**F12 - Interview transcript farmer Villacarrillo 8-11-2021**

**To start, what is your age?**

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**And you live here in Villacarrilo?**

Yes

**And how long are you living here?**

I’ll tell you, I did the same as the president here. I spent a lot of time outside and I reincorporated in the sector later. My family is from here and works in the sector all their live. My father, my grandfather, but I went to study abroad/somewhere else. I studied in Sevilla and worked in the banking sector. I studied economic sciences and I worked in the banking sector during the last crisis. During that crisis I wanted to change, I came here and took one year to think about what I wanted. I came into contact with the sector again and started. My parents, who owned a plot of olives told me, try it out. So I came to take rest because I was really tired. I started working here in the sector and saw that the economic opportunities were viable. I saw that this was better and I took the decision to stay here. I tried it out for one year. And I felt that I really liked it, I felt more happy, I work more, but less with my head, which I really like. And every day I am happier with my decision. I am never thinking about returning to Sevilla.

**And when did you make this change?**

In 1999, I was 12 years in Sevilla, 5 in my studies, 7 years working. Now, I am here already for 20 years.

**And do you own a plot now?**

Yes, I have property, I bought it from my savings from Sevilla. When I decided to stay here, I invested in olive trees. And I am also in charge of the property of my father, 2 brothers and my own.

**How many hectares do you have?**

I have about 5000 olive trees, so that is about 50 hectares.

**And you depend on olive cultivation for your income?**

Yes 100%

**And do you work together with other family members on your land?**

Not so much anymore. My father was with me until he retired, but that was 14 years ago and now I work alone. My sisters are in Vienna, and in Marbella. They don't want live here, they just come here to say how beautiful it is and leave. Not like Irene, Irene comes to work in the family.

**What are your cultivation methods?**

Traditional cultivation like most people here. Traditional cultivation method of 10 by 10 olive tree. Except for some new exploitations, that started 40 or 50 years ago. But all in the frame of 10 by 10. With three stems for each olive tree. And as Gonzalo has previously commented, mechanization It is very difficult and a lot of labor is needed, the harvesting is labor intensive. Hence there is need for immigrant workers. I have permanent workers, discontinuous for 16 or 17 years. They are the same Moroccan people, they come just for this. The rest of the time they are in Spain doing temporary work. They work in Huelva, in the strawberry harvest, or in Lérida in the fruit harvest. For the olive harvest they are coming here.

**How many employees do you have during the harvest?**

During the harvest? 9 persons and I, 10 in total. Yes, until there is a long season. Normally, in an average season like this year, I estimate that 50 days of work is acceptable, that's fine. There is semi mechanization. I my farm I have a large machine. It is hard to use a tractor because the orography of the land is bad and the slope, because the tractor is a big machine. Nerd does the job well, they do not go with several now individual mechanics, but hey, it is combined and the truth is that it is quite affordable.

**Most of the costs are for labour, right?**

Possibly, I calculate the labour costs as 40 percent, 45 percent per year. When the harvest is very high it can be 40, when the harvest is very low it may exceed 50, because it makes production more expensive per kilo. And then the general inputs have gone up a lot. The cost of inputs, both fuel and fertilizers, phytosanitary products and the cost of irrigation have gone up considerably in the last year. That is why the weight of the cost of the collection is lowered. A lower percentage, because the other inputs have become more expensive. And the wages of the workers well, they do not go up so fast. Contracts are being maintained, up 2 or 3 percent per year, but we are talking about other inputs that have raised 40-50 percent and this year we already have the bills for fertilizers for the next season, which are almost double that of last year. Oh yeah, with the supply and cost problem energy sources are becoming very expensive.

**What kind of fertilizers do you use?**

Normally nitrogen, nitrogen in the soil and sulfate. The olive tree is mainly nourished by nitrogen, sulfur, potassium, but especially by nitrogen. And they are becoming more expensive.

**What amount of fertilizer?**

More or less an average of a kilo of nitrogen per tree per year.

**And how is pruning done?**

We do the pruning, it is the a very qualified job. Possibly one that needs more learning and qualification. The olive tree needs a practically annual regeneration pruning and the Irrigation is strong and the vegetative growth of the tree is important. Practically every year you have to prune. It is possibly more profitable and necessary in conjunction with fertilizer use. Of course the pruning is done by staff persons. Each person in the pruning knows how the owner of the farm wants them to be pruned. Like all qualified work, every teacher wants to do it in a way. In the pruning almost all of the olive trees here are aerated. They open to the outside and the interior is free for the oxygenation of the olive tree. Ok, so I could do with qualified personnel, three people. I usually I prune 75 percent of the olive trees every year. There are people who do half in one year, the other half in another year. But I more than half the olive trees.

