

Good Practice Guide for Orchard Project Management

The first draft for this Guide has just been sent out for consultation. Thank you to everyone who provided information and advice. It will be printed and be available in electronic format on the Sustain website by the end of January 2008. There will also be a dissemination event in January, but the location and date are yet to be arranged. Suggestions are welcome!

Leader+ Orchard Co-operation Project

Newsletter

Welcome to our Autumn edition of Leader+ Orchards newsletter. We hope you all had a successful and enjoyable season for plums, damsons, quinces, cherries and cobnuts this year and, of course, a great apple day and harvest!

Project officer Ida Fabrizio, has spent this year travelling to the participating Leader+ areas across England, so we have lots of updates. We have also included information on some orchard projects in other European countries, such as Germany, Luxembourg and Belgium.

Leader+ Network meeting July 2007

This second network meeting was held in Ledbury, Herefordshire, and was kindly hosted by Natural England. It was very well attended and lively, and was followed by a site visit to the beautiful Tidnor Wood Orchard, near Hereford. See page 8 for details about Tidnor Wood Orchard Trust. The minutes from this meeting are available on Sustain's website www.sustainweb.org/pdf/11_07_07_orchard.pdf

National Biodiversity Action Plan agreed for orchards

In August this year, traditional orchards were approved by the government as priority habitat under the Biodiversity Action Plan. This status means greater consideration will be given to orchards in planning and development decisions, environmental grant schemes and external funding. For more information on BAP www.ukbap.org.uk

Natural England Technical Advice Notes for Traditional Orchard Management

These are now completed and are available for free to download from Natural England. They are documents TIN012-TIN021 <http://naturalengland.twoten.com/NaturalEnglandShop/>

Orchard photo sharing www.flickr.com/orchards

See photos of Ida's orchard visits this year, which includes images of cherry orchards in Mid Kent Downs, Meg Game's Kentish Cobnut orchard and celebrating Apple Day 2007 in Devon.

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PAGE 4 North West Devon Leader+

will be working with Orchards Live to administer new grants to create and restore local traditional orchards.

PAGE 5 Mid Kent Downs

The Orchards For Everyone project has been busy this year, including developing a schools pack.

PAGE 6 Herefordshire Rivers Herefordshire Community Orchard Evaluation Project, spent this summer assessing biodiversity value in the orchards, where some rare species of wildlife were discovered.

PAGE 7 Cumbria Fells and Dales

The Damson Development Project has now finished its report with some very useful recommendations for developing the local damson industry.

Cumbria Orchard Link recruited more members, and has a second orchard group and another apple press for the South Lakeland area.

PAGE 8 Orchard sponsorship schemes and Community Supported Agriculture. These are two inspiring initiatives based in Herefordshire, where orchards are run self sufficiently with the help of tree sponsorship and a "cropshare" scheme.

PAGE 9 & 10 Orchards in Europe

Orchard initiatives in Germany and Luxembourg are trying to save traditional orchards by bringing them back into the economy.

PAGE 11 Leader+ Wallonie (Belgium)

This Leader+ funded orchard co-operation project is working to safeguard traditional orchards in the Wallonia area of Belgium.



Adam Montague Pressing Juice

On the road again - with a travelling performance to follow their apple press. **Mary Richards** of Common Players reports.

Cider with Roadies

Over the last 17 years the Common Players have taken new experiences through the media of drama, education and interactive performances, into people's communities to engage, stimulate and help create new community relationships and events. Cider with Roadies is the latest of these projects, funded with grants from Leader+ and Heritage Lottery amongst others, conceived to rekindle local interest and enthusiasm for apples, orchards and different apple uses.

There are three elements working together to create the overall project: First, people juice apples during an afternoon, in a community space, culminating in a performance of a specially-written piece called *The Big Squeeze*; the story of Pip the apple and her meeting with Mr Badfinger, the fruit expert.

Second, our Apple Educator, Heather Fallows offers one of three art-based days to a Key Stage 2 class in local primary schools. The

children can taste local apples and compare them to supermarket imported varieties, also producing art-work, poetry and prose to be collected into a book at the end of the project.

The third element to the project is the Apple Animateur, Adam Montague. He tours with the press, encouraging everyone to get involved in the juicing process and fostering new contacts for the wider role of the Animateur; to bring together local apple growers and producers with local businesses to explore opportunities for working together. He also talks about how to identify apples, as well as being on hand to answer questions on all things 'appley'.

