

UCD-branded olives on sale to benefit research center

The University of California, Davis, Olive Center is benefiting from a different kind of olive green.

Green, as in money.

Last month, the Olive Center began offering a new line of Sicilian-style table olives, a boutique segment of the California olive industry.

The brine-cured olives – available in "Sicilian Spiced," "Gourmet Garlic" and "Lemon Citrus" flavors – were grown and processed in Glenn County and then donated to the Olive Center to be marketed under the UC Davis brand.

The 10-ounce jars are on sale at the UCD bookstore (and its Web site) for \$7 each.

The initial run of 6,000 jars could potentially raise \$25,000 to support the Olive Center, the first-of-its-kind research center in North America. That would be some serious green to a center that opened last year with a \$200,000 operating budget.

Dan Flynn, the Olive Center's executive director, said sales kicked off over the April 18-19 weekend, coinciding with Davis' annual Picnic Day open house.

"We gave away 50 jars, one olive at a time. We moved quite a few cases that weekend," Flynn said. He estimated that about 300 jars of olives were sold over the Picnic Day weekend alone.

West Coast Products, a producer of specialty olive products and brine-cured olives since 1937, grew and cured the UCD-branded olives for nine months, and Penna Gourmet Olives, an olive producer for more than 30 years, marinated and bottled them. Both companies are based in Orland.

"Traditionally, the state's olive industry has focused on growing, processing and selling black-ripe olives for canning," Flynn said.

"The Sicilian-style olives represent an emerging boutique segment of the industry."

The UCD olives can be purchased online at www.bookstore.ucdavis.edu (typing "olives" in the search link brings them up). The bookstore's phone number is (530) 752-6846.

According to the Fresno-based California Olive Committee, California produces more than 95 percent of the olives grown in the United States. There are about 1,200 olive growers statewide.

– Mark Glover