

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Municipality of Kalamata, Greece, I salute this gathering and I bring the Mayor's, Mr. Panagiotis Nikas', salute and best wishes for happiness and prosperity to each one of you and to the people of India in general.

Since the time of Alexander the Great, Greeks consider India and its people as bearers of long-lasting traditions and a unique civilization. Today, I am here to speak about products of my country, which are not just food, but integral parts of Greek traditions and civilization.

Olive cultivation in our area, Messinia, in the south of Greece, whose capital today is Kalamata, goes back even in prehistory. The palace of Nestor, King of Pylos, who took part in the Trojan War, was destroyed by a fire in the early 12th century BC. The fire spread quickly due to the large quantities of olive oil in the storerooms, some of which were located behind the throne room. This indicates the importance attached to olive oil. The fire had a positive outcome, however: thousands of clay tablets, covered in oil and baked in the high temperature of the fire, were saved. These tablets were written in Linear B and in 1952, architect Michael Ventris and philologist John Chadwick, using decoding methods, were able to interpret them and determined they were annual accounting records. Ventris was able to discern the word E-LA-WON, which is the modern Greek word "ELAION", meaning oil, olive oil.

The olive tree was, and still is, not only a source of life for Greeks; is also a source of inspiration and emotion that fosters sportsmanship and civilisation. Apparently, the Ancient Greeks could find no better way to symbolise these things than to cut an olive branch from the sacred plain of Olympia, in Peloponnese, next to our area and place it on the head of the Olympic Games winner. Though it was an object of little value, it was a symbol of many cultural messages.

The olive tree continues to deliver these messages and to enliven the Peloponnese and our area particularly, with Koroneiki and Kalamata varieties, to this day.

Kalamata, our city, has given its name to a variety of table olives, well known all over the world as, perhaps, the best variety of black edible olives. It's not just a food. Its nutritional properties are great, since it possesses a high content of oleuropein, a substance that contributes significantly to maintaining a good health status. It's not just tasty, it's good for health to consume it. Kalamata olives are a Protected Designation of Origin product, recognized and protected as such by the

European Union, due to its unique nutritional properties, sensory characteristics, gastronomic importance and strong historic ties to its area production.

Table olives are one of the pillars of the Mediterranean diet, which is beneficial to human health. Another pillar of the Mediterranean diet is extra virgin olive oil.

Extra virgin olive oil is extracted from olive fruits at this time of the year – it's olive harvesting time for us in Kalamata – and this is done by mechanical separation only – no chemistry involved!

Kalamata extra virgin olive oil is a Protected Designation of Origin product. It is being produced in the Kalamata area, where the olive trees of the local Koroneiki variety, planted here in their unique environment, are able to bear properly matured fruit and produce an olive oil with an intense green colour and a pleasant flavour and aroma.

Kalamata PDO has a well-balanced sensory profile with medium intensity of bitterness and pungency and a predominance of green fruitiness. Odour : Very fresh and rich overall sensation; intense greenly fruity with undertones of freshly mown grass, olive leaf, artichoke.

Taste : Fruity and harmonious, showing character, delicate in the tones of ripely fruity. Pungency is slightly more intense than bitterness. Unparalleled persistence on the palate, beginning with greenly fruity and closing with green pepper aftertaste.

We, in Kalamata, use extra virgin olive oil in everyday cooking, given the fact that it contributes considerably to maintaining a good health status. It is not just tasty. We consider it a medicine. And it's not only us: the United States FDA and European Union both accept its significance as a cardiovascular protective factor. I also note that recent research has proven that our extra virgin olive oil is particularly rich in oleacin and oleocanthal, which belong to the greater family of polyphenols. Oleacin is an anti-inflammatory and neuro-protective chemical substance and oleocanthal is the most powerful anti-oxidant substance of olive oil. Scientists do say what our fathers and mothers have known for centuries: extra virgin olive oil is, truly, a medicine, not just a food. And it has also a great taste and odour.

The chefs who join us from Kalamata, Greece will give you some evidence on that!

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to particularly thank the Ambassador of Greece to New Delhi Mr. Ioannis Raptakis, and the first counselor of the Greek Embassy Mrs. Aliko Koutsomitopoulou, a dear friend for years who comes from Kalamata too, as well as the rest of the staff, for enabling us to show these products to you and to let you know how we cook and what we use for cooking, which are much the same as those that our ancestors used 3.000 years ago. Fine ingredients, that taste great, for a healthy diet! Enjoy!

Thank you very much.