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94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF
Tel: 020 7837 1228 Fax: 020 7837 1141

Meeting minutes for UK Leader+ Orchard Co-operation Project

11th July 2007, Natural England Offices, Ledbury 1pm-4.30pm

Present	
Phil Aubrey, Teignbridge Leader+	Sheila Leitch, Marcher Apple Network
Debbie Baker, Monitoring Officer, Herefordshire Rivers Leader+	John Lewis, CAMRA, Campaign for Real Ale (Cider & Perry)
Jonathan Briggs, Mistletoe Matters	David Marshall, Herefordshire Leader+ Orchard Evaluation
Marie Brompton, North West Devon Leader+	Henry May, Tidnor Wood Orchard Trust
Debbie Bryce, East of England Orchard Project	Adam Montague, Common Players, Devon
Anita Burrough, People's Trust for Endangered Species, Traditional Orchards Project Officer	Pippa Palmar, Mid Kent Downs Orchard Officer
Simon Clark, National Orchard Forum/Northern Fruit Group	James Petts, Natural England (Landscape)
Sue Clifford, Common Ground	Ben Raskin, Soil Association, Supply Chain Team Manager
Kath Dalmeny Deputy Co-ordinator, Sustain (Chair)	Alex Sherman, Somerset Levels and Moors Leader+
Jackie Denman, Big Apple Association	Sally Shiels, Glasu Leader+ , Wales Orchards in Powys
Ida Fabrizio, Orchards Project Officer, Sustain	Ann Smith, Gloucestershire Orchard Group
Tom Froggart, Marcher Apple Network	Elaine Spencer-White, Somerset Food Links and Somerset Orchard Link
Meg Game, Ecologist and cobnut grower	Ben Totterdell, Orchards Live, North Devon
Laura Hurt, People's Trust for Endangered Species	Dawn Turner, Herefordshire Rivers Leader+
Dan Keech, Senior Researcher, New Economics Foundation	Chris Wedge, Natural England/Gloucestershire Orchard Group
Angela King, Common Ground	

Apologies	
Adrian Banford, Cumbria Leader+	Dick Palmer, Orchard Link Project Cumbria
Karen Bentley, Damson Development project/Orchard Link Cumbria	Anthony Richards, Common Players, Devon
Liz Craven, Mid Kent Leader+	Heather Robertson, Lowland Ecologist, Natural England
James Crowden, Poet and cider maker	Christine Taylor, Mid Kent Leader+
Sally Evans, Mid Kent Downs Officer	Gillian Williams, Campaign for Real Ale (Cider and Perry)

1. Presentation –Traditional Orchard Initiatives in Germany

Dan Keech, New Economics Foundation (Senior Researcher, Food & Farming, working on the project: 'Real Steps towards Sustainable Local Food Systems')

Dan talked about this initiative to save traditional orchards, which started in Germany 1986 following a nature survey by the nature conservation organisation NABU. They saw a correlation between bird loss and the loss of traditional orchards. The value of traditional orchards in Germany is little disputed, so a national programme to conserve orchards was soon launched.

'Streuobst' is the German term for traditional agroforestry systems, consisting of fruit scattered on agricultural land. (Note: In Spain, the term 'árboles en diseminado' is used; the French and the English terms 'près vergers' and 'fruit-tree meadows' are similar, but restricted to fruit trees on grassland.) Trees can also be underplanted with arable crops, but today, Streuobst most frequently occurs on grassland. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN,¹ typically Streuobst consists of common fruit trees with densities of 20 to 100 trees per hectare. Rows of fruit trees along streets are also considered a form of Streuobst. Intensively managed orchards consisting of trees managed exclusively for fruit production are not included.