**You don't prune, then?**

I'm already learning. Now, not at the beginning, I I do not know. It is very important to see their explanations, but I already know a bit after accompanying my father. He taught me to do it in the beginning. He had been doing the pruning for many years for his plot, for his properties and for other properties. So he showed me. Now if I do the pruning and another person who accompanies me helps me it is fine.

**Is it a company that does the pruning?**

No, I have contracts with three people. I am the owner of the farm, businessman and self employed too. One person brings the personel, one for power and the other two for the branch. The pruning waste is put in a line and with a machine crushed and left as a groundcover.

**And what do you do it with all the bigger pruning waste, use as firewood?**

I use it as firewood. Bigger wood is cut first and moved away to take to my house, for heating, to heat the house and hot water. And every two years I have to sell because there is a lot of firewood. I do not consume so much, I do not need so much.

**What do you consider to be the biggest challenges here?**

The biggest challenge I consider here, as Gonzalo pointed you before, is the improvement of mechanization. In the olive grove traditional and with the orography of the land that we have here, it is difficult for the entire olive grove to be harvested with heavy machinery. So an important challenge is that the farmers themselves become aware that we need to optimize farms and unite. We have excess machinery for small farms. I consider myself a small medium owner with 50 hectares and even I even know that I have an investment in excessive machinery. I have machinery to carry out the management, which could possibly be used for another 50 hectares. I have more tractors. One is used almost always during the year, another is not used most of the year. The machine for phytosanitary treatments is used three or four times year. These are underused investments. We should partner. So the most important challenge that I see is the same as for the production, cleaning and selling of the oil, we we have joined in a cooperative for collection and for the tasks of countryside. We should be coming together and optimize farms. We have also done it in the communities for irrigation before. When I had a plot everyone was doing his own drilling, making his own well, which meant a very important extra cost. In the end we have joined all of that into irrigated communities and instead of 1 hectare irrigated, there are thousand of hectares irrigated. We have obtained concessions from the administration because with such a large number of owners you have more power than if the administration treats you one by one. We have almost no power in the traditional olive grove. The important thing is that I fear is exploitation and trying to lower costs in the intensive intensive olive grove. I do not know if we are able to produce intensive, but the process is worth it.

**Why don't you do it like that now?**

It is hard. What are appearing are service companies for the application of phytosanitary products, for pruning, to collect firewood, to chop up the pruning remains and for the olive harvest. That is what we are headed for and that is why service companies are emerging, yes. But there are people who don't like me. For example, I do not want to let a service company service do my work. But I do need to reduce costs and I think of working with another farmer in the same area, because we would get to lower costs.

**And apart from this, do you see any other challenges here?**

The most important is that there has not been a focus for many years to open marketing channels of our product. Traditionally when we have delivered the olives, we release it at the factory and we say goodbye until next year. We do this without knowing the price, how much my olive is going to be worth and is it enough? We are not only farmers, we have to become also marketers of our product. Because we deliver it very easily and we pay for that sometimes in the oil market. Very cynical for that reason, because we deliver to the marketer of the product without asking the price. If we had the channels to sell bottled oil. We have barriers, I believe that. That we would do better and we would not always be speaking of costs. We have the same if we try to optimize costs, we also have to maximize income. We know which is the route, but we are very slow, although it is 20 years ago we started this. Now Irene takes a very important step in the quality of the oil. Before we did not produce quality, now if we produce quality. I believe that the initial step is to package our oil and market. I think that in another 20 years we would be talking differently because 20 years ago we were totally lost. Now we do produce quality, which is the first thing they asked us to market our product and little by little we are giving way to not send everything in tanker trucks.

**You said it goes slowly. And why is that?**

There are many barriers to enter the market, to get on the shelves. There are brands already consolidated and for a long time, Spanish and Italian oil brands came here buy our oil in bulk and have a settled in the markets. Especially the European and American market, to enter and break the barrier. You have to assume initial losses and sometimes in the cooperative assembly members are not willing. Already with the price of the oil we are even going to put. I think little by little the mentality of the members opens up. But the entry barriers to the markets are very strong and you don't do that in a year. For more than two years you have to work on it and convince the customer, not the final consumer. The final customer is more than convinced of the oil. But the one that puts our bottles on the shelves so that the final consumer can buy the oil, it is necessary to convince him. And he is only convinced in economic terms.

