

# Kasandrinos Extra Virgin Olive Oil: Taking a Known Product to New Heights

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Roberts, T., Pendergrass, K. (2022). **Kasandrinos Extra Virgin Olive Oil: Taking a Known Product to New Heights. Third Party Certification Research.** The Paleo Foundation.

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## KEYWORDS

- Third-Party Certification
- Kasandrinos
- Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- Keto Certification
- Paleo Certification

**THIRD-PARTY CERTIFICATION RESEARCH****Kasandrinos Extra Virgin Olive Oil: Taking a Known Product to New Heights**Tobias P. Roberts <sup>1</sup>  | Karen E. E. Pendergrass <sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup>Department of Standards, Paleo Foundation, Encinitas, CA<sup>2</sup>Department of Standards, Paleo Foundation, New York, NY**Correspondence**Tobias Roberts  
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Paleo Foundation, El Salvador**Contact**<sup>1</sup>Email: karen@paleofoundation.com<sup>1</sup>Twitter: @5WordsorlessKP<sup>2</sup>Email: tobias@paleofoundation.org**Abstract**

Leveraging third party certifications can be an indispensable part of growing awareness of health food brands, establishing deeper consumer trust, and distinguishing products within an increasingly competitive health food market. Kasandrinos is a direct-to-consumer olive oil brand that offers fresh, single-source olive oil to consumers around the world. In order to distinguish the quality, freshness, and health benefits of their product, the brand has relied on several independent, third party certifications to connect with a wide array of customer bases.

**KEYWORDS**

Third party certification, Paleo Diet, Keto Diet, Kasandrinos, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Organic Certification

**1 | INTRODUCTION**

One of the defining characteristics of the health food industry is that companies are always trying to find and market the newest, most exotic, and mysterious superfood that was miraculously found in some Moroccan desert oasis or Peruvian mountaintop village. Perhaps our society is still looking for the famed “fountain of youth.” The more exotic and unknown a food product, the better the possibility that it might just offer us that path towards immortality. While exceptional foods such as Black Maca from the Andes and purple Mangosteen from Cambodia certainly do offer unique health benefits, many of the staple food products that define the culinary traditions of western civilization continue to humbly offer healthy meals for millions of people.

Olive oil, the liquid fat obtained from olives, has long been used by different cultures located around the Mediterranean Basin. Today, millions of people around

the world regularly use olive oil due to its high content of healthy monosaturated fats, its anti-inflammatory properties, and the abundant antioxidants it contains. In fact, over 3.12 million metric tons of olive oil were produced around the world in 2019 [1]. For people on low carb diets such as the Keto Diet or the Paleo Diet, the healthy fats offered by olive oil make it an essential ingredient in most meals.

Despite its soaring popularity and widespread adoption, the quality of most olive oil found on the shelves of local supermarkets is questionable, at best. Tony Kasandrinos was raised in New York, though he spent a lot of time growing up in his father’s tiny village in Greece where olive oil is not just a health food fad, but the essence of culinary and cultural traditions. As he grew up and moved around the United States, he quickly found that the difference in quality between commercially produced olive oil found at supermarkets

and the hand-pressed olive oil from his father's village was night and day.

Today, Kasandrinos is one of the leading producers and distributors of high quality, extra virgin olive oil. They source their organic, non-GMO olives from their Grecian homeland and press the oil in small batches that ensure maximum freshness and the best taste. The company believes that "for us, olive oil isn't just a heart-healthy kitchen essential. Every bottle of Kasandrinos extra virgin olive oil is a piece of our homeland, made with economic stability, environmental sustainability, and your health in mind." [2]

In a recent interview with The Paleo Foundation, founder Tony Kasandrinos further states that, "in our case, all of the olive oil we sell comes directly from our family farm in Greece. We do not use any pesticides, and all our olives are hand-picked, without relying on machinery or tree shakers. We also have independent testing on every single batch to ensure that nothing is in there except extra virgin olive oil."

## 2 | FROM FAMILY TRADITION TO A STARTUP HEALTH FOOD AND BUSINESS

In Greece, where Tony and his sister Effi (co-founder of Kasandrinos) spent time growing up, many families customarily grow and press their own olive oil. Whereas the average American only consumes 0.9 liters of olive oil each year, people in Greece consume at least 17 liters of olive oil on a yearly basis. [3]. Olive oil in Greece is pressed in small batches to ensure maximum quality and consumed fresh. Tony, used to the high-quality olive oil that his aunts and uncles grew on small farms in Greece, was appalled to find people in the United States settling for stale, mass-produced olive oil. While

these olive oil products might have certainly still offered more heart health advantages over lower-grade plant-based oils, the difference in taste and quality was apparent.