- Characteristics of German Traditional Orchards for the **Streuobst project**.
- The orchards grow a mixture of different fruit types such as apples, pears, plums, cherries
- Orchards are scattered in the landscape, which is distinctive of German orchards
- Orchard ownership is sometimes divided tree by tree
- They are entirely unsprayed

The conservation organisation NABU gives support by providing:

- Advice and guidance on orchard management, including pruning and grafting
- Advice on processing and labelling for orchard products such as juice
- Advice on health and safety
- Ideas for community use

They also take action in areas such as:

- Lobbying for agri-environment policy to restrict orchards to *streuobst* style systems
- Abolition of fruit grading criteria based on cosmetic qualities
- Ensuring best use of local infrastructure

An important consideration is the economics of production and income from different sales outlets. In Germany, 100 kilos apples costs about 7 Euros. Selling through local buying groups generates 18 Euros for 100 kilos. Organic fruit can also attract a premium. If fruit is sold wholesale, it takes a long time to be paid, and the amount is too little for the hard work that goes into picking. Local growers can make better business selling locally through direct sales, e.g. to pubs, farmers' markets and small shops. Traditional orchard juice can sell for 1.10 Euros per litre, with carton (Tetrapak) juices at 60 cents per litre. There is also increasing interest in developing new value-added products, such as apple and pear champagne. East Germany are busy replanting elder orchards (for berries and flowers) to mix with the apple juice. Local groups get together to form a partnership with growers to make traditional orchard juice, with the following characteristics:

- Groups are formed as charities and co-operatives
- There are 120 groups scattered around the country, making it a large-scale operation (though distributed and multiply owned)
- The scale of production for the bigger groups is about 600,000 litres of apple juice a year, and an average of 30,000 litres for the small groups

There is now some pressure to grow more commercially, and to form bigger groups. Success of the Streuobst project has also resulted in interest from further afield.

The juice is marketed as unsprayed traditional orchard juice; they also make it known that the products are from orchards that abide by conservation rules. A producer/grower can only become a member of group if they meet the following conditions:

- The fruit is unsprayed
- The orchard owners/managers are engaged in conservation activities
- The orchards work in partnership with local conservation groups.

Some of the groups are also involved with import of Fairtrade fruit products, such as mangos and pineapple, to mix with apple juice to extend their range.

¹ See Herzog, F. 'The importance of perennial trees for the balance of northern European agricultural landscapes', see: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/x3989e/x3989e08.htm> (accessed September 2007)

To find out more about the Streuobst project, see the website (in German only):

www.streuobst.de

Dan Keech undertook a study of traditional orchards as part of a Winston Churchill fellowship in 2002. His report "Traditional Orchards: Exploring a Sustainable Future" includes information on visits to France, the Basque region of Spain and Germany. It can be downloaded in pdf format from Sustain's website:

http://www.sustainweb.org/pdf/traditional_orchards_report.pdf

2. Presentation: Somerset Orchard Link

Elaine Spencer White, Somerset Food Links (Project Officer, working on the Somerset Levels & Moors project)

Somerset Orchard Link is an orchard marketing group that started after an initial meeting in November 2003 convened at the Somerset County Council offices. This came at a critical time, when cider companies were not renewing contracts with smaller orchard owners, and there was a lack of market for these orchards and their crops.

Within a few months, Somerset Food Links formed Somerset Orchard Link and 45 members signed up, representing around 250 acres of orchards in the region. A steering group was formed in 2004 with the sole purpose of finding an economic use for cider apples in these orchards to help sustain economic, social and environmental benefits for the area.

The first year was spent on orchard management and learning, and communicating with members.

Initial marketing activities were successful, contributing to and benefiting from a renaissance in cider drinking. The group then began to look at the feasibility of developing new products, even the possibility of drying apples for horse fodder.

Two experts went around the county identifying apples and indigenous varieties, which proved to be very worthwhile. The group also got involved with the Somerset Wildlife Trust and took part in wildlife surveys in the orchards, which helped raise awareness of the value of traditional orchards. The group also took a stand at the Bath & West agricultural show.

In June 2006, with the help of Leader+, Somerset Orchard Link ran a training course called 'apples for profit', helping orchard owners (members and non-members) to market their produce. The course was very popular, and quickly oversubscribed.

At the core of Somerset Orchard Link are 20 or so orchard owners who would like to form a legal structure for the group, such as a co-operative, to make and market quality juice. Last season was spent undertaking research on apple varieties and market research (including consumer tastings) to identify favourite varieties for an apple juice.

The intention is to produce more of these two varieties to produce a quality cider apple juice to sell commercially.