On with the show

So, at the beginning of September, off we went armed with our unique touring apple press, a well-rehearsed show and the promise of community apples for pressing. The weather was immensely generous, this being an entirely outside event, so all ages came along and juiced

"With the pressures of life this squeeze was a great way to spend an afternoon."

Audience member in Ilstington, Devon

their apples. People were very interested in the project and regaled us with stories from childhood, local traditions and tales and shared family secrets for brewing the best cider. We learned of successes and failures with pruning, growing and grafting apples. Adam was able to give much valuable advice and will be going back to communities to run courses on topics such as orchard management.

We are exploring working with one Mid Devon couple who have two acres of land, all organic, who are keen to plant an orchard. With Adam's expertise and their enthusiasm we plan to record each stage of the process for inclusion in an exhibition which will tour with the press during autumn 2008.

Twenty four communities were involved this year, ranging from Farmers Markets and a Heritage Museum to community orchards and local schools and we have been thrilled and inspired by this diversity. Cider with Roadies continues during 2008, with our Apple Animateur working on an interactive apple website and investigating ways of making our traditional orchards economically viable, to help preserve this valuable habitat and part of our rural heritage. Two new pieces of drama are also being written for performance in schools and at community feasts during the autumn.

"Excellent all round. Activities, set and music superb. Information talk was well received too. People asked if we could make this an annual event."

Land Heritage, Hittisleigh, Devon

If you would like to know more please keep in touch via their website www.ciderwithroadies.org

Somerset Orchard's cider apple juice.
Photo Somerset Orchards



Somerset Orchards

Somerset Orchards is now a co-operative and sells cider apple juice from their traditional orchards

Somerset Orchards (previously Somerset Orchard Link) began in 2003 as a group of small-scale orchard owners trying to find independent markets for their cider apples when they lost their contracts with the large cider companies. 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.

During last year's season the 20-strong steering group did market research (including consumer tastings) to identify favourite varieties for an apple juice. This research identified popular varieties which are now being marketed this winter. Some 3000 bottles are being produced under contract which will be sold via Somerset Local Food Direct, an online, local delivery scheme. A new variety of cider apple juice is also undergoing trials from this year's crop.

Somerset Orchards is submitting an application to Food from Britain for a Protected Geographical Indication certification (PGI) for Somerset Apple Juice. A successful application will protect Somerset's apple heritage and help market the juice. A previous enquiry about registering Somerset Cider, failed because 'Somerset Cider' is already used as a brand name, despite the fact that the product does not contain Somerset grown apples!

Somerset Orchard Link has been renamed Somerset Orchards and is working with English Food and Farming Partnership to become legally registered as a company. They have become a co-operative, and an internal structure and management roles will ensure the smooth running of the business. The area covered by Somerset Orchards will be extended to the Northern Somerset Levels. 2008 will also see improvements to distribution and transport and research into the demand for small local apple juice bottles at Somerset B&Bs and pubs.

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Apple Day 2007
Eggesford
Gardens, Devon

New Leader+ grant scheme for North Devon's orchards

Extra funding for North Devon's Orchards was announced this year to restore and create traditional orchards. Individuals, community groups or businesses are eligible for the grants, which can cover activities such as buying trees and tree guards, doing tree surgery and buying signs, leaflets and public liability insurance.

Ben Totterdell, of the Coast and Countryside Service said: "By encouraging the planting of new orchards and the restoration of old ones, we can ensure that this important part of our local heritage has a healthy future. Traditional varieties of fruit offer an amazing range of taste and aroma, so often missing from the standardised supermarket ones."

North Devon Coastal Countryside Service (NDCCS) and Orchards Live are helping to implement the project, providing practical advice and guidance on planting, pruning, suitable varieties and aftercare. They are also suggesting suitable local businesses for applicants, for tasks such as tree surgery. The NDCCS will visit the

orchard, give advice and write a report which details recommendations and costs. The report will then be signed by the orchard owner before being handed to the North West Devon Leader+ team.

Michael Gee, Chairman of Orchards Live, said: "Since we set up Orchards Live a few years ago we have been encouraged by the growing enthusiasm of those restoring traditional orchards. This excellent grant scheme will enable us to accelerate the process of restoration."

