

The Future of
**UK ORCHARD
FRUIT**



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THE STORY OF A BRITISH APPLE IN 2025

Despite a perfect top fruit growing climate and tremendous heritage including 2,500 varieties of apples, wassailing traditions and fine cider to rival champagne, the UK orchard industry faces a variety of challenges if it is to thrive in the future. Currently growers are tackling commercial models that don't capture the full value of fruit grown, land use competition from other forms of agriculture and housing development, skilled labour shortages and new pests, diseases and extreme weather events resulting from our changing climate.

With charitable funding from Jenifer Barton and family, Forum for the Future has led a collaborative research project with over 150 stakeholders from the UK orchard sector. *The Future of UK Orchard Fruit* considers what is required for a thriving and resilient future for UK orchards. This document tells the story of what that future looks like and what we need to do to get there.

There are many exciting and innovative solutions already underway across the industry that if given greater visibility and support could set the orchard sector up to thrive in the future – delivering greater food security, long term biodiversity and health gains and greater community connection and wellbeing. Through the research process collaborators expressed the following five visions as critical to a future that they were invested in and wanted to see for British top fruit growing.





1

The **UK grows more of the top fruit it needs** to feed its citizens. Supply chains support British farmers with fair prices, sharing risk with long-term, responsive contracts, allowing producers to continue to invest in their orchards. There are markets available for fruit grown in commercial orchards of all sizes. Cutting edge storage facilities for storing British fruit year-round are widespread and extend the availability of British top fruit.

2

Orchards, especially **traditional orchards, are protected and funded for their biodiversity and environmental benefits**. Developers work closely with local councils and communities to preserve traditional orchard spaces and put plans into action for planting and maintaining new orchard spaces for the long term. Traditional orchards are designated as protected landmarks, preserving their cultural and historical significance and as rich habitats for biodiversity.



3

Community orchards are more accessible and available to everyone living in the UK, offering opportunities to connect to food growing, nature, and neighbours. These spaces are inclusive, supported by local councils, and are maintained long-term by community members equipped with training and resources.

4

There are **ample jobs and people with the skills needed** to care for fruit trees and orchards of all sizes. Community orchard groups offer skills training for communities and UK agricultural colleges have courses for future orchardists. Orchard fruit production is incentivised as a viable and desirable career that allows people to earn a decent living.

5

UK cider, like French wine, is sought after globally for its unique taste and **regionality**. Rural communities and the UK economy are bolstered by the traditional cider making industry. Ecosystems are regenerated by a system of commercially operated, traditional cider orchards.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACHIEVING THE FIVE VISIONS

Everyone can play a role in making these visions a reality – from national and local government to the orchard industry, community groups and individual citizens.

National and devolved governments have the power to provide long term certainty and continuity for the industry with incentives and funding of environmental and producer organisation schemes, seasonal worker schemes and grants and investment allowances for infrastructure and innovation. They can also support new models such as universal basic income for farm workers and programmes like Fareshare’s Surplus with Purpose to make farming more feasible and attractive for UK workers and commercialise more of the fruit that is grown.

Local governments are central to unlocking the potential of community orchards to deliver wellbeing, nutrition, biodiversity and climate benefits. They have the power to make land available for community orchards, align these biodiversity havens with regional food strategies and support funding for maintenance skills and equitable access to community orchard spaces.

The orchard industry including retailers and wholesalers can support growers through long-term or variable

contracts as well as speaking directly to consumers about food growing, healthy choices and seasonality.

Civil society can be instrumental in building connectivity across the sector and sharing knowledge about agroecological practices between community and commercial orchards and across regional food and orchard networks.

With thanks

This resource was written by the food team at Forum for the Future: Kat Zscharnagk, Libby Lyon and Sophie Robins.

With special thanks to our amazing story tellers: Tom Adams from Tom the Apple Man, Polly & Mat Hilton from Find & Foster; Jess Latchford from Waste Knot, Sonja Martin and Debbie Burden from Fareshare Kent, Steve Oram from The People’s Trust for Endangered Species, Robert Rendall from Peake Fruit, Gareth Roberts from Regather, Kath Rosen from The Orchard Project, Martin Ross from Ross on Wye Cider & Perry Company, James Simpson from Adrian Scripps, Natasha Soares from May Tree Orchard, Pete Thompson from Nature Based Farming, and Charles Whitfield from Niab.



HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

A Collaborative Vision

In early 2025, Forum convened over 150 stakeholders from across the orchard sector to diagnose the challenges facing it and imagine a future for the sector that was thriving and climate resilient. We asked how the sector, supported by the British public and government, might get there. You can read more about the process and insights on our [webpage](#). This resource shares that collaborative vision, articulates why we need to take action now and outlines the actions needed via the stories of thirteen magnificent storytellers.

Call to Action

For each vision you will see “calls to action”. These are the things that you can do individually or via your

organisation to support making the vision a reality. This is a collective vision and will take a collective effort to realise. Please share the films with your family and friends, like and share the content on Instagram and LinkedIn and use this deck as a way to promote your work and the work of others.

