

Geelong Advertiser

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HD **A low-profile high-flyer**
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FOR a multi-million-dollar operation, Boundary Bend Olives has a low profile in the community in which it operates, while at the same time having a formidable reputation nationally and internationally.

Not many of us know much about the Lara-based business, though given 80 per cent of all Australian extra-virgin olive oil is supplied and packed by Boundary Bend, most of us will have used its oils.

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Perhaps that low profile is because it supplies oils under several different labels. Whether you **buy** your oil as premium brand Cobram **Estate**, or second-tier Red **Island**, or one of the private-label products at any of the major retailers in Australia, one thing is sure — the oil you're using began life as a tiny cutting in a shed in the Broderick Rd headquarters.

Or perhaps that low profile on a local level is down to the number of employers being relatively small. Though the **company** produces close to \$100 million of oil a year, it doesn't employ any more than about 100 workers, including those at the olive groves — 6000ha in total — it owns in Boundary Bend, Boort and Wemen.

That low profile could also come down to high staff retention. Employees feel valued; one worker with a seriously ill spouse has been told to take as much time as she needs to care for her man. Staff are promoted from within: a nursery hand is now the production manager. Exciting projects engage the workers' attention: an expansion into California means workers from Lara can help set up the new facility.

While Boundary Bend may not be the name on everyone's lips, its oils are, and there are very good reasons for that, according to general manager Nick Stahl.

"We are a tree-to-table business," he said. "We take charge of the whole process. We grow the trees, we harvest the fruit, we produce the oil, we bottle it, we market it. Everything is controlled." On the day Business Beat visits, three women are in the nursery, taking charge of the tiny seedlings, which have come from the groves and will return there 18 months later as young trees blooming with fruit. For all its big bucks and big influence — Boundary Bend has won a swag of international and national awards — it all starts here in a labour-intensive little corner with a pile of soil and a pair of secateurs.

We walk through the process of making olive oil, through the controlled atmosphere where the seedlings grow before being transplanted into tubes encouraging deep and hardy root growth, and then into pots. The fruit is picked at the groves by over-the-row harvesters — a collaboration between Boundary Bend and Maqtec — and within four hours its juice is transformed into extra-virgin olive oil. Later it is transported to Lara where it is stored in huge vats made on **site** in the temperature-controlled sheds.

The bottles are labelled and packaged and then warehoused on **site**. "The current bottling line felt ambitious when it was installed seven years ago, but now cannot keep up with demand and will be

replaced in September with a \$4 million Italian bottling line which will triple the efficiencies and will be able to process 15,000 bottles every hour in a 24-hour non-stop operation,” Mr Stahl said.

“This investment is necessary because we have been turning down contracts. We will be able to bottle more rather than sell in bulk, which we have been doing to try to keep up with the demand.” Boundary Bend has a **commercial** laboratory on **site** accredited by the National Association of Testing Authorities, that has won awards for its work.

“In the past two out of four years we have won the award for the most accurate lab in the world,” Mr Stahl said.

“The lab means we can test our oils and then use that in our harvest plan. “And while other producers just stamp a two-year use-by date on their bottles, we can test the rate of rancidity and then label more accurately.” The only part of the operation the **company** doesn’t take charge of is the transportation of the packaged product.

Boundary Bend packages oils under a range of labels for international markets including **China**, the US, the UK, NZ, Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam. Right now Japan is “very exciting”.

“It’s the westernisation of the middle class with a big fusion movement going on,” Mr Stahl said.

Selling to the Japanese is straightforward with the appeal of the Boundary Bend oil being the transparency of the production processes and the quality of the product.

“Numbering on each label of every bottle means the oil can be traced back to a particular row of trees. Everything is accountable and that is an assurance that no one else in the world can offer,” Mr Stahl said.

“We’re really proud of this from a Geelong perspective.

“We’ve been short-listed for the Manufacturing Hall of Fame and will know the outcome of that in about two weeks.” And despite all of this, he said: “People still say, ‘You still work over at the little olive oil place?’ ”

THE GOOD OIL ROB MCGAVIN and Paul Riordan founded the public, unlisted **company** in 1998. OF THE 19 million litres of oil produced in Australia last year, Boundary Bend grew 13.5 million litres and bought another three million litres from Australian farmers.

THE **company** has 2.3 million trees across 6200ha and 22 over-the-row harvesters, each costing \$900,000.

EACH week during harvest, 20 trucks deliver oil to Broderick Rd from the three groves. Each truck carries 42,000 litres of oil.

THE business won a Scope Business Enterprise Award for its work with the Scope team, who package ALDI cartons that require three products in one box. THE **property** in Sacramento, California, will be called Boundary Bend USA and will initially supply the US market.

And those 2014 awards: Olive Japan International Competition — five gold and two premiere awards. New York International Olive Oil Competition — five gold and two best in class awards.

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