The grant helps with 50% of the cost for businesses and up to 75% of the cost for community orchards, and the maximum grant awarded is £1000. For community orchards volunteer time can be included towards 25% of the project costs. The closing date for the grant is 31st October 2008.

Orchards Live run up to seventy orcharding courses a year, and also run a local network of orchard owners and enthusiasts. They have already been awarded a Leader+

grant to buy an apple mill and press to produce juice and cider, on a non-commercial basis, for individuals and small-groups. More grants will help fund more orchard training workshops and promote community events.

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The Wider North Devon area is designated as a new style **Biosphere Reserve** by the United Nations due to the quality of its environment - the UK's first. To find out more go to www.northdevonbiopshere.org.uk

Community involvement to restore and create orchard heritage

As soon as the sites were chosen, agreements were set with landowners and five year plans were put in place with the parish council representatives who will take on the management of the orchards. The management of one of the orchard sites will be taken on by the local school.

One of the chosen sites is Church Lane cherry orchard, which had "limited future direction" until now. Project officer Pippa Palmar, this year organised a planting day, where 40 volunteers turned up and planted rootstocks, ready for a future grafting course. The orchard has been secured, with a new attractive and traditional gate and fencing, using a local woodsman, who made it from chestnut sourced from coppiced woodland in the Kent Downs.

A "Breakfast in the Orchard" event was held during the summer which proved to be very popular and increased community interest. It was followed by a "Teddy Bear's 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 to share their expert knowledge.

Historical findings

Hollybank orchard, which is managed by the local school, revealed a number of fascinating historical facts, illustrating different eras of the orchard's life. For example, the orchard has the

"Cherry Joe" Local cherry orchard expert at Hollybank orchard.



Running for two years, from September 2006 to September 2008, the **Mid Kent Downs Orchard** project is taking an holistic approach to working with communities to restore and promote traditional orchards in the Mid Kent Downs AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) landscape. It is focusing initially on four community orchards sites.

remnants of ridge and furrow, a ploughing method, which was an important feature of historical landscapes, as well as a 1940s air raid shelter from World War II. As well as being rich with wildlife, it has a mixture of very old remnant trees, several old rare variety cherry trees, and also newly planted trees.

The project has also inspired some genealogy research, with old names of wealthy land-owning families dating back to the 1500s. The internet helped research old surnames associated with orchard owners, which in turn threw up information on the history of family titles, land ownership and land management. Some local cherry farmers were discovered to have given money to King James I in exchange for a knighthood and family crest (which included three cherry trees in the design). Some children at the local school have the same surname, and the area still has traditional cherry orchards.

Schools Pack

Pippa Palmar this year also produced a very useful "Bud To Beaker" school pack, which has both teacher's notes and worksheets for pupils, for use in schools across the area. The pack will be available to download from the Mid Kent Downs website in the near future www.kentdowns.org

The next steps for the project will include art in the orchard, exploring imaginative ways to display information. The project will also look into sustainable uses for the fruit, and is hoping to purchase a fruit de-stoner to make cherry juice. There will be master classes' on juicing, making preserves, wines, liqueurs as well as researching traditional and distinctive recipes.

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Hereford Orchard Community Evaluation Project

With the season's fruit being collected and the smell of apples hanging in the air across Hereford, Dave Marshall has been busy harvesting apples, but also information and experiences

The project is concentrating on evaluating the impact of just six of more than three thousand orchards in Herefordshire. These were selected to represent the different types and characteristics of orchard that can be found here, including organic, traditional and a bush orchard. (One of the orchards being evaluated is Tidnor Wood, see page 8). The evaluation is examining the triple bottom line value of each orchard, assessing environmental, social and economic effects. This means aspects as diverse as the orchard's contribution to climate change, biodiversity, the local economy and people's lives are being looked at.

During the summer of 2007 there was a hive of activity on a publicly owned remnant orchard in Bodenham, one of the target orchards, as a group of 33 people from Herefordshire Recorders and Naturalists descended for the day to record its flora and fauna. Some interesting species cropped up, such as the lichen *Bacidia rubella* which is an ancient woodland indicator species. Insects and butterflies were recorded on all the orchards by specialist Dr Arthur Wild. Another highlight earlier in the summer was finding a micro fungus called *Pirottaea nigrostriata*, on a dead stem in one of the bush orchards being evaluated. This is the first recorded anywhere in the county.