Sharing Impact and Learning

If you would like to share your thoughts on the resource and let us know how you’ve used it and what you found valuable, we would appreciate hearing your thoughts. You can share your feedback in this [survey](#). If you are curious about the impact of this project, we will share the findings of the survey with those who share their details with us.



FOLLOW THE
CALL TO ACTION
HIGHLIGHTED LIKE
THIS THROUGHOUT THIS
RESOURCE.

**WATCH THE FILMS
USING THIS
PLAY ICON**





The Future of
**UK ORCHARD
FRUIT**

SECURE & RESILIENT LOCAL SUPPLY



In 2025, most apples¹ sold in the UK are imported from France, Italy, South Africa and from as far away as New Zealand.

And most apples you buy will be one of just a handful of varieties² of which Gala, Braeburn, Bramley, Jazz, Cox, Pink Lady, Cameo and Magic Star are grown at scale in the UK. For a country with the ideal maritime growing climate for top fruit and over 2,500 British varieties, why do we import so much of our top fruit, why do we only have access to certain varieties, and what can we do to change this trend?

¹ <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-product/apples-and-pears/reporter/gbr>

² <https://www.theorchardproject.org.uk/blog/the-amazing-world-of-apple-varieties/>





The UK is only 40% self-sufficient for apples and 9% for pears and plums despite a favourable growing environment.

THE CHALLENGE

There are two main challenges that have caused our reliance on imports and decreased our ability to secure our own supply of fruit.

Price and Specifications

The first challenge is the shape of our modern retail supply chain. Due to the ability to source competitively from global supply chains, supermarkets place enormous pressure on growers of all sizes to grow to a particular size, quantity and variety at a low price. The price paid by retailers for commercially grown fruit increasingly means that growers are unable to meet the rising costs of production and invest in the technology needed to grow efficiently at scale, while remaining commercially viable.

The challenge of producing fruit in this way also contributes to a large amount of waste in the system. According to a 2017 House of Commons report, up to 25% of apples grown in the UK are wasted because they don't match cosmetic standards of suppliers.³ While a lot of the fruit that does not meet specifications goes to other uses like making juice or other products, a lot is left on trees or wasted at each stage of the process where the fruit is graded and deemed unsuitable.

³ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvfru/429/429.pdf>



British Apples and Pears Ltd represents all the commercial growers in the UK who sell fruit to our supermarkets.

In this film, learn more about how they are working to increase our security of apple supply from 40% to 60%.



Land Use Changes

The second challenge to secure our supply of British grown fruit is the space and land needed for orchards. Unlike other fruits that can move to innovative growing methods and spaces like greenhouses and vertical farms, trees require land and space outdoors. This land continuously faces competition for other uses, in particular to build housing. In England and Wales, over 56% of orchards (and over 80% of traditional orchards) have been lost since 1900, largely due to housing development and removal for farmland.⁴ Despite this, the land used for commercial orchards has remained relatively stable for the past 10 years showing the value of investments being made in these orchards to create growing efficiencies.⁵ Climate change in the countries that we source from will impact agricultural⁶ production and reshape supply chains leading to further pressure on land use choices in the UK.

⁴ <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/our-cause/nature-climate/nature-conservation/how-were-bringing-blossom-back#rt-surveying-the-losses>
⁵ <https://www.britishapplesandpears.co.uk/largest-ever-uk-apple-and-pear-orchard-census/>
⁶ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/a08836eb-7d78-5987-8cdf-548f4fb09352/content>

Innovating at Peake Fruit

What enables us to address the challenges facing growers? “We have a really entrepreneurial culture in the family, from my Grandmother who started Copella Juice to her children who opened the Stoke by Nayland resort and golf course near Boxford. Finance loans have played a big role in our business, but they are always backed by solid business plans and our supportive and objective Board. The Producer Organisation schemes we were part of also allowed us to develop our orchards, increasing productivity, enabled technological innovations and promoted UK Food Security.”

What innovations are we trialling? “We are aiming to be a circular business and many of the initiatives we develop help us to use byproducts or waste from other initiatives like our anaerobic digester (AD). These range from additional polytunnel crops like strawberries and asparagus to compost for garden centres made from the digestate output from the AD. We also partner and invest at scale in the future through solutions like hail netting, dynamic cold storage facilities and biodiversity and plant health data tools.”

What do we need to thrive in the future? “We need a favourable business environment where the government backs UK orchards and supports them with investment schemes and policies including adequate seasonal labour supply, easing planning rules, and encouraging investment in reservoirs and other water storage schemes. Climate change is likely to be beneficial for orchards in the UK overall, which creates an opportunity for the government to back something that other markets will start to struggle with.”





WHAT IS THE VISION AND HOW DO WE DELIVER IT?

Prioritise Future Food Security

Because apple and pear trees take between 5-7 years to grow before they become productive, we need to act now to ensure we have invested in a secure supply of top fruit in the UK in the future.⁷ There is a current misconception that we will be able to rely on importing all our fruit in the future. However, if we rely on imports now and stop planting trees, we may be putting our food security at risk, especially as global supply chains become less predictable due to global conflict, pandemics, emerging markets or extreme weather. The danger of relying on others to feed us is outlined in the government’s 2024 National Preparedness Commission “Just In Case” Report⁸ but the vision of everyone in the sector is that we have a more resilient supply of our own top fruit.