The next steps for the Somerset Orchard Links project are to devise a business plan, and for the group to become an entity in its own right. The objective is to get to know the marketplace, test capabilities and attract investment. In 2008 they intend to extend the area to Northern Somerset Levels and work to improve distribution and transport.

The group has also explored the possible benefits of seeking 'protected name' status, for Somerset Cider, (PDO – an official European Protected Designation of Origin used to help with marketing²). However, they found that another company already uses the brand name "Somerset Cider" on a product that does not contain Somerset grown apples. Instead, they are exploring the possibility of a PDO for Somerset apple juice.

² For details of the different 'protected name' schemes, see the Agriculture and Rural Development pages of the EU website: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/foodqual/quali1_en.htm (accessed September 2007)

3. Leader+ updates

Mid Kent Downs Leader+ - Orchards for Everyone project

Pippa Palmar (Mid Kent Downs Orchard Officer)

This project is part funded by Leader+ and Mid Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It involves the restoration of three traditional cherry orchards in the Mid Kent Downs, and creation of one traditional orchard, all for community use. The orchards vary in size between 4 and 11 acres and the majority of them are in good condition. So far there has been a lot of interest by the communities involved and several events already taken place. The project is involving the community in restoration work such as planting, weeding and removing dead wood. The project will provide management plans and guidance notes for the community to take on the long term care of the orchards.

There has been a wealth of activity, with a series of popular events. Forty people turned up for a root-stock planting day, and a grafting course is planned for the near future. A 'Breakfast in the Orchard' event on a Sunday was also very popular, soon to be followed with a teddy bears' picnic for younger participants. An inter-generational project saw the community learning about the history and heritage of fruit growing in the area. Representatives from the nearby Brogdale National Fruit Collection attended an event to share their expert knowledge. Schools are also learning about the importance of heritage mapping, which research so far has proved to be very interesting, showing that many old family names associated with orchards still persist among the local population.

The project has also been working on conservation issues. DNA testing in one orchard has revealed typical local varieties. Biodiversity surveys are also planned, to involve children from the local school.

The next step is to examine at sustainable uses for the fruit, which will involve research into traditional and distinctive recipes, such as sour cherry soup, cherry brandy, and a wide variety of fruit juices.

One technical problem remains – height restriction on ladders, due to new EU health and safety regulations. Many of the trees are quite tall, and the ground below is unsuitable for heavy planting gear that would meet EU regulations; and so a large amount of the fruit will have to go unpicked.

Teignbridge Leader+ – Cider with Roadies project

Adam Montague (Apple Animator for Common Players)

This project, involving the touring theatre company Common Players, started in 2006, touring a working apple press to local communities, allowing them to bring surplus apples and press it into juice.

The project has secured funding for an additional 18 months. Starting in September 2007, they will tour mainly the West Country and more widely next year, with the next instalment going out to schools and the community.

The project has employed an Apple Educator and performance artist, who will interpret the work for children. Projects will include teaching the history and heritage of local orchards, orchard art & design projects, and teaching about healthy eating and nutrition – depending on each school's needs.

In 2008, Common Players will develop a 40-minute performance for primary schools. They also plan to do harvest suppers around apple harvest time. The group will also make contacts with local orchard groups such as Orchards Live, in Devon. They also plan to make contacts with the apple industry, and to explore the possibility of a 'Wikipedia' style updatable website for Devon orchards – to contain information on varieties, orchard management, pruning, products, presses for hire, tree sales, etc. They hope to have a draft website up and running by the end of 2008.

To discuss the project, contact Adam Montague on adam@ciderwithroadies.org Or register your interest in being put onto the Common Players database for more information and a newsletter about the project by emailing: mary@ciderwithroadies.org. For the project website, see: www.ciderwithroadies.org.

Herefordshire Rivers Leader+ - Herefordshire Orchards Community Evaluation project

– David Marshall (Bulmer Foundation)

This is a two-year project, which started in 2006 and involves six orchards of the 3,000 that are in Herefordshire. There are more orchards in Herefordshire than any other county in the UK. The main work of the project is to show how applying 'triple bottom line accounting' methods can help to record and communicate the full value of orchards: economic, social and environmental.