The data collections wasn't without its problems. During the Foot and Mouth disease restrictions, it was decided that it was not sensible to make farm visits. The adverse weather conditions of summer 2007 also hindered some data collection! However, a lot of information on the

nature of the orchards has been amassed, from soil right through to mammals.

On the social aspect, to date a total of 88 people have been involved in discussing the impact of orchards at facilitated community evenings. Detailed surveys have been completed by visitors to orchards, tree sponsors from Tidnor Wood and visitors to the Tourist Information Centre. Hotel owners have also been asked for their perspective to try to put a value on the orchards as an amenity for leisure, employment and for education.

David held talks about the project during this year's Big Apple Festival and the Flavours of Herefordshire Food Festival. The project was also approached by BBC Radio 4 in April to contribute to the Nature Programme on Orchards, to explain the new perspective on orchards the project is developing.

This programme is still available to listen to on the BBC Radio 4 website on this link: www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/science/nature_20070430.shtml

By the end of the year, there should be a full account of each of the orchards participating in the project, and some interesting comparisons should be apparent, with the final report held at the Hereford Cider Museum.

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Damson Development Project

Project officer Ida Fabrizio attended Damson Day in April this year, and was pleasantly surprised by the many delicious damson products she tasted. Local producers who use local damsons are thriving: Savin Hill Farm sells a popular damson pork pie, and Cowmire Hall's successful damson gin is sold in Fortnum and Mason in London. Also in attendance were dairies, bakeries, local breweries and preserve makers, who brought an impressive display of damson ice-cream; damson cheese; damson bread, puddings, cakes and jams; and even damson stout!

However, even with the enthusiasm of local - and national - producers, retailers and consumers for damsons and damson products, many producers still have difficulty getting fruit from the local Lyth Valley, because of a shortage of labour and supply and a lack of de-stoning facilities.

The Damson Development Project was launched in partnership with the Westmorland Damson Association to investigate this very problem and examine the long-term viability of a

sustainable local damson industry. In early 2007, project officer Karen Bentley carried out extensive research, canvassing growers and producers to explore the challenges facing the WDA and the Westmorland damson industry. The project also aimed to provide stewardship advice and orchard management training; the WDA's orchard management workshop in March 2007 was a great success and has underscored the need for more teaching sessions.

Following the research survey, Karen's report was released in July this year. Notably, it confirmed the interest of growers, producers and retailers in damsons and damson products, and found that there is encouraging potential - both regionally and nationally - for industry growth. Key recommendations included setting up a scheme to sponsor the planting of damson trees and donating trees to local schools to plant as part of school orchards; establishing a programme to employ, train and insure a team of pickers to visit several orchards during the picking season; and clarifying the application and awarding process for grants, targeting younger farmers and

other interested locals. Taking part in established national schemes could be helpful as well: applying to include damson orchards in the local National Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), for example, would help attract tourists and visitors who are interested in agriculture and the environment.

The study also raised the possibility of a partnership with the nearby Witherslack Co-operative, which would provide facilities for storing, freezing and selling damsons, as well as offer an information point for interested visitors, but would relieve the WDA and local farmers or producers of the responsibility of setting up and running a centre on their own.

The survey was presented to the WDA's executive committee, which has wholeheartedly decided to pursue the majority of its recommendations. The orchard grant scheme has already been resurrected, and the committee is currently drawing up an action plan for the next 12 months.

Karen Bentley

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Orchard Link Cumbria

Orchard Link Cumbria was set up with the support of Fells and Dales Leader+ to ensure local apples are used and not wasted as windfall. The project initially started with an orchard group and the purchase of a community apple press; it now also puts orchard owners in touch with local producers and helps to organise events around the county.

Over the last year, Orchard Link Cumbria helped plant a reference collection orchard at Sizergh Estate, a National Trust site, in collaboration with Brian Fereday, a forester for the National Trust and an orchard enthusiast. The site is the very old Fellside orchard, which was initially restored ten years ago and has now been replanted with more traditional local varieties of plums, apples, damsons and pears. The orchard has been featured as part of the estate's garden walks and orchard weekend celebration, and has been used for

training workshops, including a well-attended orchard management course as part of the Damson Development Project.