⁷ <https://nationalpreparednesscommission.uk/publications/just-in-case-7-steps-to-narrow-the-uk-civil-food-resilience-gap/>
⁸ <https://nationalpreparednesscommission.uk/publications/just-in-case-7-steps-to-narrow-the-uk-civil-food-resilience-gap/>

READ AND SHARE THE
ASKS FOR SUPPORT
NEEDED FOR COMMERCIAL
ORCHARDS IN THE UK TO
THRIVE AND **INCREASE**
SUPPLY OF UK GROWN
FRUIT.





Enable Longer Storage

One way to achieve this vision is to store more British fruit for longer. New storage technologies and techniques mean that some apples can now be stored for up to 12 months.⁹ This means that producers and retailers can store and supply British fruit throughout the year, when they would otherwise rely on supply from abroad. As well as infrastructure investment in dynamic storage facilities spread across the country, we need to research and grow more varieties that are climate resilient, store well and are harvested at different times of the harvest season. The government can support more of this commercial investment in future tools and research, by increasing business investment allowances.

⁹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/122987/default/>

May Tree Orchard Collaborating and sharing resources

"May Tree Orchard grew out of a partnership between two families farming organically at Pear Necessities near Goudhurst, Kent. Although my husband and I started our own orchard, May Tree, in 2021, we continue to work with Julie and Antony of Pear Necessities sharing resources and tools and collaborating to harvest and sell our fruit. Antony of Pear Necessities buys our whole apple crop, rents cold storage in Kent from Paul Ward of Mole End Farm and manages the sale of our apples through the Stoke Newington farmer's market over the Autumn season. This year we also sold plums via Growing Communities' wholesaler, the Better Food Shed. We had a bumper year of plums, and Better Food Shed were able to amalgamate orders from smaller veg box schemes so that we sold more than we expected.

Two things that have really helped us to be successful are, the relationships with others, including the freely given energy of countless volunteers which has been hugely important in maintaining the orchard. Secondly, the ability to use other organisations infrastructure. Paul Ward of Mole End Farm giving us access to his cold storage has been instrumental in how we store and sell our fruit."

In 2017, up to 25% of apples grown in the UK were wasted because they didn't match cosmetic standards of suppliers.



Create Markets for the Whole Crop

Another way to achieve this vision for security of supply is to ensure that all fruit grown provides commercial benefit to farmers. This means that fair contracting terms are agreed with farmers for fruit that meets different specifications and that markets exist for any fruit that does not. Fareshare runs a programme called Surplus with Purpose, which pays farmers a break-even price for fruit that can not be sold. This fruit is then distributed to food banks and community kitchens across the UK via the Fareshare network.

Expand Local Orchards

A final solution is to invest in other orchard spaces that can provide British fruit to citizens. Whether run by the Council, community or a Community Support Agriculture farm, more spaces for local growing could help ensure a future for British fruit beyond our current global supermarket supply and help British consumers to reconnect with nature and the food they eat. More dedicated, local orchard spaces also help to increase biodiversity and environmental outcomes such as storing carbon. You can read more about this idea in Chapter Three.

Waste Knot Connecting farmers to new markets. "Around 7% of what's grown in the UK never makes it to a plate and that's more than £1 billion worth of goodness going to waste. Waste Knot creates a market for farmers to supply misshapen and surplus vegetables to commercial caterers, as well as restaurants, pubs and hotel groups and offers customers a sustainable relationship between food production, food waste and food redistribution. Waste Knot distributes regeneratively-grown, UK produce, including orchard fruit, with apples being a familiar product in our mixed fruit boxes, thereby offering commercial orchardists a way to sell more of their fruit. We work with existing routes to market in order to deliver the produce with minimal food miles added. We also run educational workshops and programs to develop understanding of the food and farming industries as well as volunteer opportunities for people to come and help on a farm."



FareShare

Fighting hunger and waste. FareShare joins the dots on two parallel problems: food waste and food poverty. "We rescue good-to-eat surplus food from the food industry – farmers, retailers, manufacturers, logistics providers and so on – and we redistribute it to frontline charities who support those experiencing food insecurity. We organise regular gleans on local farms and orchards in Kent, picking fruit and veg that would otherwise be left to rot, often because it's not commercially viable for the farmer to pick it. That might be from pollinator trees dotted throughout the orchard, or because fruit has grown too big, small or marked to meet strict supermarket specifications. Sometimes it's from test trees where farmers are trialling new crops or growing techniques and they'd rather the fruit doesn't go to waste. In redistributing fruit from orchards to local charities and community groups, we're helping ensure that more of the fruit that's grown in this country makes it off farms and onto people's plates. We're supporting a shorter form of supply chain, where people get to eat fresh produce grown more locally to them."



ORCHARDS AS SOLUTIONS FOR NATURE AND BIODIVERSITY



**FOLLOW
THE PTSE
APPLICATION
TO UNESCO TO
LIST TRADITIONAL
ORCHARDS AS
PROTECTED SITES
OF CULTURAL
HERITAGE.**

Fruit trees have the capacity to minimise land use tradeoffs by hitting multiple targets.

