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## California Olive Ranch wins awards for extra virgin olive oil

By E-R Staff



California Olive Ranch trees, which are trained to grow in trellises are harvested entirely by machine. (Submitted photo)

OROVILLE — Butte County has always been a land of almonds, rice and olives, but it is now gaining a reputation for its olive oil.

California Olive Ranch south of Oroville received four gold medals for its extra virgin olive oils at the 2005 International Oil Tasting Competition in Pomona in May. All four of the oils it produces — Arbequina, Arbosana, Koroneiki and Estate Reserve Blend — were awarded the medals after going up against 300 extra virgin olive oils from 18 participating countries, according to a press release.

The Arbosana and Estate Reserve Blend also earned Best of Class awards. The competition, now in its sixth year, is put on by the Los Angeles County Fair and the California Oil Council. An international panel of olive oil taste experts judges it.

Established in 1999, California Olive Ranch occupies 700 acres along Lone Tree Road. It uses a super high tree density tree planting system that allows 675 trees to be grown per acre, compared to 120 trees per acre on a traditional olive farm.

The trees are trained to grow in trellises, which allows them to be harvested mechanically instead of by hand. This method allows for a tree to be harvested in about three seconds. Ten tons of olives can be picked in an hour. The olives are harvested over a period of two weeks in October then pressed in a mill on the ranch. Bottling, packing and shipping facilities are also on the ranch. The ranch accounts for 24 percent of all extra virgin olive oil produced in California.

The ranch is a destination on the recently published Sierra Oro Farm Trail Map. Tours are offered from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Fridays from May to September. Tours include a look at the mill and answers to questions about the tree planting system. The ranch is at 2675 Lone Tree Road. People who would like to take the tour should call in advance at 846-8000.

Extra virgin olive oil has a more distinctive flavor than other olive oils. The California Olive Council says extra virgin olive oil must be obtained from the fruit of the tree solely by mechanical or other physical means under conditions that do not lead to deterioration of the oil. No chemicals or extreme heat may be used during the extraction process. It must pass a range of chemical tests, including one that determines its acidity level. In addition, it must be judged defect-free with some olive fruitiness, determined through a blind sensory evaluation by a trained tasting panel. The California Olive Oil Council's Seal Certification program provides quality assurance to the consumer and retailer.

The ranch provides recipes that make use of extra virgin olive oil.