Orchard Link Cumbria has also co-operated with the social enterprise Growing Well, an organisation that works with and trains people who have long-term mental health problems. The two groups held a grafting training day this year with orchard expert Hilary Wilson of Northern Food Group. All the grafts were successful, and Hilary was very pleased with how the training event boosted the confidence of those who took part. "They didn't believe their graft was going to work," she said. Another grafting course will be held in March 2008. Next year, Growing Well will plant a traditional orchard; they will eventually sell the harvested fruit along with the vegetables from the organic market garden they tend.

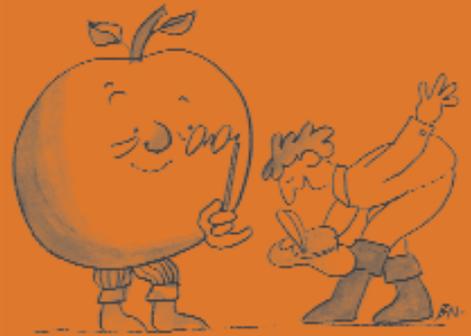
Dick Palmer, who co-ordinates events for the community apple press, has recently been busy with orchard events, demonstrations and community pressing days around the county. He has recruited many more members and created an interest all around Cumbria, with the press being in high demand. This year they formed an orchard group to cover the South Lakeland area. They were able to obtain extra funding from Volunteer Action Cumbria and Leader+ for an apple press for the group, which has already been in use for this autumn's crop. The new group is considering some local orchard sites for restoration, with a view to adopting one as an educational site. Discussions to set up a North Lakeland Orchard Group are underway.

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Can you help support Lord Lambourne?

A novel sponsorship scheme for orchards



In the spirit of community-supported agriculture, innovative tree-sponsorship schemes are helping Herefordshire orchards navigate their future

While a number of traditional fruit varieties have been in decline, some orchards are quietly and effectively safeguarding traditional varieties with the help of public involvement and sponsorship. One such orchard thrives just couple miles out of Hereford. Tidnor Wood Orchard Trust is eschewing funding applications and grants in favour of the revenue from cider apples and public sponsorship of trees. For £60, a tree may be sponsored as a memorial or a gift, or simply in the name of conservation. Sponsors pick their desired variety and rest assured that it will be nurtured for its lifetime. Sponsors may visit the orchard, a sprawling 26-acre area, to sample their tree's produce - fruit that may be unavailable elsewhere.

With more than 350 varieties of apple tree in Tidnor Wood, the orchard represents the UK's largest collection of cider apple varieties, says Henry May, who owns and runs the orchard trust. Indeed, the orchard has been awarded "National Collection" status by the National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens.

Tidnor Wood Orchard is currently in organic conversion, a stage that should be completed by next year. In the meantime, Henry says, the orchard trust is trying to promote the site as a nature reserve. To that end, they are continuing to encourage diversified flora and fauna, though not to the detriment of the commercial necessities of the orchard. The challenge will be to continue gene-banking some fascinating old cider apple varieties while maintaining a traditional Herefordshire orchard as a profitable and self-sustaining venture.



Left: Apple orchard at Tidnor Wood Orchard Trust. Right: Ann and Norman at Dragon Orchard. Photo - Dragon Orchard

East of Tidnor, in the vast Herefordshire countryside near Ledbury, Dragon Orchard is a small, family-run, traditional fruit farm running a similar tree-sponsorship scheme. Here, £50-sponsorship will cover the cost of planting and caring for a fruit tree in a new orchard that has been landscaped and designed with ecology and recreation in mind. While Dragon Orchard nurtures apple, pear, greengage, plum and quince trees, their emphasis, mirroring that of Tidnor Wood Orchard Trust, is on species diversity and preserving traditional varieties. Sponsors are given a free visit to spend a day in the orchard, and also receive regular newsletters and information on varieties that would be invaluable to a fruit tree enthusiast.

In 2001, Dragon Orchard branched out into cropsharing, an innovative scheme in which a member of the public pays an annual subscription of £300 in return for a generous quantity of fruit produce come harvest time. The produce includes home-made jams, chutneys, juices and cider. Added bonuses are offered for a family subscription: four invitations a year are extended to visit the farm, during wassailing, blossom time, harvesting or cider-making. Half of the cropshare members are local (from within a 30-mile radius), while the other half hail from further afield, many coming from cities such as London, Bath and Manchester.