The six chosen orchards vary from traditional, to organic and commercial bush orchards. The survey of the bush orchard will be unusual as there are few assessments of bush orchards undertaken.

The key to the research is to broaden the scope of accounting; not just looking at financial data from the orchards. The projects has been conducting evening meetings with orchard owners, recording stories, and looking at the sense of place. The records from this study will be kept at the cider museum in Hereford.

For the future, they hope to work with NFU (National Farmer's Union) and National Association of Cider Makers. They will also focus on horticulture and look at the effects of climate change on orchards. This will be complimented by work on planning issues. The threat in Herefordshire is not to commercial orchards, but to orchards in settlements. This makes the project work especially valuable, to convey the value of orchards to local people.

North West Devon Leader+ – Orchards Live project

Marie Brompton (Programme Manager, Leader+)

Ben Totterdell (Countryside Officer, Coast and Countryside Service)

This project (www.orchardslive.org.uk) reported that they have been:

- Using Leader+ funding to develop a grant scheme for orchards in North West Devon.
- Working in partnership with Orchards Live and the County Coastal Service to create new traditional orchards through a grant scheme. About £10,000 will be used to plant small orchards. The objective is to plant community orchards and to work with schools to plant orchards on school grounds.
- Received support from the District and County Councils.

North West Devon Leader+ area also has the advantage of being within Britain's first Unesco Biosphere Reserve area (World Heritage site www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk) which could provide opportunities for further support.

Glasu Leader+ - Orchards in Powys project

Sally Shiels (New Harvest Project Officer, Glasu)

Powys is the largest county in Wales, covering a quarter of the country's land area. Glasu Leader+'s central theme is 'Adding value to local products'.

The orchard project is part of the Glasu's 'New Harvest' project to raise awareness and provide training. They appointed two Orchard Doctors, Tony and Liz Gentil, who have undertaken a survey of 30 selected sites. They organised orchard workshops and apple days, and worked with mainly farmhouse orchards of 20-40 trees (only a couple of larger size, with about 100 trees). They have worked with the community, schools and the National Trust, and are now putting together information sheets on pruning and orchard management on the Glasu website (<http://www.glasu.org.uk/newharvest2.htm>).

Some challenging issues remain. For example, it is not cost-effective for orchard owners with only 20 trees to go into business without support or some form of selling cooperative. Established businesses are protective of their place in the market. Some farmers have problems with labour. Not all the apples get picked, and there is an issue with storage and distribution.

After this stage of Leader+ funding there will be a gap until at least January 2008.

PTES Traditional Orchard project

Anita Burrough (Orchards Project Officer, People's Trust for Endangered Species)

This project aims to conduct an inventory of orchards in England to support a recently introduced Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) that supports the rare Noble Chafer beetle, that is prevalent in environments such as traditional orchards. The project will also offer information of relevance to other BAP species including birds, bats, lichens and fungi. The People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) originally chose eight counties to include in its survey activities (Essex, Cambridgeshire, Kent, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Devon, Cumbria, Herefordshire), and may raise this to nine if they include Somerset. The project is restricted to these counties as it is very ambitious for the timescale, and counties were selected on the basis of sightings of the Noble Chafer beetle.

Activities so far

The project has two-year funding, and has one year left to run. They started a mapping process by identifying likely orchard areas via aerial photographs. PTES has recruited volunteers, who have been trained to undertake 'ground proofing' of sites with basic roadside or onsite surveys. They are generating a database of traditional orchards and have so far covered six counties. The quality and detail of information from the volunteers is very good, with plenty of photographic evidence.

PTES is now at the stage of digitising the information, to be presented as a map and database. They have also produced a leaflet for orchard owners, which is a guide to wildlife and management in Traditional Orchards.