These include growing food, promoting biodiversity, sequestering carbon and especially in the case of community orchards, providing citizen access to the health and social benefits of green spaces. If orchards can provide so many benefits, why are they not the go-to solution for our public and private spaces, and what can we do to make them critical and essential in our decisions about how land is used?



THE CHALLENGE

Removing Orchards for Other Land Uses

Throughout the UK, orchards continue to be grubbed¹ where they are not commercially viable or are removed for development opportunities such as building new houses. Removing orchards also removes the environmental benefits they create such as sequestering carbon, increasing floodwater uptake, and providing rich habitats for biodiversity. More can be done to ensure that they are protected and planted as biodiversity havens.

¹ Grubbing is the removal of all trees, shrubs and stumps from a site.
http://www.theenglishappleman.com/journal_2023-03-03-Empty-shelves--empty-orchards.asp

80% of small traditional orchards and over half of all orchards, have been lost in England and Wales since the 1900's.

Lack of Aftercare Can Limit Orchard Potential

Where orchards are grubbed for new developments, legislation² says that as a Tier One Habitat, the developer must replant the orchard or an alternative Tier One Habitat and create an additional 10% biodiversity gain. An orchard is the most cost-effective Tier One Habitat to create, but the legislation does not mandate a plan for aftercare of the orchard. The decline of an orchard planted for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)³ misses the co-benefits gained to communities and the environment and can also miss many of the long term biodiversity benefits it sought to create in the first place.

² Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/biodiversity-net-gain>



Biodiversity Net Gain alongside Food Production

“At **Brook Farm** it became very clear to us that top fruit production in the UK was financially unsustainable unless you are a very large operation and even then it can be borderline. The risks in growing fruit and vegetables are increased by climate change and we can only expect this to increase over the coming years. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) potentially provides a significant early payment which effectively provides security of income for the lifespan of the BNG project – usually 30 years. The most rewarding aspect of the approach though, is how quickly nature returns. We are seeing so many improvements to the soil, wildlife and insect life that are on our farm. We have planted a traditional orchard on our BNG site, as one of our habitats to enhance biodiversity further and we sell that fruit to a food service company who are less concerned about how the fruit looks than a supermarket.”

“We’ve started to trial organic fertiliser and are seeing healthier trees which recover better from disease and are more resilient to climate change impacts”

JAMES SIMPSON MD AT ADRIAN SCRIPPS



Continued Use of Chemical Pesticides and Fertilisers

The use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers in commercial and traditional orchards continues to be a challenge due to the many negative environmental impacts they have. Although precision spraying and integrated pest management practices have decreased their use, intensive commercial fruit production still relies on these inputs. Pesticide use is regulated by the Chemical Regulation Directorate⁴ but growers face challenges around registering alternative biological solutions quickly and they are also disadvantaged compared to growers in other countries, particularly in Europe, who can use chemicals in their orchards that are banned here.

Receiving Value From Nature

Farmers aren’t paid for the environmental benefits of fruit or pollinator trees and as commercial growing becomes more economically unsustainable for many, farmers are looking for other options to create value from their land, grubbing orchards where they are no longer viable.

⁴ <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pesticides/>

NIAB Using precision technologies to minimise inputs

“Niab is an independent research organisation that works to support farmers and growers in the UK and that has been developing precision technology for orchards. For the past 20 years, work at our East Malling site, has been developing systems to assist growers to manage their crops in a more sustainable manner. The PACE (Pesticide Adjustment to the Crop Environment) system was released in 2008, which helped growers adjust the dose of pesticides according to the size and development stage of the orchard. The research has continued and Niab is now involved in developing an automated tree scanning and dose adjustment system which allows each tree in an orchard to be measured and a precise and targeted dose to be applied on a per-tree basis. The objective is to maximise crop protection efficiency, and minimise environmental impact, whilst saving the growers’ input costs. Precision technologies such as these are the future of large-scale food production, and will enable us to produce more food sustainably.”

WHAT IS THE VISION AND HOW DO WE DELIVER IT?

Making Long Term Commitments

What are the right tradeoffs between providing food, ensuring strong farmer and farmworker livelihoods, restoring nature and providing environmental benefits? The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs have recently closed their 2025 consultation on land use in the UK. The consultation considers how land is used and managed to meet these competing outcomes and making the case for orchard spaces is part of this consultation.⁵ As the government further considers a 25 Year Farming Roadmap⁶, more voices can make the case for continued long term funding commitments to schemes such as the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, Sustainable Farming Initiative and Fruit & Vegetables Aid Scheme which can support long term care of traditional orchards, and the planting of fruit trees for biodiversity outcomes.

