

Olive oil quality checks in the European Union 2020 results

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, Member States performed a number of conformity checks required by the EU legislation on olive oils sold on the EU market. The number of checks performed decreased compared to 2019, as the measures put in place to address the pandemic of COVID-19 in Member States led to difficulties in carrying out the minimum number of category checks established in the legislation.

Conformity checks in the olive sector are carried out to ensure consumers that the quality of the product they are buying is in conformity with the marketing standards set in the EU legislation¹. Each Member State has to perform annually a minimum number of checks for both labelling and category. This number is calculated by taking into consideration export and consumption data. Therefore, Member States that produce olive oil (“producing Member States²”) have to carry out many more controls than Member States that do not (“non-producing Member States”). Extra-virgin olive oil is the main category checked as it represents the biggest share of sales at EU retail level.

The decisions on the final number of checks (while respecting the minimum number required), where these checks take place, and what categories of olive oils are checked, are based on a risk analysis. This means that checks take into account risk factors, like features of the product (e.g. category, period of production, packaging operations, storage, country of origin/destination, means of transport or the volume of the lot), findings of previous checks, consumer complaints, or the characteristics of operators.

As checks take into account risk elements, the results cannot be considered representative of the overall quality of olive oil on the European Union market. The system is not built to give an indication of the overall share of non-conformities of the olive oil produced and marketed in the EU.

Further checks are carried out in the framework of the Regulation on Official Controls³, to verify the safety of olive oil placed on the EU market, but the results of those checks are not reported here⁴.

¹ Commission implementing regulation (EU) No 29/2012 of 13 January 2012 on marketing standards for olive oil.

² Olive oil producing Member States are Spain, Italy, Greece, Portugal, France, Croatia, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus.

³ Regulation (EU) 2017/625 on official controls and other official activities performed to ensure the application of food and feed law, rules on animal health and welfare, plant health and plant protection products.

⁴ For more information, please visit the [Food Safety website](#).

CHECKS PERFORMED

1) Labelling checks

Labelling requirements apply only to the categories of olive oils sold to final consumers. These categories are the following:

- extra-virgin olive oil
- virgin olive oil
- olive oil composed of refined olive oil and virgin olive oils
- olive-pomace oil⁵.

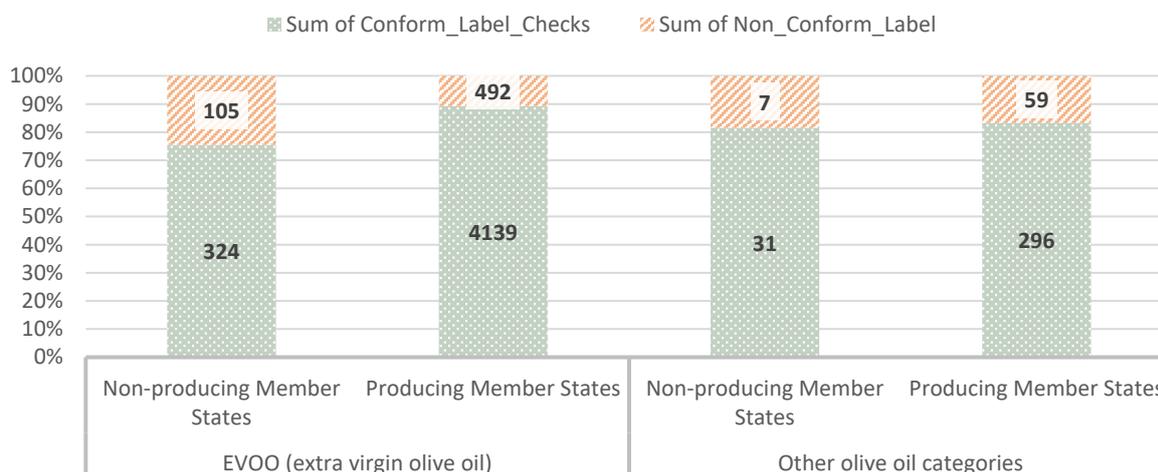
Labelling checks involve verifying that the requirements of the EU legislation on marketing standards for olive oils⁶ are met, for example, ensuring that the name of an olive oil and the origin of an extra-virgin or virgin olive oil is correctly indicated, the storage conditions for the oil are included etc.