**You are dedicated to growing olive trees. It is something that you can live well of?**

I already told you, despite the volatility, the ups and downs it has the oil market, the farmer's philosophy is always have a certain reserve. It is a reserve saving because we know how agriculture works, we depend on many factors, not just our work, but on the weather, prices, whatever circumstance. Like this year there have been many storms and this dropped production. So one lives well, but taking into account that your job pays everything at the end of the year, you need to have previous savings, having that guaranteed always. Although the price still fluctuates in this area, where the olive grove is very productive in the region and the hills of Úbeda, Villacarrillo. Here still farmers work enables you to live well. There are other areas already a little further, and towards the mountains, towards the natural park where the olive grove is less productive, the costs are huge, where in these last two years of low prices farmers there have had a very bad time. Yes, there have been farms that did not continue. It has not been reported how they have worked, they are already facing marginalization. The costs far exceeded the price for more than a year. It has been two years already, two years have led many people to abandon the olive plots. If plots are abandoned, it is mostly abandoned in areas with very steep mountains. They have abandoned the cultivation and make another thing, have another job. Usually they emigrate, they do other work because unfortunately in the province of Jaén this monoculture absorbs almost all the work to do. The normal thing is that in provinces, like is in areas like these of Sierra, the loss of population is not a traumatic shock, but progressively it losses its population. Because there are few alternatives except this one sector. The primary production sector absorbs almost the entire workforce and within the primary production sector we have a monoculture. There was an intention to change this. Gonzalo has already said that a few years ago we had much cereal. I know in Villacarrillo more than half land was cereal. Oh yeah and now you can see only olive trees next to the road. The cereal was always the same price. 40 euros, 15 cents difference from last year, in 1980, the same price. Now you can start a little pistachio plot, but I don't think so. I know we lose population, because we do not have a strong company in the province from the secondary production sector and we do not have many service companies. The service companies already have the people they need and do not need more employees.

**Would you be interested in collecting and sell the pruning waste?**

In fact I already told you that I regret collecting part of the firewood remains of the pruning. If it does not cost me additional, I would do it without a problem. The good thing with my olive trees is that I already have an inert plant cover for many years. It does not bring an additional cost to me even so that It can be the lowest cost for me. Instead of hiring people to chop it. Yes without trouble I would sell it. Although there are some plots where I hardly see it happening because the machinery that was dedicated to the chipping, I don't know how they would do it. I do not know but most of what I have is flat and accessible. If it would not be a problem for me, because now the groundcover is also used for protection from the sun. A fairly cheap and effective system of composting the remains of pruning, they are generating nutrients in the long term. I have it mixed, alive and inert cover. I also let vegetation grow and I only treat the lower part of the olive tree with herbicide where the olive may fall, but where there is no branch. It is not a problem if the olive plot is covered with grass, different types of grass. In early summer with another machine the grass is cut and left. It is quite effective also to avoid erosion, it retains the water of the rain. In short, for me it would not be a problem to sell the pruning waste if I continue to practice living cover crops.

**Is the cover something that is also sold or is it only for the ground?**

It is not only for the soil, but that is a clear benefit. It rains and although it rains hard, the water does not erode and it also generates compost, a natural compost, organic matter that you also need. Buying it from the fertilizer company is very expensive, organic matter is the most expensive. In addition to the compost, it also helps beneficial insects against other pests that are living in the olive grove and do their part of the job. Some seasons even the application of pesticides It is not necessary because there are predatory insects of the pests that negatively affect the olive tree.

**Is it common in this area to have green cover?**

Now, it is still becoming mainstream. There are still plenty of plots where the land is tilled so that it is oxygenated. But it is also being shown that regarding erosion it is not recommended and if there is a slope, if it rains it will generate runoff. If people want more fertile land, it should become more widespread. In the traditional olive grove we have very wide streets, that benefits without a doubt.

**Are people also thinking about having a cover crops. Energy crops that can also be used, or converted into biofuels, is it something that happens now?**

I don't understand the question.

**You can also raise energy crops instead of herbs. You can raise energy crops like miscanthus or something like that. I understand that can also be used for vegetable topping, but they can also be use for general biofuels.**

I don't know that, but you learn from everything. If that is profitable and creates a synergy that benefits both the olive grove as well as those who want to exploit that crop, great of course. We are lacking that kind of alternative that incorporates a benefit, be it matter, fertilizer or exploitation. Yes, of course that is what could be done here. Without a doubt people would be very open to this. Because I already told you, the costs go up, the income sometimes not so much at same pace and any additional additions to your income is always welcome.

**And why do people now chip the pruning waste?**

Right now it is the most efficient, the cheapest and the fastest. There is a regulation that at that time when the pruning is done in spring, you cannot leave the waste without treatment in the field, without chipping the branches. There are a number of insects that enter the wood and breed their young. They will be born and come out of the wood and begin to eat. This is very harmful to the tender sprouts of the olive trees. Anyway, leaving the pruning waste has to be avoid so that these insects do not find accommodation. And second, because the pruning waste is in the way. To do work you have to go back through that street for phytosanitary treatment. And the most effective strategy with the type of machinery there is and the fastest way to avoid all that kind of of anomalies is to chip it and leave it.

