



LEADING BY EXAMPLE:

Taking a leaf

As nurserymen with more than 30 years' experience propagating trees for Australia's olive industry, Ray and Delphine Archer were well acquainted with the health benefits of using monounsaturated olive oil in preference to saturated or trans fats. But it wasn't until they went on a research tour of the Mediterranean that they learned about the health-giving properties of the olive tree leaves. They found that the locals follow an ancient custom of drinking tea from the leaves to boost their immune systems.

Subsequent research on their return to Australia meant the Queensland couple gradually transformed their business from producing trees for fruit and oil to extracting the essential compounds from the leaves to produce olive leaf extract. During the past decade, their expertise at grove management, harvesting the leaves and extraction has developed in tandem with the growing acceptance of the benefits of olive leaf extract in the marketplace. These days, Olive Leaf Australia's grove is the world's largest specialised leaf orchard and their product is one of Australia's most sought-after natural supplements.

ABOVE: Olive leaf extract is now being distributed with positive results to children living in a number of hospitals and orphanages in Uganda, Kenya and Zimbabwe.

Far from being content to rest on their laurels, the Archers, who also have a long record of humanitarian work in the Pacific Islands, decided to share their product with communities less fortunate than Australians, who can easily buy their product from healthfood shops and pharmacies. "Although our volunteer work was mainly in communities in PNG, the Solomons and Vanuatu, we discovered there really wasn't the infrastructure to distribute olive leaf extract in that part of the world," Delphine explains. "We decided to concentrate our attention on places where we could make an immediate difference. So we looked to countries where aid groups are established in the hospitals and orphanages."

Olive leaf extract is now distributed on a regular basis to a handful of institutions across Uganda, Kenya and Zimbabwe and results of regular doses of the product are most encouraging. On a recent field trip for the aid organisation, Aid for Africa Down Under, Queensland registered nurse Pam Harrison was able to

observe first hand the benefits of distribution of the product. She visited the Chikombedzi Methodist Mission Hospital in Zimbabwe where she witnessed the combined effects of the AIDS/HIV pandemic, food shortages, population crises due to the displacement of farm workers and resulting political instability.

"I was only able to make a single visit to the hospital because of concerns for our safety," Pam says. "However, in spite of the dire situation, discussions with the hospital staff, a local teacher and childcare workers revealed that they felt better off than the bigger hospital at Chiredzi. In fact, Chiredzi often requests supplies from them.

"The children at the associated orphanage looked well and cared for. The senior guardian mother said that all the orphans were now receiving doses of olive leaf extract on a daily basis. Initially, it was only given to HIV/AIDS-affected children, but after regular supplies started coming they realised it could be used not just for emergencies. She said children receiving the extract suffered fewer colds and infections and, if they did get a serious illness, they recovered more quickly. Some supplies are being sent to other orphanages with positive results being reported."

Delphine Archer adds that, while the news is pleasing, she would like to see their assistance rolled out to more institutions in need. "It's only a drop in the ocean of need, but at least we feel we are making a small step in the right direction," she says.