



OPENING THE GATE

Inspiring producers to pursue growth by sharing of local success stories

CAMILO OLIVES



From an apartment in Port Melbourne to transforming a grazing property near Teesdale into an olive grove: it seems an unlikely path, but it is precisely the route that Joan and Peter McGovern took when they created Camilo Olives. Their leap was all the greater as they had no previous involvement with the olive industry. Conversations with a friend who had connections to the industry provided the inspiration for Joan and Peter's brave decision to establish an olive grove and produce their own olive oil.

Joan and Peter's blank canvas was a 54 hectare grazing property with water from the Leigh River used to irrigate the trees. After initially planting Taggiasca, Koroneiki, Pendolino, Kalamata and Corregiola tree varieties, it took a further six years before the trees started producing fruit. From planting those first trees in 2002, they have developed a business producing award-winning olive oil and exporting internationally, including to high-end restaurants and providores in Japan.

In establishing Camilo Olives, the McGovern's were clear that they wanted to produce a world-class product and focus on developing export markets. Joan identified the difficulties in focusing solely on the domestic market, including the limited scale and a substantial number of competing brands.

Producing a world-class olive oil doesn't stop at producing high quality olives: Joan realised that they had to develop the skills to process and blend their olive oil to create products that meet the standards of their market. She took courses in olive oil blending to learn as much as she could about the process.

Like many of their fellow producers, they started off selling at farmers' markets. Selling direct, the margins were good, but with both Joan and Peter working full time, spending a full weekend day at farmers' markets was difficult. In the initial years they also targeted top-end retailers and food service companies. These customers only required small quantities and the couple hired a sales consultant to market their product. With the scale of the business at the time, they found this preferable to using a distributor, who would require larger volumes, a lower price and would return any product that went out of date.

Expansion of their product range saw them producing table olives, infused oil and olive-based jams, tapenades and relishes plus a honey balsamic glaze using their farm honey. They also developed a range of olive salts, which provided a point of difference to other producers.



“Produce a world-class product and focus on developing export markets.”

Their location meant that deliveries direct to the customer was not viable. An online presence through Farmhouse Direct, an Australia Post company, broadened their customer base without Joan and Peter having to manage the online sales themselves.

While producing and selling olive oil, they continued to improve the quality of their oil. To benchmark their oil against the best, Joan and Peter started entering domestic olive oil competitions. This also garnered feedback from judges about the quality of their oils and their blending methods.

Awards are seen as a key element in developing this kind of business. Their success in competitions also increased the reputation and awareness of their olive oil. After being awarded Victorian Champion at the Royal Melbourne Show, Camilo Olives learned that they were now at a standard where they could export to Japan. Consequent success at international olive oil shows in Japan and New York continued to increase the reputation of the Camilo olive oil.

Their high-quality product has placed them in the top 500 producers in the world. A major achievement has been their inclusion in the Flos Olei, the go-to guide for olive oil lovers globally. Camilo Olives has been included in the publication from 2011 – 2016.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- ① Export markets can provide better opportunities than the domestic market.
- ② Awards allow you to benchmark and receive recognition of high quality.
- ③ Meet your export customers personally and work hard to develop relationships and trust.
- ④ While every event you attend may not be worthwhile, they can reveal a key connection which leads to major growth.



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The awards, and the recognition in this high-end olive oil publication, have generated their own media interest and have earned Joan and Peter the reputation needed to participate in industry events like specialist forums. Thanks to such exposure, Camilo Olives has never had to advertise. The product and the plaudits it has received have been advertisement enough.

Whilst recognition of the quality of their oil was important for the export markets, it would have been for nothing without meeting their export customers personally and developing relationships and trust. Joan said that it took a couple of years for her and the Japanese customers to develop this relationship and for her to gain a proper understanding of her customers' needs. This effort saw Joan rewarded with exports into a number of high-end Japanese restaurants and high-end retailers such as Andersen Bakery and Dean & DeLuca.

Joan also identified that attending events was of high importance for the development of businesses such as Camilo Olives. She recommends that business owners look at every opportunity, and whilst they may not all work, they may reveal that key connection which provides the chance for a business to undertake major growth.

In September 2016, Joan and Peter sold Camilo Olives and retired to Tasmania. The new owners, the Corbet family, have jumped at the chance to continue the success of Camilo Olives.



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