Personal Statement

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In November 2019, a buyer from Amman rejected 1.2 tonnes of oil from our family's olive press in Kufr Yuba. Its free acidity was 1.1%, above the 0.8% limit for extra virgin oil, and it sold that winter for less than half the price. My father blamed the rain. I was in my second year of chemistry, and I wanted to know whether he was right.

He was partly right: rain at harvest does make things harder. But when I spent the next two harvests logging every delivery, a different pattern appeared. I recorded when each farmer's olives had been picked and when they reached the press, and with my professor's permission I tested 40 samples in the university laboratory. Olives that had waited more than 48 hours in sacks gave oil with almost twice the acidity of olives pressed within a day.

Numbers were not enough on their own. Our customers are small farmers who had always brought their olives in sacks whenever they had time, and my father did not want to turn anyone away. Together we agreed on two changes: farmers who booked a pressing slot within 24 hours of picking went first, and we lent plastic crates to anyone who asked. In 2021 every batch we sent to Amman met the extra virgin standard, and the buyer who had refused our oil signed a three-year contract.

What I learned was less about chemistry than about how change happens in a small business. A test result convinced my father only when it came with a plan that did not cost him his customers, and the plan convinced the farmers only because it saved them time. Since graduating in chemistry from Yarmouk University in 2021, I have worked as a quality control chemist at a dairy in Irbid, and I see the same thing every week: the best procedure is the one people can follow on a busy morning.

I am applying for the MSc in Food Technology at Wageningen University because I want to understand quality from the tree to the bottle, not only in the laboratory. I will bring the view of a small producer to a classroom of future food engineers. And I want to take home tools that a family press or a cooperative of thirty farmers can afford: simple tests, clear thresholds and procedures that fit the harvest.

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