To avoid the stale bottles of olive oil sold at U.S. grocery stores, Tony and his family would regularly bring back cases of olive oil for their personal use and to gift to friends and other family members. "It was so much a part of our lives that we never realized most people in the U.S. have been drizzling stale olive oil on their food for decades," the company states. [2]

When Tony shared some of his family's olive oil with friends at the local Cross Fit gym where he was training at the time, it quickly became evident that the difference in quality was palpable to the wider public as well.

"So everybody tried it, and they loved it (and) it kind of like snowballed from there," Tony says in a recent podcast interview. "Everybody was asking me, 'Hey, can I get some more?' I made a few more trips back to Rochester over the following months, and brought tons." With the encouragement of some friends, Tony decided to turn this side hustle into a business and create his own private label selling the Grecian olive oil produced by his family.

The company started by direct shipping to customers. "Then it got quite overwhelming, very quick. Within a few months, I was getting more orders than I could handle by myself," Tony says. As he was preparing for possible deployment with the Marines, he asked his sister Effi to join him in the entrepreneurial endeavor. Since then, Kasandrinos Extra Virgin Olive Oil has grown into a successful business selling well over \$9 million in revenue

[according to Zoominfo.](#) [4]

### 3 | CAPITALIZING ON QUALITY: THE FUNDAMENTAL IMPORTANCE OF EXCELLENCE IN INGREDIENTS

Regular, refined olive oil is not only less tasty than extra virgin olive oil, but it is also significantly less nutritious. The refining process strips regular olive oil from many of the important nutrients and antioxidants. Furthermore, extra virgin olive oil is superior in taste, odor, and quality because the natural extraction process ensures that the final products retain these nutrients and antioxidants from the olive fruit. Unfortunately, many olive oil products that are sold commercially in the United States and that claim to be “extra virgin” are falsely labeled. While there are strict standards regarding labeling within the olive oil industry, there is not a reliable enforcing agency and standards are routinely ignored.

Even with brands that produce 100 percent extra virgin oils, freshness is a major problem affecting both the quality and taste of the oil. According to [Tom Mueller](#), an expert on olive oil production, more than half of imported, extra virgin olive oil in the United States is substandard due to issues with aging and staleness. [5]

“The fact is, it’s quite often just very low-grade oil that doesn’t give you the taste of the health benefits that extra virgin should give you,” [Mueller states.](#) [6] The olive oil produced in the Mediterranean basin might be shipped from warehouse to warehouse before eventually ending up on the shelves of a U.S. grocery store. By the time the product is purchased and consumed, many of the heart-healthy compounds that make olive oil healthy options for our kitchens

have significantly degraded.

A recent study by the University of California, Davis went on to find that almost 70 percent of all imported olive oil products failed to meet the United States Department of Agriculture’s quality standard. The main reason that millions of American consumers are eating stale olive oil is due to the fact that most imports are dominated by major corporations whose sheer size makes it close to impossible to expedite the shipping and importation process in order to maximize the freshness of the product. [7] For example, Bertolli is one of the leading producers and distributors of olive oil in the United States. While the brand might trace its origins to Italy, the company is today owned by Unilever, a large corporation that manages over 400 individual brands.

After trying the stale, nutritionally-diminished olive oils imported by these large corporations, Tony understood that there was a unique opportunity to capitalize on the quality of his family’s olive oil heritage. [Tony says that](#) “we come from a tiny little... place in Greece, and (our olive oil) is not something that’s mass-produced...There are certain things you can only get from a certain area...Yeah, you can get [olive oil from] California, but the bottom line is they’re not the same.”

Trusting that consumers in the United States would note the difference in taste and quality, Kasandrinos focused on giving out samples of their superior product to try and grow their customer base. “Any chance we get, we give samples, because, in my opinion, if you have something, especially when it comes to food if somebody is going to be trying it and they love it then they’re just going to keep coming back for it,” [Tony says.](#) [8]

According to their website, the company says that they “took a leap of faith that people stateside would care about the quality of their olive oil. And we were right. More and more health-enthusiasts and foodies started tasting and feeling the difference from our single-origin, small-batch, organic oil.” [2]

The company continues to sell every bottle of olive oil and vinegar that they produce directly to the consumer, without any middlemen. Only this way are they able to continue to ensure the freshness of their single-origin product that is continuing to capture the attention of health food enthusiasts around the country.

#### 4 | THE ROLE OF THIRD-PARTY CERTIFICATIONS IN ESTABLISHING A DIRECT TO CONSUMER CUSTOMER BASE

Since its beginnings, Kasandrinos has also relied on different third-party certifications help differentiate their olive oil products from the hundreds of other, mass-produced competitors on the market. In the specific case of olive oil, many consumers innately associate this product as a health food, mainly due to the adverse health effects of other low grade food oils that dominate the market. As we mentioned above, however, the founders of Kasandrinos firmly believed that there was a unique opportunity to introduce US consumers to the much improved taste and health benefits of extra-virgin, single-origin, and fresh olive oil. How to convince consumers that a supposed health food staple could be even healthier was a challenge.