⁵ You can view Sustain's response to the consultation here <https://www.sustain-web.org/reports/apr25-sustain-response-land-use-framework-consultation/>
⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-reforms-to-boost-profits-for-farmers-with-a-cast-iron-commitment-to-food-production>

The UK has only 50.3% of its biodiversity remaining, one of the lowest rates in the Western world.*

*<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2024-0101/CDP-2024-0101.pdf>





ADD YOUR
ORCHARD TO THE
PEOPLE'S TRUST
FOR ENDANGERED
SPECIES
HABITAT MAP

FOLLOW AND SHARE
THE FRUIT & VEGE
COALITION'S POLICY
BRIEFING TO ENCOURAGE THE
GOVERNMENT TO PRIORITISE
AGROFORESTRY IN THEIR
FARMING ROADMAP
CONSULTATION.

Agroforestry and Farming with Nature

Solutions such as agroforestry have the potential to change our land management practices to decrease inputs such as pesticides and fertilisers and to create diversified income opportunities for farm businesses. Sharing best practice and incentivising more environmentally friendly approaches should be a commitment of organisations and orchards of all sizes as this will increase the resilience of our natural and farmed landscapes.

People's Trust for Endangered Species Mapping orchard

habitats. Traditional orchards are a Priority Habitat in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, holding significant cultural and biological value. Using a mixture of funding from government environmental bodies and public donations, the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) has mapped over 42,000 traditional orchards across the UK. Hundreds of volunteers, orchard owners, and partner organisations have assessed thousands of them on the ground to better understand their condition. These habitat inventories illustrate the dramatic loss in the number of traditional orchards over the last few decades, with surveys showing that of those remaining, only 9% were in 'favourable' condition for wildlife, and 45% were 'declining'.

PTES and their Orchard Network partners provide resources and advice on creating, maintaining, preserving and, most importantly, using traditional orchards. Whilst the harvest is of course the foremost concern of an orchard, they are also fabulous green spaces for getting close to nature, going for a walk, or holding events like wassails, Apple Days and Blossom Days.



DISCOVER
MORE ABOUT
LOCAL FRUIT
VARIETIES AND **ACCESS**
A WEALTH OF
ORCHARD RELATED
RESOURCES AT THE
[PTES WEBSITE](#)

Credits and Support for Orchards as Biodiversity Havens.

The government can financially incentivise planting fruit trees and enabling farmers to care for those trees by ensuring that there is a fair market for their fruit. Environmental land management schemes could fund or pay credits for the environmental benefits that their orchards and pollinator trees create.

Local councils can also support nature and biodiversity by making council land available for orchards and funding their long term care. Food manufacturers can also support by accepting fruit outside retailer specifications creating more products that utilise fruit grown using more non-intensive methods.



WHAT IF there was the
opportunity for farmers to
harvest and sell the fruit
from the trees they plant to
meet biodiversity goals?

ORCHARD SPACES FOR COMMUNITIES



Since the Covid pandemic in 2020, the movement to grow more food locally has been gaining momentum.

From Fab Cities¹ to Sustainable Food Places,² there is a real opportunity for community orchards to be part of the local food picture, supplementing the fruit that we can buy in our supermarkets while also reducing food waste, supporting local nature recovery, community wellbeing and skills, and local net zero plans. More local areas are supporting people to change their food habits by creating healthier, more accessible and planet-friendly food options. What else should happen to enable this growing movement?

¹ <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/fab-city-global-initiative>
² <https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/>



27–35% of British adults, and only 8% of children, eat the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

THE CHALLENGE

Consumer Expectations and Views on How Food is Grown

Apple and pear varieties in stores have dwindled, shifting consumer expectations and understanding about the diversity of apple varieties that can be grown in the UK and what a desirable apple looks like. The specifications for top fruit stocked in supermarkets also influence the way we think about top fruit – as being a certain size, shape, crunchiness and flavor – regardless of the time of year.

Poor Heath and Access to Green Space

In the UK, only 27-35% of adults, and only 8% of children, eat the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, which has knock-on implications for our health and our health system.³ Our current food system has conditioned us to demand convenient, processed food options and we are generally less connected to how our food is grown and prepared than our grandparents and great-grandparents.

In Luton in the 1800's, there were around 260 people provided for by each local community orchard. Now there are 12,000 and it is no longer imaginable that a community orchard could feed that many people.⁴ As well as declining over time, community growing spaces are often not well maintained and can become unproductive where they are neglected.

³ <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/are-we-achieving-5-a-day.html#:~:text=Do%20we%20eat%20enough%20fruit,fruit%20and%20vegetables%20a%20day>.

⁴ <https://www.lutonorchards.org/historical-research/results-in-numbers>

Over 7 million people in the UK live in food poverty and almost 10 million people in England live in areas with very limited access to green space.*

*<https://friendsoftheearth.uk/nature/access-green-space-england-are-you-missing-out>

LOCAL COUNCILS
CAN **MAP AND
CREATE ACCESS TO
PUBLIC LAND FOR
COMMUNITY ORCHARD
GROUPS**



Inequitable Access to Green Spaces

Even where there are opportunities for people to engage with food growing and food producers, such as garden allotments or farmers markets, they are not always accessible to everyone and particularly not to those in low-income households, marginalised communities or densely populated urban areas like Luton. This can make access to food knowledge and locally produced food inequitable.



WHAT IS THE VISION AND HOW DO WE DELIVER IT?

