



Introducing Olivado Natural Nutrition and Olivado Kenya (EPZ) Ltd...

Olivado Natural Nutrition, a New Zealand-based company producing premium quality extra virgin cold-pressed avocado oil, brought its mobile processing plant to Kenya in 2007, establishing a pilot programme to test the viability of the project. Despite a number of setbacks, the plant was commissioned in October



Testing the plant, Nairobi 2007

2007, and testing on the late season avocados confirmed that Kenyan avocados produce an exceptionally high quality oil. Now, as the 2010 season ends, and the pilot programme is completed, we have contracted hundreds of small farmers to provide their fruit, and this year we have produced approximately 100,000 litres of oil. Olivado Kenya (EPZ) Ltd gained organic and fair trade status in 2008, achieving this within the remarkably short period of seven months. The success of this pilot programme in Kenya provides tangible evidence of what can be achieved in a developing country.

Olivado was founded in 2000 by a professional chef, who realised that the oil of avocados could be extracted and made into an ultra-healthy and delicious edible oil. He put together a team of experts who, working hand-in-hand with the food scientists at Massey University under a New Zealand Horticultural grant, pioneered and perfected the process of oil extraction from the avocado. The proprietary process they developed is used exclusively in Olivado's factories. No other company can produce avocado oil in the same manner with the quality and shelf life of Olivado extra virgin Avocado Oil.

Since its inception Olivado has grown to become the world's leading brand of extra virgin avocado oil, with distribution in the UK, Europe, and USA as well as New Zealand, Australia and Asia. CEO and now owner of the company, Switzerland-based Gary Hannam, recognised the need to expand production beyond the climatically affected harvest of New Zealand, and after researching supplies in South America and other parts of Africa, the company settled on Kenya as a potentially suitable country in which to set up its organic and fair trade operation. However, "persuading my fellow directors and investors that investing in Africa was a wise move was not easy", says Hannam. "Kenya is a wonderful country with a workforce determined to break out of poverty, but the international media have been merciless in producing easy column inches about the bad elements, ignoring an industrious and willing majority."

Now, over 570 small farmers in Kenya's central highlands have been certified as having organic and fair trade status. Olivado's field teams work with the farmers, mapping the farms and their crops and ensuring that organic practices are followed, and there will be an ongoing process of monitoring the farmers to ensure that the organic



Gary Hannam assesses fruit ripeness in Kenya's Central Highlands

requirements are met. In addition, there will be external audits by IMO, the Swiss registration organisation (www.imo.ch).

IMO was chosen as the registration organisation because they specialise in developing regulations for smallholdings rather than plantation crops. In terms of economic development, the inclusion of many hundreds of small farmers in such a venture produces the best development result. In Tanzania, IMO has been involved in a successful organic fair trade cocoa project involving 20,000 smallholdings.

In March 2008, IMO's Nairobi-based representative, Joachim Weber, conducted his first farm inspection, to ensure that the farms selected by our field teams complied with IMO's organic and fair trade regulations. He was satisfied on all counts. This year Olivado's organic production will be sold in Europe and the UK for the first time. It is already sold in Canada, and is used by Dr Bronner's Magic Soaps in the USA, to produce an organic avocado oil soap.



Gary and Joachim during the IMO inspection

Olivado's arrangement with the farmers is that Olivado buys all their fruit and, to ensure its organic status, Olivado teams do all the picking and transporting. Our role with the farmers expanded as we became more involved in the organic registration. It has become obvious that the best way to manage the organic status of the avocado trees is to ensure that entire farms are organic. To this end, we are encouraging the farmers to plant crops which are not merely organic, but also more productive than their current crops. Initially, we plan to provide them with Desmodium, a tropical leguminous cover crop which adds nitrogen to the soil and conserves moisture. A perennial crop, it is very nutritious for cattle, much more so than the ubiquitous maize or napier grass.



Gary greets a farmer in Thika

We have already provided the seeds to some of our farmers, but we are searching for partners to assist with this programme, to help both in providing the seeds and in getting the organic message across. The farmers are receptive to the idea, but understandably sceptical, their past experiences with traders and middlemen having coloured their expectations. We are working to gain their trust, and we are finding now, as this third season comes to an end and the farmers are satisfied that we keep our promises and that the benefits to them will be substantial, that they are willing to work alongside us; indeed, many more farmers are eager to bring their farms to organic status so that they too can join our programme.

Given the success of Olivado's Nairobi-based pilot programme is being evaluated, and a custom-made factory located in closer proximity to the farmers is begin planned. This will significantly reduce transport costs and increase efficiency and production. A new factory will enable production to increase in the first year to 200,000litres of avocado oil, and eventually up to 900,000litres per year.