

Olive Oil Times

Record Number of NYIOOC Awards for American Producers



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Olive farmers and producers from the United States enjoyed a year of record success at the 2022 NYIOOC World Olive Oil Competition.

Forty-five producers from California, Oregon, Texas and Georgia combined to win a record-high 94 awards from 134 entries, the second-highest total for the country. Their 70-percent success rate was also the highest for American producers.

"Awards always bring recognition and approval of a great product. This is key for consumers if we are to change the olive oil culture in America." - Zack Thorp, co-owner, Lot22 Olive Oil
As they do every year, farmers and producers had to overcome a range of challenges, from California's increasingly hot and dry climate to record-low temperatures in Texas and challenges created by supply chain issues.

"Farming is not for the faint of heart," Edie Barry, owner of F & B Foods, which produces the Queen of Trees olive oils, told Olive Oil Times.

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"The weather is unpredictable, and you sweat every freeze, hot spells, strong winds when the olives set and then you have all the furry friends who want to eat through the irrigation," she added.



Edie Barry

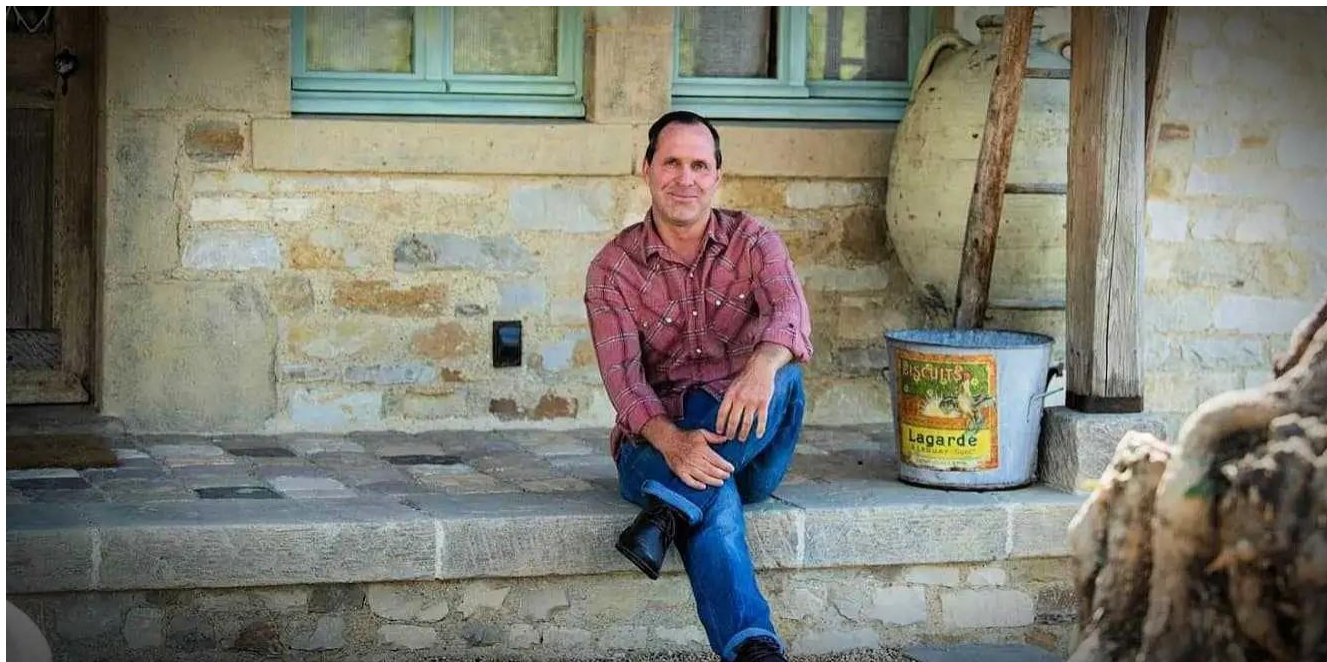
Located in olive oil-soaked San Luis Obispo County, in central California, Barry and her team earned a Gold Award for a medium blend in their first time entering the competition.

“I’m still pinching myself,” Barry said. “I’m a small producer, female-owned, and this recognition is a big win for our brand as we consider expanding. It is a game-changer for us.”

“Winning Gold is huge. It gives you credibility with retailers,” she added. “When your extra virgin olive oil is next to others, and you have an NYIOOC Gold, consumers reach for your bottle. Having that gold stamp on the website also drives direct-to-consumer sales. It is especially helpful when consumers can’t taste your oil in advance of purchase.”

From first-time entrants to NYIOOC veterans, the pleasure of triumphing in the world’s largest olive oil quality competition does not seem to fade with time.

Brooke Hazen, the owner of Gold Ridge Organic Farms, earned four Gold Awards this year, which he said was the eighth one for his company at the competition.



Brooke Hazen

“[I was] really happy and surprised, since we won four out of four Golds just a few years ago, and three out of four last year,” the owner of the northern California producer told Olive Oil Times. “I have been grateful for the accolades coming our way.”

Located approximately 80 kilometers north of San Francisco, Hazen said the climate, terroir and lack of “extraordinary challenges” were the keys to another successful harvest.