Dragon Orchard won the Country Living Enterprising Rural Women's Award in 2004 for Farm Diversification and Rick Stein has featured them as one of the Food Heroes of Britain. These tree-sponsoring and cropsharing projects are a type of Community Supported Agriculture, that aim to reconnect farmers and consumers to boost local economies and communities in a sustainable manner. In choosing to preserve and promote the great genetic diversity of British fruit trees, Tidnor Wood Orchard and Dragon Orchard are vibrant, living landscapes and evolving habitats that help to usher the past into a sustainable future.

For more details about Tidnor Wood Orchard Trust see www.tidnorwood.org.uk

For more information on tree sponsorship, crop sharing and CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) see www.dragonorchard.co.uk

See also the Culminating Communities website, with case studies of community supported agriculture: www.cuco.org.uk/Regional/fullpage.php?type=4&article=8&sort=0

Orchard initiatives in Germany

The owls, in their way, saved the orchards



In Germany in the mid-1980s, a nature survey conducted by non-governmental organisation Naturschutzbund Deutschland (NABU) found a correlation between the loss of old orchards and significant decreases in bird life - Athene noctua, the Little Owl, included. Following the survey, an initiative to save traditional orchards was officially launched in 1986.

What began as an environmental effort some twenty years ago, today has a full-fledged economic impulse behind it as well. These twin ideals of conservation and financial viability drive the programme of Schutz durch Nutz ('Protection through use'), through which NABU groups in Germany's western states work to protect the local orchards.

A key example is the Streuobst project (Streuobst is the German word that refers to traditional orchards), which has encouraged the production and marketing of juices made from local fruit to help old orchards be financially viable. Today, 120 juice initiatives have been founded around the country to harvest fruit in local traditional orchards; to make, label and market the juice, cider or 'Most'; and to build community-based programmes encouraging conservation and tourism, among other projects. This collection of local enthusiasts makes up a fairly large-scale operation, supporting the renewed economic viability and environmental sustainability of the old orchards. To support and promote such initiatives, NABU grants a label of quality to products such as Streuobst juice. The NABU label on a bottle of Streuobst juice is a guarantee of regional production and environmentally friendly land use; it assures the consumer that only high-quality, naturally produced fruit was used, and that those involved in the production and distribution of the juice were paid a fair wage.

While the juice groups are independently owned and run - often as charities or co-operatives - NABU hosts and funds a federal working group on orchards that advises these local groups on issues ranging from the practical to the political. Besides offering advice and support on matters pertaining to orchard management and the processing and labelling of orchard products, the group also proposes ideas for community use of local orchards and ensures the best use of local infrastructure. In addition, an internet specialist helps manage the sharing of advice and information on the group website. The group maintains, as well, a lobbying arm in regular contact with government ministers. In this political capacity, it protests against basing fruit-grading criteria on cosmetic qualities, and pushes for agri-environment policy to preserve traditional orchards.



Photos NABU

From 1999-2001, NABU groups in neighbouring Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate partnered with their Luxembourgian counterparts to run an orchards project in Saarland, partly funded through the EU's Interreg programme. The aims of the project were two-fold: to create orchard employment and to improve marketing activities for the fruit.

Based on results of consumer surveys confirming that increased Streuobst juice consumption could lead to the creation of a number of new jobs while saving existing ones, the Interreg partners agreed to develop regional juice initiatives. The group launched the Saftmobil, a one-tonne trailer with a 60-litre press and scrapper, which travels to villages and schools to press fruit brought in by local people; the trailer also doubles as a mobile shop from which to sell the juice.

Meanwhile, a tree nursery was established in the city of Merzig, and is run as a demonstration traditional orchard - complete with juicing facility - from which both growers and consumers are invited to learn about orchard management techniques.

NABU Saarland has also worked to combine funding from various sources, including the state government and the EU, for a targeted orchard-support scheme. In addition, NABU supports the Schulpfappel (school apple) scheme, whereby students between seven and 10 years of age receive a free apple from a local orchard.

