Surrounding the olive groves, and along the property boundaries, well-designed drainage swales have been extensively re-vegetated with both native and exotic species to enhance eco-diversity and biological sustainability.

The property is visually delightful with its well-maintained olive groves. The main olive varieties grown are WA Mission, Manzanillo, Kalamata, Frantoio, Nevadillo Blanco, Pendolino, Corregiola, Paragon, Leccino, Arabequina, Koroneiki, Bouteillan, Bouquettier and Minerva. These are grown for both eating and oil production.

'Cowaramup Creek Farm' also farms a range of other

gourmet produce. Among the more exotic are 2500 Queensland macadamias, 500 Italian stone pines, and a 200-tree avocado orchard.

The stonefruit trees grown on the farm are nectarines, peaches, apricots, apples and plums. The property has citrus plantings of oranges, mandarins, lemons and limes along with plantings of chestnuts, hazelnuts, almonds, fejoas, sapodias and guava. In all 1000 trees.

Seasonal Mediterranean variety vegetables are grown for sale and for processing into freshly made dips and preserves in the property's kitchen. Herbs are grown in raised sleeper beds beside the tasting room.

When entering the picturesque 'Cowaramup Creek Farm', visitors first encounter the beautiful and welcoming Olio Bello tasting room.

The tasting room was opened in November, 2001, to allow visitors to participate in guided tasting of the nine varieties of estate grown and pressed organic extra virgin olive oils. Visitors are provided with informative tasting notes, and information on the medicinal benefits of extra virgin olive oil. Olio Bello's farm fresh produce and their range of marinated olives, tapenades, dips, and pestos preserves – all made on the property – are also showcased.

2001 also saw the installation of a modern Peralisi one tonne per hour, olive press. The press enables Jack and Sue to have total quality control over the oil-making process. The fruit is picked and pressed on the same day to ensure consistency of quality and flavour.

This was also the year in which 'Cowaramup Creek Farm' joined Biological Farmers Australia (BFA), with the intention of achieving organic certification. The property received organic 'in-conversion' status in 2003. ■



Olio Bello at sunset. The 7000-tree grove is home to 14 varieties.