The project website is at: <http://www.ptes.org.uk/work/TraditionalOrchardsproject.html>
Please contact Anita Burrough for details or a copy of the wildlife leaflet, contact Anita on: anita@ptes.org.uk

Comments from participants:

- Elaine Spencer White – Somerset Wildlife Trust has lots of information already and a very dedicated officer. The county orchard working group in Somerset has conducted a wildlife survey, receiving completed forms from about 23 orchard owners.
- David Marshall – Herefordshire has already a digitised Millennium map – a countywide wildlife survey, mapping important wildlife habitats. The Biological Records Centre may also have useful information.
- Simon Clark – there is a lack of work in orchards mapping in the UK. A national survey would be highly useful. The BSBI dot map scheme (Botanical Society of the British Isles, www.bsbi.org.uk), records flora in the UK at 10 metres squared.
- Laura Hurt – Natural England has undertaken a country-wide survey of orchards; however the data is not particularly detailed in terms of exactly how many are traditional orchards.
- PTES hopes that after the project, it can continue, or someone can take on the task of surveying the rest of the counties in the UK.

4. Brainstorming session

Ideas for the 'Good Practice Guide for Orchard Project Management'

The following notes aim to capture a flavour of the discussion that took place, drawn from participant and facilitator notes, and presented here in no priority order. More detailed notes, and further consultation, interviews and research, have been used to inform the further development of the good practice guide – chapter drafts will be circulated to the group for comment. Additional comments and ideas are welcome at any time – contact Ida Fabrizio at Sustain on 020 7837 1228; email: ida@sustainweb.org.

4a) What would you find most useful for a good practice guide?

- Avoid repetition – lots of good work already exists – promote it – refer people on to it.

- List of existing/past projects with characteristics and contact details.
- Searchable local knowledge base – resources available.
- Sources of finance/funding – note, however, this may change. But process/procedures useful. – German example – they fund their activities through trading.
- Help people to find equipment to hire – for e.g. larger apple presses for juicing. No central point of access currently. Need more networking opportunities and need more sharing of information. National Orchard Forum can help as they hold information about who has equipment to hire. Perhaps we should refer on to those specialising in such services and promote their links.
- Processing Information, harvesting, processing, equipment, transport, storage and distribution. – Perhaps a mobile press as one of the projects in Germany? (Saftmobil) www.das-saftmobil.de Or a processing 'hub'.
- Not just about profit from fruit – other crops/products e.g. wood, mistletoe, honey, grazing.
- Public perception – the awareness and celebratory side. Culture and festivals. Making it a part of everyday lives.
- Don't forget celebrating other fruits and nuts! (pears, cobnuts and other fruits for their unique attributes).
- School resources for orchard projects.
- Availability of TINs (Technical Advice Notes, e.g. on Natural England website).
- Ideas on recruiting, involving, training volunteers.
- Issues arising from case studies – which was part of the original idea.
- What to do if an orchard is under threat – general planning advice and experience.
- Legacy – the future. What to do after project, how to keep it going.
- Commercial/enterprise element –business advice on setting up, e.g. health and safety, employment law, etc. signposting to environmental health and Business Link.
- Definitions and terms – size, types, biodiversity value of orchards.
- National collections of heritage varieties. A list of gene banks, nurseries, skilled practitioners.
- Perhaps contacts of biodiversity friendly tree surgeons?
- How to select specialists and where to find them, and use to best effect i.e. economies of scale.
- Good practice management/steering group – illustrating that it's not necessarily landowners who most effective; need dynamic leadership to achieve progress.
- Surveys – habitat and historical.
- Threats – how to engage in planning process and be pre-emptive.
- Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform and Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme for orchards. Orchards can and should go for HLS payments.
- How to get varieties identified.
- Cross-border issues – relevance of procedures to other areas of UK.

4b) What are your thoughts on project evaluation?

- In terms of profit, the best break-even timescale is a minimum of five years.
- Need to think about who is making you evaluate and what are your (and their) motivations.
- You can get stuck on 'measurables'; worth thinking about wider benefits and means of proving worth (as in Herefordshire case study, above).
- Setting objectives (SMART/KPI³) – particularly in the case of public money.
- Benefits may not reflect the primary aim of the project. For example, it is less easy to measure social justice as it is to measure economic benefits. It's not just about the money but social outcomes, landscape features.
- It's worth keeping anecdotal evidence as well as 'hard' evidence – orchards are about more than economics; need to put in measures that have resonance with people. Orchards that persist do so through love not just money.

³ Note: SMART is an acronym for 'Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely (or sometimes 'Time related') – a useful checklist for helping to set objectives, sometimes used by funders to assess whether a project has been well thought through. KPI stands for 'Key Performance Indicator'- a specific objective or target set – usually within a commercial organisation – to measure and reward performance.