Championing Local Food Systems and Resilience

The initiative to create more local food growing opportunities is increasing, from Community Supported Agriculture⁵ to local council policies to increase procurement of locally grown food for schools and hospitals. The trend towards increasing community resilience and adaptation presents an opportunity to front foot community orchards as essential community assets that contribute to food production, food security, community wellbeing and local net zero plans.

Community orchards can be a pivotal part of this more resilient, local system, supplementing the fruit available in supermarkets and creating avenues for local citizens to not only connect with food growing but also with seasonality, diversity and others within their community. However, community orchards need support from local councils to make this happen, including providing space for orchards and funding community groups who will care for the orchard after they are planted. Local council food plans, like Sheffield's⁶, can also help to provide the framing for this connected local food system.

⁵ <https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/>

⁶ <https://sheffood.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/SHEFFIELD-FOOD-ACTION-PLAN-V6-SPREADS-SFS.pdf>





The Orchard Project is a national charity dedicated to creating, maintaining and celebrating community orchards. “Our aim is for everyone in towns and cities across the UK to have access to community orchard spaces because we see the immense social and personal impact that these spaces have, alongside the positive environmental benefits they create. The majority of our work focuses on reaching those who need it the most, particularly marginalised groups living in areas of high deprivation with limited access to nature. Since 2009, we have planted over 640 community orchards across the UK. We stay connected to these communities for many years, not only bringing the initial practical skills and tools to plant the trees but also providing ongoing support to ensure people have the skills and confidence they need to maintain their own orchards for generations to come.”



GET INVOLVED AT AN ORCHARD NEAR YOU.
FIND A TRADITIONAL ORCHARD NEAR YOU [HERE](#) OR ONE OF 640 COMMUNITY ORCHARDS THAT HAVE BEEN SUPPORTED BY THE ORCHARD PROJECT [HERE](#).

At **Regather** our goal is to bring food, farming and landscapes to life in Sheffield.

"We run an organic community farm and orchard and sell organic fruit & vegetable boxes across Sheffield. Every year Sheffield produces an enormous amount of apples, in gardens, allotments and schools, but many of these apples end up wasted due to the sheer amount of apples that a mature apple tree can produce. We believe that community harvesting and juicing is the solution and with a grant from The Co-Op Foundation we purchased a press in 2022. Now each year Regather receives around 6 tonnes of apples and juices and pasteurises them. This year we pressed apples from 140 donor orchards producing 3,200 650ml bottles and 1,700 330ml bottles of apple juice. A portion of bottles we produce go back to the donor orchards but the rest are sold wholesale and retail across Sheffield, including in our Regather boxes."



Food as a Right

In 2024, the government commissioned a report on food security in the UK which showed that there is a long-term decline in the UK’s natural capital (our land and farms) which creates a pressing risk to UK food production⁷. As an alternative, community orchards are a non-market avenue for fruit production and can create spaces that provide multiple health and wellbeing benefits to citizens who might not otherwise have access to gardens or spaces to grow. Equity of access to these spaces and ensuring that urban and peri urban communities are not disadvantaged can be supported by councils through funding of initiatives that ensure all community members are encouraged and able to join and participate in community orchard spaces.

⁷ <https://nationalpreparednesscommission.uk/publications/just-in-case-7-steps-to-narrow-the-uk-civil-food-resilience-gap/>