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Read about NABU, and other European orchard initiatives in Dan Keech's 2001 Winston Churchill Fellowship Report "Traditional Orchards - Exploring a Sustainable Future". Download the report from www.sustainweb.org/pdf/traditional_orchards_report.pdf

Luxembourg - Initiativ Bongert



In Luxembourg, a similar scheme to the German initiative focuses on the related aspects of nature preservation and orchard conservation. Recognising that orchards are home to a vibrant biodiversity, the Fondation Hëllef fir d'Natur, a nature preservation organisation, has created the Initiativ Bongert (bongert is the Luxembourg term for 'orchard') to protect local orchards by supporting and promoting Luxembourgian fruit. The project area currently covers two Leader+ areas in eastern Luxembourg: in Mullerthal and along the Moselle River.

The group launched the Label Initiativ Bongert to market own-label fruit and derivative products - juice, cider and jam, for example - from these Leader+ areas. Fruit marketed under this label must be free from chemicals and must come from Luxembourgian orchards. In addition, growers who take part in the programme must adhere to a certain level of orchard care, agreeing to plant new trees regularly as well as tend to the old ones.

The programme requires that members sign on for a minimum five-year period; during this time, growers are able to sell their high-quality 'Label' fruit to partner producers at a price about 20 per cent higher than they would normally receive in the marketplace. Besides being sold directly to the customer from the producer,

'Label' apple juices are also sold in small shops as well as a large supermarket chain.

Other innovative projects of the Initiativ Bongert include the Obstbörse, a sort of fruit stock exchange through which farmers with an oversupply of fruit may get in touch with producers who need more fruit. Meanwhile, a parallel scheme, the Bongertenbörse, puts short-handed orchard owners in touch with interested participants who may be looking to harvest more fruit in exchange for tending the trees. To coordinate the efforts of all participants, from orchard owners and farmers to fruit and cider producers and nature associations, the group has set up a dedicated Initiativ Bongert phone number and website. Through these, customers may place direct orders for 'Label' juice and subscribers can receive updates about current programmes and news about forthcoming projects.

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Luxembourg orchards.
Photo, Marc Thiel,
Initiativ Bongert

Orchard conservation in Belgium (Les vergers conservatoires)

Leader+ Orchard Co-operation Project in the Wallonia region of Belgium

Dotted across the Belgian landscape, fruit orchards, though greatly diminished in size and quantity since the mid-twentieth century, speak to the country's rich agricultural past. Recognising the significant role orchards play in Belgian heritage, three Leader+ Local Action Groups (LAGs) in Wallonie have been involved in co-operative efforts since 2005 to establish conservatory orchards in the three participating regions. The project was formally launched in 2006 and is due to continue through June 2008.

In an effort to promote their shared cultural heritage, LAGs in Pays des Collines, Assesse-Gesves and Haute-Meuse have collaborated to plant traditional fruit trees (510 at last count) in a network of eight conservatory orchards, and to institute a planned campaign of education and communication about traditional fruit orchards. The initiative includes a great variety of fruit trees, and growers are encouraged to plant cherry, peach, plum, walnut and chestnut trees, in addition to the more popular apple and pear trees.

The orchards reach beyond a celebration of culture and heritage, however; the various strands of the project bring together agriculture, education, nature conservation and tourism as well. In Pays des Collines, the conservatory orchards are part of local village life and customs, and are strongly linked to tourism efforts. In Haute-Meuse, the promotion of regional products comes to the forefront, as the fruits from the Domaine d'Ahinvaux orchard are regularly incorporated into the menu at the local restaurant. Another site, in Dinant, is a training orchard, where farmers and producers learn about orchard maintenance and the development of new products for the market.

The Leader+ Wallonie orchards project includes a number of initiatives to increase awareness of traditional orchards among local populations, especially among young people. The conservatory orchards - each one clearly marked with signposts describing plants and methods of orchard conservation - are open to the public once or twice a year, with specific activities for schoolchildren. In addition, the LAGs organise conferences on planting and orchard upkeep throughout the year, and set up networks for training specialist workers and linking other interested individuals.



Photos: LAG pays Collines, François Migeotte, LAG Assesse-Gesves

The LAGs have also begun to work with the genetic resources conservation programme at the Wallon centre for agricultural research (CRA-W, Centre Wallon de Recherches Agronomiques), pooling the results of their projects to form a database of traditional fruit trees of the Wallon region. Where rare or unique varieties of indigenous fruit trees currently risk extinction, this collaboration seeks to protect and, perhaps, eventually replant them.

Description of the project is available in this PDF document. (In French only) www.gesves.be/material/Gal-VergersConserva-BasDef.pdf

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