

Greek olive oil to remain olive oil, govt insists

Minister rejects OECD proposal to allow sale of adulterated olive oil

Government rejects OECD recommendation that the sale of blended olive oil with cheaper vegetable oils should be allowed, as part of an effort to modernise the country's economy



Workers pack bottles of olive oil at the Gaea extra virgin olive oil factory near the town of Agrinio (Photo: Reuters)

The government has no plans to lift laws banning the mixing of olive oil with other cheaper types of oil, MPs were told on Thursday, in a clear rejection of a much-touted proposal in a recent OECD competitiveness report.

"I would like to make clear in the most explicit and absolute way that the government does not intend to legislate, under any circumstances, the mixing of olive oil with other types of oil. We are clear on this and this message should get all parties so that this discussion is over," Deputy Development Minister Thanasis Skordas said, in reply to a parliamentary question.

Skordas said that under law 4177/2013, the illegal mixing and trade of oils of different quality for sale is banned.

"This provision is in effect and will remain in effect. Therefore, those who think they can get away with mixing different types of oil, they may as well forget about it," the minister said.

But in a recent report commissioned by the government, the Paris-based Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, or OECD, said that the sale of blended olive oil with cheaper vegetable oils should be allowed, as part of an effort to modernise the country's economy. The new product would need to prominently carry the label: "blended olive oil".

The OECD's report ran to 328 pages and contained detailed recommendations to change regulations for commonly used products — from books to milk.

Olive producers fear if the recommendation is adopted, Greece could spoil its own signature product. Spain and Italy allow blending.

Greeks consume more olive oil per capita than anyone else on earth, a staggering 18 litres per head each year, using up two-thirds of domestic production that averages an annual 300,000 tonnes, or 10% of the global total.

Weak export branding, however, means most of Greece's surplus – much of it top-grade extra virgin oil – is pumped into container trucks and sold cheaply in bulk to nearby Italy to be bottled and branded there.

Large containers

The government, Skordas added, would adopt another OECD recommendation that olive oil should be made available for retail in larger containers.

The selling of olive oil in packages of more than five litres was worth considering and the issue has been raised by food and olive oil industry professionals.

"We are in final stage and we are moving towards the adoption of this proposal," Skordas said.

Regarding the use of non refillable olive oil bottles at restaurants, he said this was not illegal and that many restaurants were already using them.

He also made clear the ministry would not accept the use of powdered milk for making of yoghurt and rice pudding.

EnetEnglish, ANA-MPA, AP