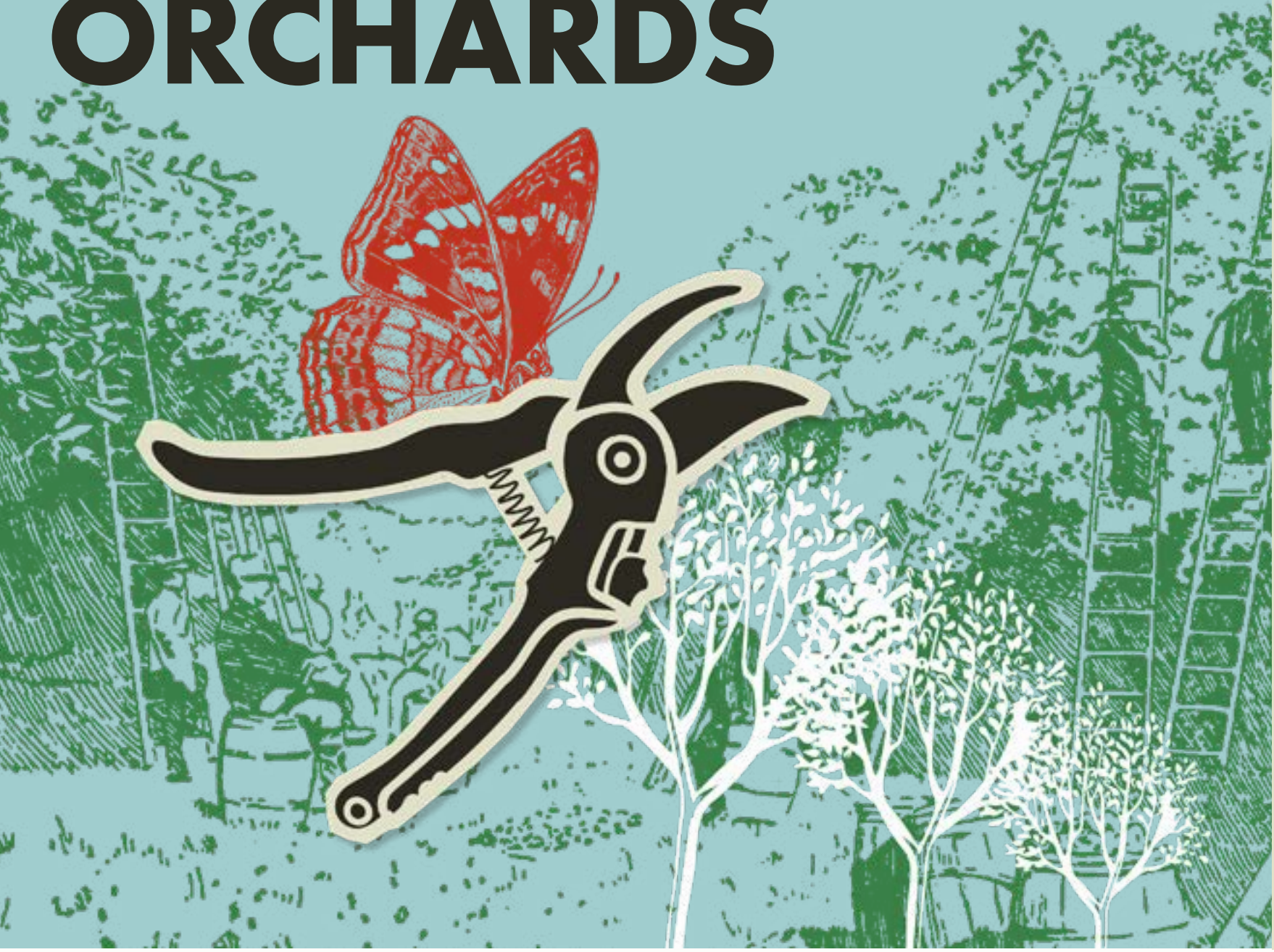
WHAT IF every British family had their own fruit tree? Some councils, like Surrey County Council, are working to plant a tree for every citizen. What if many of those trees were also producing fruit for people to eat? Each apple might not be perfect and blemish free, but they could change the way we view our food.

WHAT IF local authorities recognised community orchards as essential green infrastructure, incorporating them as part of local flood defence schemes such as the Exeter Flood Defence Scheme and the FLOW Community Orchard which is part of the Scheme.*

*<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/the-secret-orchard-which-grew-out-of-exeter-s-flood-defence-scheme>



JOBS AND SKILLS FOR THRIVING ORCHARDS



To ensure a thriving and resilient future for UK orchards, we need people to care for our trees and harvest the fruit.

Currently, there is a shortage of skilled and semi-skilled labour in the UK to work in the horticulture sector, including orchards. We fill that gap by bringing workers in from abroad via the Seasonal Worker Visa Scheme, which allows up to 43,000 workers to enter the UK annually to support our fruit and vegetable farmers.¹ The lack of homegrown labour reflects an overall lack of progression of new entrants into the farming and horticulture sectors in the UK² and a general low perception of farming as a sought after career path for young people.³

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/workers-and-temporary-workers-guidance-for-sponsors-sponsor-a-seasonal-worker/workers-and-temporary-workers-guidance-for-sponsors-sponsor-a-seasonal-worker-accessible-version#SE1>
² <https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/campaigns-new-entrants/#:~:text=New%20Entrants%20%E2%80%93%20who%20are%20eager,to%20be%20launched%20in%202022.>
³ <https://www.fwi.co.uk/careers/young-job-seekers-have-negative-image-of-farming-says-survey>

£60 million
worth of fresh
produce was not
harvested due to
worker shortages
in 2022*

*According to the National Farmers Union



THE CHALLENGE

People who work in orchards fall mainly into one of two groups – those who work in commercial orchards and those who volunteer in community orchard spaces. For both groups, there are a limited number of employment opportunities available. Finding training opportunities for orcharding skills and careers is equally as difficult.

A Lack of Diversity in Volunteering

For those who wish to volunteer, there are many opportunities to do so in community orchards across the UK. These community orchards often rely on volunteer power and can fall into disrepair and become unproductive without proper aftercare and maintenance. Those volunteering, however, tend to be older, middle-class people and there is generally a lack of diversity of volunteers with many not feeling connected to or able to access community orchard spaces.

In 2022 the average
take home annual
pay for a farming
household was
£17,800*

*According to a DEFRA study



Although there are cases of mistreatment and unfair practices experienced by seasonal workers, many working in commercial orchards return to the same orchard every year, and earn a decent salary compared to what they can earn at home. “My name is Jonibek and I come from Chozlak Village in Uzbekistan. I like working at Adrian Scripps because the work is easy and the salary is good. I come back to work the harvest season each year because I make good money for me and my family and I have no problem coming to work in the UK, using an agency and the seasonal visa scheme.”

