

EVOO brand Lets O'Live aspires to be a household name

 By Robin Fredericks

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We chat with Cape Town-based husband and wife duo Loyiso and Nosisa Ntlebi, founders of Lets O'Live, an extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) brand founded in June 2021, to find out more about what they do and how they do it. They share the challenges they've faced establishing their business and some advice for aspiring entrepreneurs.



Source: [Lets O'Live](https://www.letsolive.co.za/)

■ Briefly tell us about Lets O'Live

Lets O'live was founded in June 2021. We delivered our first orders the same year, soon after getting one of South Africa's boutique producers willing to share their olive oil with us as we were unknown in the industry and had no viable connections to the various producers in the country.

Since then, the company has been able to not only grow but to also forge meaningful relationships within the industry, especially as the company joined SA Olive which is the mother body organisation and custodian of the olive industry in South Africa.

■ How and why did you get started?

Nosisa: Sometime in March 2021, Loyiso received a Whatsapp from a real estate agent which we approached years prior for a different venture which ended up not getting up from the ground. The lady wanted to find out if we were still interested in an olive oil plant and thought she had the perfect place for us. Because Loyiso did not want to seem rude, he did not tell her that it was not olive oil but something completely different because we were no longer going into that business.

Loyiso: I then told my Nosisa about the peculiar conversation and my wife said with no hesitation that we are going into this industry. Of course, I had my reservations as we knew nothing about the industry apart from loving the product for cooking and baking. For Nosisa, it was a way to find herself in the agricultural sector as she had loved farming as a child and it connected her to her grandmother and aunt who raised her with the crops they planted to feed the family back in the villages of Sterkspruit growing up.

■ Tell us about your olive-making process and/or how you bottle

As we do not yet have our own farm and cannot produce for ourselves, we source the freshest and best extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) from reputable, sustainable producers in South Africa (Portion 36) who pride themselves on delivering the best quality EVOO to South African tables. We also blend our own EVOO with the Frantoio and Delicata cultivars which give our oil a unique medium blend.

As participants in the SA Olive Commitment to Compliance (CTC) scheme, we send samples of our selected EVOOs to accredited laboratories and to SA Olive's panel of olive oil tasters. Only EVOOs approved by the CTC scheme are entitled to display the SA Olive CTC seal on the container. For our customers, the CTC seal is an assurance of EVOO quality. For more information on the CTC scheme, you can visit the SA Olive website.

As we are an olive oil bottling and trading company and not yet producers, we are fortunate to be able to source and bottle the freshest South African EVOOs from the latest harvest and do not bottle any surplus oil from the previous season.



Loyiso and Nosisa Nlebi, founders of Lets O'Live

■ ***Could you share some of the key challenges you have faced establishing your business***

We think the most obvious challenge was information as we did not have anyone we knew doing something like this and we first went to the internet to scourer any info we could get. Initially, it was daunting as we did not know where to go until we found a producer willing to sell the oil wholesale to us for bottling; from there, we got to know of SA Olive which has been a well of information, advice and connections.

Although we have been able to list our oil on Takealot, we have struggled to list our oil in retail stores as we are relatively unknown and have not been able to convince any of the major retailers to take a risk on us, but we now have realised that the first yes always has a ripple effect and will only build on our success.

■ ***How would you like to see Lets O'Live grow or evolve over the coming years?***

We would love to see our brand on the shelves of major retailers and have more people introduced to Lets O'Live. As a company, we see ourselves as future market leaders and the go-to olive oil brand in the country and beyond. We have aspirations of growing and producing our own olive oil and also growing our repertoire of products associated with olives and a better way of living.

■ ***As entrepreneurs, what would you like to see changed in the South African olive industry?***

As entrepreneurs, we would love to see more young Black people involved in the olive oil industry all along the entire value chain and not only as producers or bottlers as I believe this is the only way of growing the industry.

We would love to see our government play a more active role in helping the South African olive oil industry grow and be more competitive with the rest of the world as we have some of the best EVOO in the world.

We would also like to see our retailers have more South African products listed on their shelves as currently, 70% of the EVOO consumed in the country is imported and some of this imported oil although labelled EVOO is truly not EVOO or bad quality due to lack of regulation regarding EVOO and rampant food fraud from imported goods.

■ ***What trends do you predict for the industry?***

With the average South African starting to care about what they put in their bodies, the only way is up and the recent events in the world have highlighted the need to have South Africa and Africa as a whole independent in our food security.

We hope it will prompt our government to invest more in not only our industry but the entire agricultural industry and also remove the amount of bureaucratic red tape that hinders the potential of many young Black South Africans so we will be able to compete with the rest of the world.

■ ***What advice do you have for aspiring entrepreneurs?***

Our advice is that whatever dream you have, no matter how impossible it might seem, know that it is attainable and remember if it was easy, everyone would be doing it.

■ ***Where would you like to see Let O'Live in the next five years?***

We would love to become producers ourselves and have a farm which will allow us to have more power with the quality of our product. We would love to be able to employ as many people as we can. We want to see ourselves stocked in all major retailers and have Lets O'Live known as a household brand which is recognisable locally and abroad.

ABOUT ROBIN FREDERICKS

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