

The Sacramento Bee

FOOD & WINE

From a family secret, a lush olive oil thrives

By Jan Townsend
Bee Food Writer

The Bariani family took an overgrown, weed-choked bit of acreage and turned it into an entrepreneurial venture that — at least on a small scale — is highly successful. Everything they make, they sell.

According to the story laid out by the oldest son of the Bariani family, Enrico Bariani, 28, decades ago a Sicilian farmer planted thousands of olive trees on the bare plain around the Gerber-Bradshaw area of southeast Sacramento County. For years the grove of trees thrived, producing Mission and Manzanillo olives. Then, like so many orchards, the trees went to seed.

They sat untended until the Bariani family came along in 1990. Moving onto part of the original Sicilian farm, they set about pruning and weeding and



Angelo Bariani and his son Enrico sell their olive oil Sundays at the farmers market at 6th and W streets.

bels is small compared with what the big companies crank out, there are enough for the family to sell at certified farmers markets and in specialty-food markets.

All equipment used to produce the family's unrefined olive oil is made by the father, Angelo, 57, who works full time in the construction industry.

"My father built the crusher and hydraulic press and everything else we use," Enrico says. "His father and grandfather were blacksmiths in Italy, and he learned how to work with fire over there."

The Bariani family comes from Voghera, a town in northern Italy between Milan and Genoa. It includes mother Santa, and Enrico's brothers Sebastian and Emmanuel. Another brother, Luigi,

lives with his family in Germany.

There are many facets to making such a business successful. For the Barianis, these include growing their own olives, hand-picking them and rushing them to press the same day. Flavor, fragrance and color differences in olive oil depend on the climate, the altitude and the soil, says Enrico.

Typically, the olives are harvested in December and January. And only this past season did the family harvest enough olives to produce anywhere near the amount of olive oil it wanted, oil that Enrico describes as "warm and golden."

You know exactly where the olives in Bariani oils are grown. Not so with some bottles that claim, for instance, to be a product of Italy, when in fact the olives and oil may have come from Spain. Bariani oils are from what's called a single-estate producer, where everything to do with the product is done at one site. And in the Barianis' case, their product is unrefined.

In her book "The Essential Olive Oil Companion," Anne Dolamore describes unrefined olive oil as the "first cold-pressed olive oil — a pure product retaining all of its natural flavors."

It's this lack of extra refining that appeals to those who love olive oil, says Enrico of a product that hasn't been refined to crystal-clear clarity and lightness. It's a robust olive oil, looking and tasting as natural as the family intends it.

Next year, another Bariani product will be available: oil-cured, Greek-style olives. And, perhaps, the family will shift from what is currently a part-time business to a full-time one.

"We're contractors now who make olive oil on an occasional basis," says Enrico. "Soon we might be processors of olive oil and olives who build buildings occasionally."

BARIANI OLIVE OIL comes in three sizes: 12 ounces for \$6, 25 ounces for \$9 and 34 ounces for \$12. Look for it at Corti Bros. and certified farmers markets. The Barianis are always at the Sunday market at Eighth and W streets under Business 80.

Oil: Unrefined to preserve flavors

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taking back the 110 trees that came with the 4-acre package. Today, the family produces an olive oil that sells out wherever it's available.

Bariani says the family has been making olive oil for about four years, but until recently, "we just made it for ourselves and relatives."

It wasn't a family secret for long. Although the number of bottles with the Bariani Olive Oil la-