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in

Allaya M. (ed.).
L'économie de l'olivier

Paris : CIHEAM

Options Méditerranéennes : Série Etudes; n. 1988-V

1988

pages 147-148

Article available on line / Article disponible en ligne à l'adresse :

<http://om.ciheam.org/article.php?IDPDF=CI010904>

To cite this article / Pour citer cet article

Caballero J. **The FAO European Cooperative research network on olives.** In : Allaya M. (ed.). *L'économie de l'olivier*. Paris : CIHEAM, 1988. p. 147-148 (Options Méditerranéennes : Série Etudes; n. 1988-V)



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The FAO European cooperative research network on olives

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I - Starting and development

In September 1974 the European Cooperative Research Network on Olives was set up by the FAO Regional Office for Europe in Cordoba, Spain, at the Regional Centre for Agricultural Research and Development of INIA, which was appointed the Coordination Centre. This first Network of the European System of Cooperative Research Networks in Agriculture (SCORENA) started its activities with four specific research topics dealt with by the corresponding Sub-networks, and the participation of a few institutions from a limited number of countries. Since that time the Olive Network has increased both its work programme and membership: it has been extended to all olive-producing countries of the Mediterranean Basin.

The Sub-networks on "Mechanized harvesting", "Use of water by trees", "Plant protection", and "Utilization of by-products" mainly aim at diminishing the production costs of olives and/or olive oil. The study, propagation, selection and breeding of the olive species is done by the Sub-network on "Improvement of vegetative material" while the improvement of the quality of olive oil and table olives is a new topic decided at the last Consultation. The "Bioclimatology" Sub-network

tries to correlate varietal characteristics and climatic features.

Taking into account the reorientation and restructuring of SCORENA agreed on by the Network Coordinators during their last meeting in Rome (December 1985), the Olive Network Consultation of Marseille (1986) decided to establish different Working Groups (WG) under each Sub-network in order to facilitate a better division of the work to be done in the future. This new structure will also allow for replacing the WGs as they reach their research objectives, and, more important, will improve the organization and success of the small workshops that will be held for discussing the results and problems being faced when developing the work programmes.

Plant breeding work had already been accomplished by some cooperating institutions, but a cooperative programme to be developed by one Working Group was set up at the last technical meeting of the "Improvement of vegetative material" Sub-network. The Marseille Consultation also endorsed this programme.

Such a good development has been possible not only due to the enthusiastic work of all the Cooperating Centers, but also to the support of FAO (Regional Office for Europe, Plant Production and Protection Division, Regional Project on the Improvement of Olive Production)

and IOOC, which we know are ready to continue their contributions.

II - Achievements

The establishment of a framework which has allowed for the olive related Mediterranean scientific community to work together under a cooperatively set up research programme can be considered as the first achievement of the Network.

The wide exchange and dissemination of information has also been of paramount importance. The Network has held eight Consultations, one of which was entirely dedicated to present six invited and 45 contributed papers. A special issue of *Olea*, the Information Bulletin of the Network, has also just appeared including these papers. Fifty eight more papers as well as reports of consultations and meetings of interest to the Network have been published since 1975.

As a summary, here we have a few examples of achievements brought about by the Olive Network:

- Olive nurseries propagate olive trees by rooting leafy cuttings under mist.
- Two selected clones of *Picholine marocaine* and four new varieties (*Kadesh*, *Briscola*, *Moncila* and *Barnea*) have been released to growers, and some of them are already being tested at field level.
- Mechanical harvesting can be done with trunk or limb shakers while fallen fruit can be mechanically swept or picked.
- Irrigation accelerates production start up and improves the use of fertilizers, specially in the case of drippers. Saline water can be efficiently used by olive trees.
- The definition of bioclimates and the varieties' response to those bioclimates is being done in many cooperating countries
- The olive fly may already be controlled by the associated use of its sex pheromone and proteins and pyrethrins hydrolisates. Methodologies to

estimate its population and migrations with trap checkings have been also developed, at least for some zones.

- As for scales, it can be said that four points are finished: monitorization of chemical control when unavoidable; establishment of a damage threshold to determine when to treat, either chemically or biologically; use of auxiliary biological ways in fighting scales of economic importance; and relationships among losses and level or density of scales.

- Chemical control of peacock spot and ways to prevent *verticillium* wilt may be also considered as defined.

- A baling machine for pruning residues has been designed and constructed.

- Wall coating is produced from milled olive stones.

- Oil extraction from pitted olives allows for getting the stones and peels.

- Black waters may be depurated by concentration.

Most of these results come from research whose objectives were to improve very traditional forms of olive cultivation, still facing problems in all countries.

III - Future activities

The Olive Research Network must concentrate its work so that new sound results might be obtained in a few important subjects. Obtention of new plant material and reduction of production costs by applying modern agricultural techniques long available and used with other commodities continue to be its main goals. The improvement of olive oil quality is of paramount importance for the benefit of both consumers and producers.

The Coordination Center encourages Liaison Centers and all Cooperating Institutions to really establish a few Working Groups with well planned research projects, able both to be cooperatively implemented and release specific results when finished. Needless to say, the Coordination Center is ready to help in this task.