“The cool West Sonoma Coast climate and our proximity to the Pacific Ocean allows a long slow maturation phase for the olives to develop their inherent polyphenols, flavors, colors and nuances,” he said. “Our maritime climate plus our Gold Ridge soils really offer the perfect opportunity for each variety in our four unique blends to reach their truest expression.”

While the NYIOOC provides small producers the opportunity to show off their quality and tell their unique stories, it also gives some of the world’s largest producers the opportunity to demonstrate that quantity does not necessarily come at the expense of quality.

California Olive Ranch (COR), the largest olive oil producer in the United States, earned a Gold and two Silver Awards at the 2022 NYIOOC.



Photo: California Olive Ranch

Mary Mori, the company's vice president of quality and research and development, told Olive Oil Times these awards celebrate the hard work and passion of everyone involved, from company executives to COR's olive grower partners.

"We have always taken great pride in crafting high-quality products," she said. "The NYIOOC awards are a way for us to celebrate the passion, hard work, and dedication of our efforts in California and across the globe."

"This recognition gives our brands that well-deserved 'stamp of approval' from growing practices to harvesting to production and we are immensely proud of that," she added.

Like many other producers around the world, Mori said that COR had to overcome various supply chain issues throughout the harvest.

"We've been challenged with several of the same issues affecting our industry, from cost inflation to shipping to material delays," she said. "However, our team has worked tirelessly to keep everything in stock and on shelves."

While the vast majority of winning U.S. producers at the NYIOOC hail from central and northern California, less traditional regions of the Golden State were also represented at the competition.

“Olive oil in southern California is a lost art,” Zach Thorp, the co-owner of Lot22 located just east of Los Angeles, told Olive Oil Times.



Photo: Lot22

“Grape vines and pockets of olive groves dot the land and thrive in the soil and Mediterranean-style climate,” he added. “If preserved and expanded, they have shown a very unique product that is being recognized by world-renowned judges as evident in our most recent awards at the NYIOOC.”

In its third year at the competition, Lot22 earned two awards, including Gold for a medium Arbequina and a Silver Award for a delicate Koroneiki.

Thorp partially attributed this year’s success to the region’s unique microclimate, which has hosted olive growers for more than a century.

“We are set in a very specific microclimate in southern California that has heritage roots for growing olives dating back 100 years, but has been dominated by citrus in the last century because of water acquisition,” he said.

“Currently, with water being a significant issue for California, we are seeing the elements of our microclimate begin to take center stage for sustainable crops like olives in a water-challenged environment,” he added.

Despite the opportunities presented to olive growers as a result of climate change, Thorp added that it also presents plenty of challenges.

“The climate is not the same as it was five years ago and we are constantly needing to network with other California growers in order to problem solve an ever-growing issue,” he said. “In addition the harvest, while always a challenge, has become a much pricier and challenging aspect of olive growing due to the Covid-19 pandemic and economy.”

With all these challenges piling up for producers, Thorp said the role that awards play for the company becomes increasingly important.

“Awards always bring recognition and approval of a great product,” he said. “This is key for consumers if we are to change the olive oil culture in America to fresh olive oil as opposed to typical ‘grocery store’ olive oils that do not promote freshness, timely harvest, mill dates or tasting certifications.”

While California dominates the U.S. olive oil production, high-quality extra virgin olive oil is produced across a wide swath of the country.

The producers behind Texas Hill Country Olive Company earned two Silver Awards once against the competition, a feat made all the more remarkable after unseasonable cold and frost in February 2021 damaged the vast majority of the state’s olive trees.

Even farther east, in Georgia, Five Otters earned a Gold Award for a medium blend of Koroneiki, Arbequina, and Arbosana olives.

“Growing olives is new to this region in Georgia and my hope is this achievement encourages more growers in the area,” owner Sharon Flanagan told Olive Oil Times. “I look forward to sharing this award in our rural community where it will be most appreciated.”

She added that this year’s award did not come without its challenges. Heavy rains and limited availability at the local mill complicated the harvest, forcing the company to have three separate harvests.

Back on the west coast, Paul Durant, owner of Durant Olive Mill, celebrated winning four more awards at the NYIOOC.



Photo: Kelsey Chance, Good Chance Creative

It was the seventh consecutive triumph for the pioneering Oregonian olive oil producer, who brought his total tally of awards from the competition up to 20.

“While I come to expect getting the awards, it certainly does not make it any less gratifying,” he told Olive Oil Times. “My entire team works really hard and to see that hard work pay off with such recognition makes all of us feel good. It is such a validation of the attention to detail we focus on throughout the year.”

Despite the success, Durant added that the harvest came with some disappointment. Originally he had hoped to produce 500 gallons (2,300 liters) of extra virgin olive oil but fell about 40 percent shy of this total.

“Overall, it was a tough harvest yield-wise,” he said. “The rains in California, same as here in Oregon, put a lot of water into the fruit and that made extraction difficult. I got some good guidance from a mill in California, and we were able to improve yield towards the end of the run.”

However, Durant has not allowed any of this to dampen his sense of optimism about the future.

“Aside from that, the improvements to the mill were great and eliminated a lot of stress on me and my crew,” he concluded. “I am doing another big equipment upgrade this year that should be another big step forward.”