Kasandrinos currently has a number of different independent, third-party certifications for their olive oil products, including Certified Organic, Certified Paleo, Keto Certified, non-GMO certified, Certified

USDA Organic, Certified Kosher, and Bio-Hellas certified (the Greek equivalent of USDA certified). These certifications played a major role in helping to distinguish their olive oil from the mass-produced bottles currently ruling supermarket shelves. It was specifically useful to help Kasandrinos connect with different consumers following specific diets within the wider health food niche.

“We thought that having a Paleo and Keto-certified product would really help to bring awareness to our customer base who are in those groups,” Tony says. “Having that certification brings a certain sense of credibility within that community. It’s part of a wider brand recognition strategy in order to connect with different customer bases. When people see the different logos and know that we have those certifications, it certainly adds to the credibility we need with an important part of our customer base.”

A [2015 article published in The Journal of Business Ethics](#) identifies consumer trust “as a distinct volition factor influencing the likelihood that consumers will act on green intentions and strongly emphasizes the needs to manage consumer trust as a prerequisite for the development of a market for green products.” [9]

Kasandrinos confirmed that third-party certifications were certainly an important aspect of managing and increasing that sense of consumer trust. “With the Paleo and Keto community, people are obviously looking for certification, and this is just another aspect that differentiates us from average and run of the mill brand that isn’t doing good farming or adding all sorts of things into the olive oil they sell,” Tony says.

Among the different third party certifications that Kasandrinos boasts, Tony finds that the USDA organic certification and the bio-Hellas certification (which is

essentially the same thing as USDA organic for the country of Greece) offer a more universal appeal to the growing consumer consensus demanding healthier food options. "Non-GMO verified is also growing in importance," Tony believes. "As more and more food is genetically modified in today's world, people are worried about the effects of genetically modifying foods. Many of our customers have corresponded with us to ask about Non-GMO certification," he says.

Whereas the USDA Organic and Non-GMO certifications tend to appeal to a much more general audience, the Paleo and Keto certifications are more specific to different audiences and people following those particular diets. Though more focused in scope, Tony believes that these types of certifications are important in helping to develop a loyal consumer base within specific diet communities.

"Obviously, events aren't happening at all right now, but we used to promote our certifications at in-person events," Tony explains. "At Paleo f(x), for example, we obviously have promoted that we're Paleo certified. Similarly, at a gluten-free conference, it's great to have the Keto or Paleo logo at your booth. So these certifications are great to have for in-person marketing and events in order to connect with the customer who follows these diets."

Kasandrinos also has the logos of their different certifications visibly printed on their products in order to help with brand visibility and transparency. Furthermore, the company utilizes their certifications via their social media channels. "When we interact with the Keto community on social media, for example, we let them know this is a Keto-certified product," Tony details.

Kasandrinos continues to market exclusively direct to their consumers, so they don't know if third party certifications can help to establish a foothold in the retailer market. However, the company is starting to expand into international markets with their direct-to-consumer sales.

"During this process (of expansion into international markets) we have been finding that the Paleo and Keto diets definitely have an international appeal," Tony believes. "The international community definitely knows of these diets, and I feel that in some places, these communities seem to be growing more than in the US. For example, the Paleo Diet seems to be a big thing in Australia, and we definitely get lots of customers asking us about these types of certifications. People correspond with us to specifically ask if we are Keto Certified or Paleo Certified."

Leveraging their third party certifications has been an indispensable part of growing the Kasandrinos olive oil brand. As more and more consumers look towards independent, third party certifications to guide their purchasing decisions, Tony believes that there is an opportunity for these certifiers to improve the services they offer, both for the brands and the end consumer.

"I think the best thing we could ask as a brand is for these independent certifiers to create an up-to-date database where consumers can go to check to see if something is approved or certified. Making these certifications very customer friendly to check and verify can help the brands and the customers," he says. Furthermore, Tony also believes that making the certification process as straightforward as possible is another important element that will allow more brands to take advantage of third party

certification. “From a brand perspective, making the process of certification, verification, or approval very streamlined and as user friendly as possible is also important,” he believes. “I understand that some certifications need to be thorough, but with some of the certifications it can seem like a bit too much and a pain for the brand going through the process.”

To this day, Kasandrinos continues to operate via direct to consumer operation, shipping their fresh, premium-grade olive oil to thousands of clients around the world.

## 5 | KASANDRINOS CERTIFICATIONS

Kasandrinos third-party certifications include:

- Certified USDA Organic
- Certified Paleo
- Keto Certified
- Non-GMO certified
- Certified Kosher
- Bio-Hellas certified

## 6 | CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

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