

Chief Judge Paul Vossen, Santa Rosa

Paul Vossen has an MS degree from UC Davis in Horticulture (Tree Crops Production), a Certificate in Olive Oil Production from the U of Córdoba, Spain; Panel Head Certificate from the IOC; and a Certificate in Marketing from UC Berkeley. He recently retired as the UC Cooperative Extension (UCCE) Farm Advisor in Sonoma County after 36 years. His primary expertise is in the areas of fruit tree, berry, and specialty vegetable culture; pest control; and marketing of farm products. He helps farmers with the evaluation of their land, production costs, selection of appropriate specialty crops, cultural practices, pest control, and advises on selling their produce.

After retirement, Paul has been active in teaching olive production short courses through the UC Davis Olive Center, consulting with several olive oil producers worldwide, and sourcing olive oil for an East Coast marketing company.

His olive research focused on efficient fruit harvest for small-scale growers, olive fruit fly control, organic cultural practices, comparison of different mill equipment types, comparing oil cultivars growing in different climatic regions of California, the productive potential of the super-high-density and medium-density oil olive production systems, and the influence of tree irrigation on olive oil sensory qualities. Over the years, he coordinated 15 California Olive Oil Production Short Courses and taught 28 Olive Oil Sensory Evaluation Courses in the US and internationally to train producers, consumers, and marketers, about high-quality olive oil. He was a founder of the California Olive Oil Council, UC Davis Olive Center, and he developed the first olive oil taste panel in the USA to become recognized by the International Olive Oil Council in 2001. Paul has been the panel leader for the UCCE olive oil taste panel in Santa Rosa, CA. He serves as an olive oil judge at several US and international fairs and competitions.

As a former UC researcher and educator, he authored several peer reviewed journals, scientific, newsletter, and popular press articles. He has written chapters in the "UC Olive Production Manual"; "UC Organic Olive Production Manual"; "Aceite de Oliva Virgen: Análisis sensorial 2nd Edition"; "Handbook of Olive Oil"; and "Olive Diseases and Disorders". Paul has experience as a consultant in Albania, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, Greece, Guatemala, Iraq, Italy, Lebanon, Mexico, Morocco, Portugal, Republic of Georgia, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Tunisia, and in many states of the USA. In retirement, Paul now works as a private consultant helping producers make and market the best olive oil possible.

Franco Dunn, Healdsburg

Franco Dunn was a founding member of the California Olive Oil Council tasting panel and has been tasting olive oil for twenty-two years. He was on the U.C. Davis tasting panel as well. He has been an olive oil judge for twenty years and have judged all the major California competitions at least three times. Currently, he is a retired chef.

Louie Gonzales, El Sobrante

Coming Soon

John Hadley, Forestville

John graduated in 1994 from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo earning a BS in Horticulture. He started pursuing his passion for olives and olive oil in 1998. In 1998, he became one of the original COOC taste panel members. He currently works with Merchants and Millers tending to all things in regard to olives and olive oil. In his non "extra-virgin" time, he spends his time gardening and surfing.

Lawrence Jacobs, Cotati

Lawrence has been with Oliver's Market for going on 22 years now. 10 of those years as the Buyer for Conventional and Specialty Grocery.

He has spent 5 years on the California Olive Oil Council (COOC) Taste Panel and has over 7 years of extra virgin olive oil competition judging experience.

Arden Kremer, Sonoma

Arden Kremer has been tasting olive oil since 1997 when she participated in a three-day U.C. Davis Extension class in the Sensory Evaluation of Olive Oil. Having scored extremely well on sensory tests, she trained for several years and became a member of the first olive oil taste panel in the United States.

In 2005, Arden went to Imperia, Italy, for a weeklong seminar at the University of Imperia run by the O.N.A.O.O. (Organizzazione Nazionale Assaggiatori Olio di Oliva), which trained her to become a taste panel leader. In October of 2019 Arden participated in a weeklong training seminar hosted by the IOC (International Olive Council) in Córdoba and Sevilla, Spain.

At present, Arden serves as a taste panel leader for the California Olive Oil Council Taste Panel. She also serves as a judge for numerous olive oil competitions.

Arden and her husband Philip Coturri own Enterprise Vineyards, Inc. a vineyard management business specializing in organic and biodynamic viticulture. In 1995 they imported 10,000 olive trees from Tuscany and have been producing oil under the Sixteen 600 label since 2001.

Nancy Lilly, Sonoma

Nancy Lilly, a Sonoma native, grows wine grapes and olives, is a professional olive oil taster and is a docent at the Bouverie Preserve in Glen Ellen and Board member for its parent organization, Audubon Canyon Ranch. She lives on the family ranch in Sonoma with husband, Tony.

Olga Orlova, Santa Rosa

Olga Orlova is olive oil enthusiast, olive oil educator, and certified olive oil sommelier.

Olga is a founder of Olica Olive Oil Company where she wears multiple hats such as an olive grower, olive miller, and sales and marketing manager. She practically knows what it takes to create an award-winning extra virgin olive oil. Her Olica extra virgin olive oils regularly receive top awards at local and International olive oil competitions. Through her custom milling and blending experience she has learnt how to craft beautiful balanced and complex extra virgin oils from a range of olive varieties grown in California.

She has been extensively tasting olive oil for quality evaluation at different tasting panels since 2013. Currently Olga is serving as an olive oil taster at Modern Olive Lab tasting panel.

Deborah Rogers, Glen Ellen

Deborah Rogers has been an olive oil producer since the early 1990's. She has been a judge at many domestic and international olive oil competitions. She is currently semi-retired but returns each harvest to produce award winning organic extra virgin olive oil at McEvoy Ranch.

Sandy Sonnenfelt, Oakland

Sandy Sonnenfelt is South African born based in California. She is a member of the California Olive Oil Council Taste Panel as well the UC Extension Research Panel. Sandy was also a member of the now disbanded UC Davis Taste Panel.

Over the years she has judged in many competitions and is involved in educating both chefs and the general public on the virtues of extra virgin olive oil.

As the Prepared Foods and Pasta Program Director for Market Hall Foods, a Bay Area specialty food retailer, Sandy was responsible for introducing only California extra virgin olive oil to all the company's kitchens. Working for Market Hall Foods has afforded her the opportunity to taste olive oil from all around the world. She regards herself as an olive oil missionary.