- Evaluation is an ongoing process, always need to assess the project to know what direction to follow or what needs to change.

4c) What good ideas have you seen for 'Adding Value'?

Participants provided a 'brainstorm' of projects and ideas (already in operation or looking promising) that they have come across for adding value to orchard produce:

- Differentiating products, i.e. regional specialities and also marketing outside the area.
- 'Sponsor a Tree', such as Dragon orchard crop share near Ledbury (www.dragonorchard.co.uk) and Tidnor Wood Trust near Hereford (www.tidnorwood.org.uk).
- Other orchard products such as honey, mistletoe; database by BCBP (www.newcrops.co.uk).
- Branding and marketing, specific landscapes, e.g. Levels Best brand in Somerset (www.levelsbest.co.uk); brand with provenance, environmental land management varieties.
- Undertaking market research raises awareness and expectations; provides useful data.
- Premium niche marketing, e.g. Harrods, rare variety gift packs.
- Generate and share information about cider market trends.
- Cider vinegar – uses and health benefits; look at different markets for products, e.g. health.
- Motor fuel from ethanol.
- Branding and marketing – advice, potential cooperatives, sustainable food networks.
- Attractive packaging and mail order – can get more profit.
- Quality standards – looking at how this can raise profile and leverage added value; also gain access to markets that are starting to require this.
- Developing web-based sales and linking in to existing local food portals such as Big Barn (www.bigbarn.co.uk).
- Land rental - to farms for grazing, chickens, etc.
- Register with film companies for location rentals (they apparently pay quite well!) Rental for events, weddings, theatre, etc.
- Income generation through orchard skills training, hobby and lifestyle activities.
- Growing and selling saplings and trees and selling at farmers' markets.
- Diversify into unusual varieties.
- Gloucestershire 'Day's Cottage' Apple Juice (<http://www.applejuice.care4free.net/>) – wassailing and resource centre – runs training, orchard and rural skills centre, poetry sessions; also makes juice for cider.
- Wildlife watching events – dawn chorus, dormice.
- Care Farming in Orchards – involving public services, example given of work by the Bulmer Foundation in Herefordshire.
- Wood as a product in its own right, and use for craft making. Higher value given to cherry veneer, chestnut wood, e.g. for musical instruments.
- Organic Certification, can add value, and there is an increase in market buying organic produce. Also demand for more local organic produce however it can be expensive and not worth it for smaller non-commercial orchards; more viable for commercial intentions. Contact Ben Raskin for organic requirements: BRaskin@soilassociation.org.

5. Orchard Visit to Tidnor Wood Orchard, Hereford.

Notes from Henry May, chair of Tidnor Wood Orchard Trust (www.tidnorwood.org.uk)

"We have 10 hectares of established, commercial cider apple orchards at Tidnor, Herefordshire and 4 hectares of cider orchards in the making in Calvados, France. We are sustainable by virtue of the income from selling our apples to local cider makers (and still would be if I took a salary commensurate with my inputs). We have no volunteers to speak of as all our labour is by contract other than a retainer to our Orchard Keeper (but we do intend to attract more volunteers). We augment our apple income from the sale of tree sponsorships and of prints of paintings that we have commissioned. We also sell honey, log wood and mistletoe and the usual prisoners in our web shop."

"We have positioned ourselves as 'the UK's largest collection of cider apple varieties' with over 350 varieties in the ground at Tidnor and another 60 or so in nurseries in transit. Once our collection is fully established there will be considerable new market opportunities. In the meantime we have been awarded prestigious "National Collection" status by the National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens (NCCPG)."

"We are in organic conversion which should be satisfied next year and we have negotiated a contract to sell our cider apples up to 2017 or thereabouts. We are currently trying to badge ourselves as a Nature Reserve and to that end we are continuing to actively encourage diversified flora and fauna but not to the detriment of the commercial necessities of our orcharding."

"The trick seems to be to remain a profitable self-sustaining organisation whilst physically, at ground level, appearing to be traditional Herefordshire orchards - and at the same time gene banking some old cider apple varieties into perpetuity."