In 2020, Member States performed 5 453 labelling checks and the results are as follows:

	Number of label checks	Number of non-conform labels	Share of non-conform labels (%)
Producing Member States	4 986	551	11.05%
Non-producing Member States	467	112	23.98%
Total for 2020	5 453	663	12.16%

Source: Member States communications in ISAMM

Results of labelling checks for different types of olive oil:



Source: Member States communications in ISAMM

⁵ [Categories of olive oil](#) on the Food, Farming and Fisheries website.

⁶ These requirements are set by Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 29/2012 of 13 January 2012 on marketing standards for olive oil provides for labelling requirements of olive oils.

2) Category checks

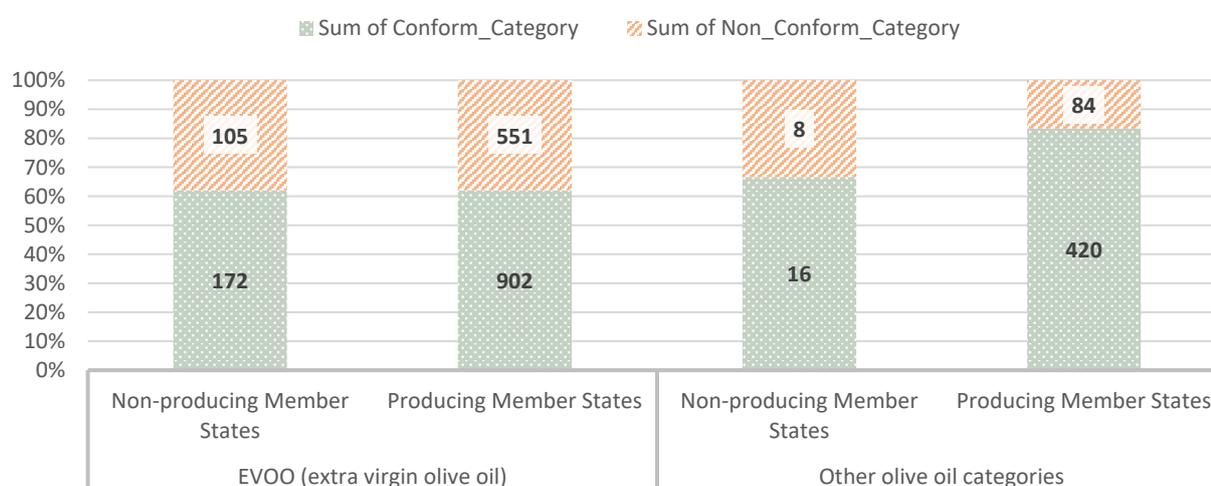
There are eight different categories of olive oil and olive-pomace oil and each one of them is defined by a specific set of quality and purity parameters⁷. National control authorities may perform category checks on all those categories of oils, not only on those sold directly to final consumers. Determining the category of an olive oil involves laboratory analyses.

In 2020, Member States performed 2 258 category checks and the results are as follow:

	Number of category checks	Number of checks detecting a non-conform category	Share of checks detecting a non-conform category (%)
Producing Member States	1 957	635	32.45%
Non-producing Member States	301	113	37.54%
Total for 2019	2 258	748	33.13%

Source: Member States communications in ISAMM

Results of category checks for different types of olive oil:



Source: Member States communications in ISAMM

⁷ Annex VII, part VIII of Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 establishing a common organisation of the markets in agricultural products and Commission Regulation (EEC) No 2568/91 on the characteristics of olive oil and olive-residue oil and on the relevant methods of analysis.

Meaning of non-conform results and actions taken to remedy the situation

A non-conformity gives an indication to Member States authorities that something went wrong along the supply chain. Several factors can explain a non-conformity. Olive oil is sensitive to temperature and light and its quality degrades over time. Poor storage or transport conditions for instance can explain that an olive oil no longer meets the quality requirements for its category at the time of the check.

Purity parameters are also determined by the checks. Non-conformities with the limits for those purity parameters could give an indication that the oil has been blended with lower quality olive oils or with other vegetable oils.

Conformity checks could also identify potential food fraud cases, which are further investigated by Member States authorities.

In the light of the seriousness of the irregularity detected, Member States take actions, including the withdrawal of the product from the market, imposing fines on operators, or even prosecution.

With a view of providing consumers with good quality olive oil in the EU, the Commission organises annual workshops and fosters collaboration between EU countries to ensure that these checks are correctly implemented.

Please visit the [olive oil marketing standards and legislation](#) webpage for more information.