**We also want to understand more on the well-being of the farmers. If there are things that can be changed or improved here, so I have some questions about that. If you could get more income from the Olive collection or maybe by selling the pruning waste, how would you spend it?**

Well, I'm going to tell you about my particular situation. Me, fortunately for now my work and my exploitation lets me live the life I want, which is not expensive. One income and a small saving is ok. Anyway, I don't think I work in another area with olive grove cultivation, that is not possible. Right now they are living near the edge, saving is not possible. I say that here in this area it is still possible to save for the form of life and the cost of living is not very high. You can live well and I can save. If my income increases, that would the better, but why would that change me? My investment will remain the same. My way of life itself will remain the same. Possibly it will increase savings for the future, to make another bigger investment. Ah yes, they are a welcome income but would not affect my way of working life, and I would smile at the root.

**Do you have children? Do you want that your children are dedicated to the cultivation of olive trees?**

Yes I have two children. I'm going to give you an answer that is truly shocking. It's going to shock you a lot. When I told my children, the boy is 13 years old and the girl is 11 years old, whe was shocked too and we always argue a lot. I would like that my son would dedicate himself to this, yes, and my daughter did not. Unfortunately I have to tell you that in this sector, woman are very little incorporated here in the cooperative. The Governing Council has three women, but those are the first members, there has never been one before. Only man come here, few women that do this at the moment. They do it marvelously, wonderfully. I am not saying that the sector is macho in which the incorporation of women is seen as a bad thing, but there is still some work. It is true, and although I see that my daughter is very determined, I see that she is more determined than my son. She is also smaller, but much smarter. She can do what she wants with him. Well, I really see that she could live very well with olive cultivation. I would like my son to dedicate himself to it. I am also clear that first I want him to form, yes. To look, to learn and to know that he is what he wants to be and that he goes to study abroad. And when he tries things like what happened to me. I decided not to return to the bank, not to work for others. And I can work for myself and I'm sure my son would be fine and my daughter too. Great if the two of them go outside.I would like them to dedicate themselves to things that they would like.

**Do you have enough time to rest?**

Let's see, my partner says no. But I do know mechanization does not give us the possibility of giving ourselves more leisure. Yes, I want my children to dedicate themselves to this, because I live a good life yes.

**What would you do if you had more free time than what you do in your free time?**

Now, in my free time, I would normally be with my partner who does not live here but abroad. So almost all the free time that I have is to try to spend time with her. Yes I have my son for a week and another week he is with his mother. Then in my time, when I have my son, we are here in Villacarrillo. Do activities with her because they are small and when they are with their mother, I try to find time with my partner and usually go out. Here in Villacarillo, there is very little cultural offer. For a little theater musical, a music event, a concert, you have to go outside of the town and that can be a long trip.

**Do you always feel free from health problems or economic problems?**

I am lucky with my financial situation, and for now I do not have health problem. I have been lucky until now.

**Is there any public service that you would like to have here?**

What is missing here in Villacarrillo? In the public services, the infrastructures are under construction, but the communication is very bad. Communication is bad and then regarding the health issue we have a hospital that is very small for the population. It is going to be very full and usually you have to go to another hospital. Then in education we do quite well. What else about the eduction, Primary, secondary? It is very good. And now with University of Jaén and the last 15 or 20 years we have enough regarding education. It seems you have it figured out, but the health and administrative issue at different levels of administration anoyes quite a bit.

**Has something changed in your environment in recent years?**

Well, the last new year. Five years ago I I divorced with small children. It was a very bad year thinking what would happen with the children. But psychologists always say no, children quickly absorb, are sponges, get used to new situations. Don't think about your head, it always goes faster than what what actually happens. And that was the bad sign. Speak up for everything.

**Is there something in life and what you want to achieve, are there dreams that you have?**

I want to see my children grow up very happy. On that topic I have no aspirations, I live very well, so no change and modify what is necessary so that it does not change. Yes, Problems will surely come, problems are faced. But I believe it is a quite satisfactory situation and the aspiration in my life was not making things easier for my son. I want them to have difficulties and know how to solve it. But it would be a great satisfaction if they had a serious problem in their life and they could work it out.

**Do you use your skills and talents in activities that you do?**

Well, I do not have many skills. The truth is that I don't have much talent. But what I think is that I am a good athlete and I work well in the field because physically I feel fine. Despite the fact that fifty-two years is quite a bit. I have no abilities in another aspect. But I lead a life that I really like. I read a lot, I go out a lot, I like cultural activities and then what we have said before, health is very well. I keep doing the sport that I like.

**If it could change something in your life, what would it be?**

If I could change something in my life right now. Possibly that me and my sister were closer. We see each-other very little. Well I do not see her every two months, but now only a couple of times a year. But hey, now I consider something.

**Thank you very much. Is there still something you want to say or share?**

Only that it really makes me very happy that I can help investigating this. Because here innovation is born and these are the steps that lead us to progress, to advance and to improve. Yes, from the studies of people who know how to do it together. So I'm glad, Ifor this kind of thing, really great.