



**Demand for local olive products is increasing among local consumers in response to rising health awareness and support for local products.** The local olive oil and olive soap are better quality than many of the imported ones, and the local table olives are cheaper. However, the supply of local olives does not meet demand due to limited local availability, and in some areas, the low demand for products because they do not meet consumers' preferences. Additionally, political tensions and low productivity have prevented local olive products from reaching parts of the country, and the lack of product labeling has increased the level of uncertainty among consumers.

Local olive products are regarded as a source of income for farmers and as a source of cheap food for consumers. Additionally, access to locally produced food is recognized as a crucial component of food security in a country where livelihoods are still extremely sensitive to changes in food prices. The main objective of this study is to analyze the main factors that constrain the demand for local olive products and make evidence-based recommendations to relevant policymakers.

## Barriers to Local Olive Product Consumption

**Local olives are not available in all places at all times.** The lack of a marketing plan by olive producers and the political tension among different parts of the country are the main reasons for the limited availability of local olive products in the local markets. Most consumers were interested in paying a premium for local olives, but they are available only at particular shops or markets that are inaccessible to many consumers.

**Compared to imported products, local table olives have lower quality.** Consumers pay more attention to quality when buying olive products. Imported table olives are of better quality than local ones, and local producers would rather switch to other agricultural production, such as poultry rather than replace their local olive trees with high-quality imported ones. The difficulty of convincing local farmers to replace their current trees with better ones, which is

## Key Takeaways

- Most local olive products are of low quality and are not always available.
- Trust in local olives is low, and products are not advertised.
- Introducing locally produced standards and logos and informing olive consumers about product availability will increase demand.
- Raising awareness among olive suppliers to participate in educational activities will enhance demand.

necessary for the preservation of this cultural production within the area, is a barrier to promoting local olive production.

### Consumers lack trust in local products.

Consumers who buy local olives have established trust through interpersonal relationships. This is

because local olives are not labeled. Some consumers have even boycotted local olive products after bad experiences with local markets. As switching from one supplier to another is a common behavior in food markets, it is recommended that olives be processed by large manufacturers who pay more attention to labeling their products.

**Consumers lack information about local products.** Generally, family and friends are the main sources of information (e.g., product features or where to buy them) for local olive products in the market. Within the past three months, most consumers have not seen or heard any advertisements for local olive products. Iraqi growers rarely use the internet or social media platforms to advertise to new olive consumers compared to imported olive products.

## Strategies for Market Growth

By making products more available and catering to the desires of local consumers the following actions may increase domestic demand for local olive products and help the industry overcome the obstacles imposed by international trade:

**Increase the accessibility of local products.** This entails making local olive products accessible in supermarkets and other stores where the majority of consumers shop, as opposed to being restricted to the local pickle market. To help increase the regularity and consistency of the olive supply, tax exemptions, and modified credit plan policies are required. Additionally, as militias are causing problems with the distribution of olives, the government should mandate all security actors allow the free flow of local products to make the olives reach every corner of the country.

**Plant more high-quality olives.** Kastawi and Decl (sometimes written as Dugal) are two well-known local olive variety types that can compete with other imported types in terms of quality and size. The supply of Khastawi and Decl needs to be increased to meet the demand of local table olive consumers. More effort should be spent on increasing their production for those consumers willing to pay for them. The government should implement an incentive program that helps farmers to upgrade to better varieties when they plant in the future.

**Create a range of certification systems.** A crucial issue when dealing with local products is trust. As a loss of consumer trust is not easy to recover, introducing a third-party certification system or a national standard will



strengthen consumer trust in local products. This implies training olive producers on the importance of using standards to find new markets for their products and supporting them in getting access to high-cost third-party certifications.

**Increase consumer awareness about local products.** Public extension services must offer some educational programs to train local farmers on the importance of advertising in their marketing plans. As farmers in that area are used to getting paid for their attendance, the local authorities can utilize the radio stations in that area to deliver training programs at a lower cost.

## **Author bios**

**Rezgar Mohammed** is an associate professor at the University of Duhok with a research interest in Demand and Price Analysis, Consumer Behavior, and Food Marketing.

**Asaad Karam** is an associate professor at the University of Duhok with a research interest in consumer behavior, branding, competitive analysis, product development, product pricing, customer decision-making, corporate social responsibility, and human resource management.