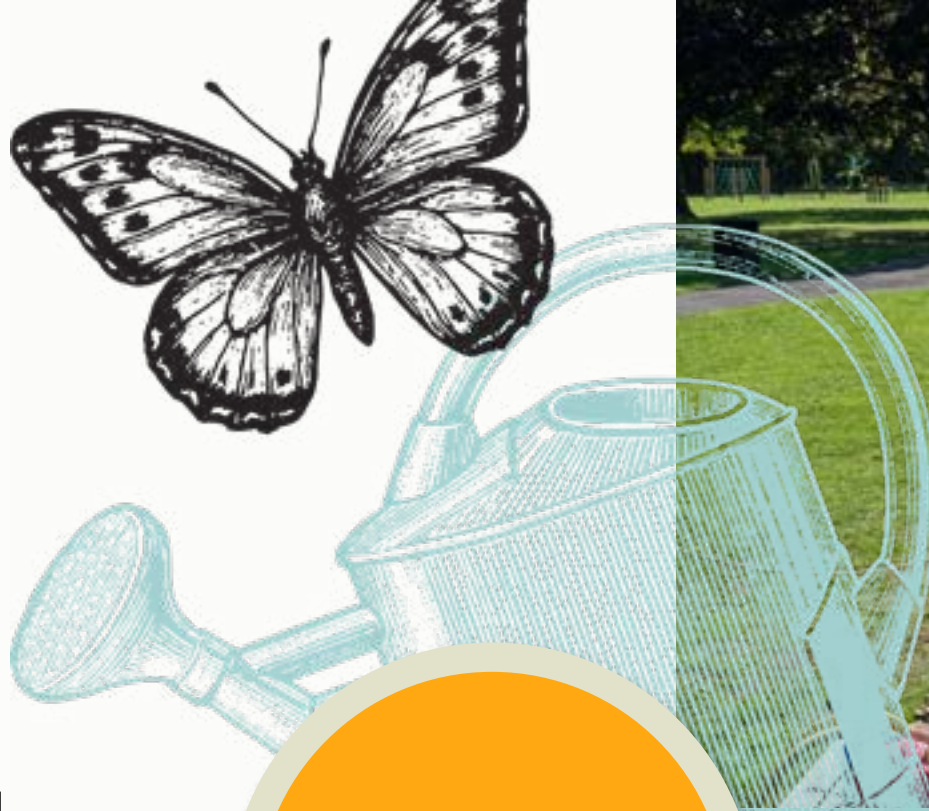
Commercial Orchards Need Seasonal Labour

British commercial growers are aiming to double the amount of fruit they produce to be able to supply up to 60% of the apples that retailers in the UK sell. The promise of robotic technology to support harvesting in commercial orchards is not developing quickly enough to replace human labor and is generally not considered a feasible solution in the near future. Technology is also not considered capable of other tree care such as pruning, so we will continue to need people with the skills to care for trees and harvest our fruit. The harvest timings for orchards also fall outside of school holidays so there is little access to student workers to cover the harvest labour needs.

WHAT IS THE VISION AND HOW DO WE DELIVER IT?

Attractive Career and Training Opportunities.

The future of the sector depends on having a skilled labor force. Without adequate labour, the UK will not be able to provide a steady supply of top fruit. It is therefore critical that we incentivise orchard fruit production, and farming in general, as a viable and desirable career through which people can make a decent living. Orchards and educational institutions can invest in training and development programs that ensure key orcharding skills are passed on to future generations. Those who have trained also need security of income which can be challenging in an industry with seasonal work. A basic income for farmers and farm labourers can even out the wage fluctuations of seasonal labour and unpredictability in employment.



SUPPORT THE
CAMPAIGN FOR A
BASIC INCOME FOR
FARMERS [HERE](#).



The Orchard Project is dedicated to sharing skills and expertise with as many people as possible to help strengthen a growing network of community orchardists across the UK. “We run three accredited courses, alongside shorter day and weekend-long training sessions and volunteer days. Our acclaimed Certificate in Community Orchard Course offers everything needed to set up and run a successful orchard, from pruning and soil science to managing group dynamics. We have trained over 396 orchardists since 2017 and are seeing so much passion and enthusiasm for these skills. In response, we have developed a new Consultant Development Programme to equip trainees with the skills, knowledge and resources required to work as freelance orchard consultants for The Orchard Project and other clients, further expanding the skilled network.”



“At **Tom the Apple Man**, we have 10 courses running a year with 10 people attending each. There’s definitely been an increase in interest. People come from all over the UK to do our courses. People want to get involved with the land. Many are starting land based businesses, starting a nursery or making a career change. It’s hard work though and there isn’t a lot of money in it, or much government support. We also have school groups who come and spend time on our farm and the kids make juice with the apples they pick. We think this is a great way to encourage the next generation to have an appreciation of fruit and what it takes to care for it.”



GAIN A
QUALIFICATION
IN COMMUNITY
ORCHARDING WITH THE
ORCHARD PROJECT
[HERE](#)

Sharing Knowledge and Expertise

A further way to achieve this vision is to develop skill and knowledge sharing agreements and training between commercial orchards and traditional or community orchards. Currently there is little or no cross over between the two parts of the sector. However this could help create social capital and resilience for the British workforce, volunteer community and the sector as a whole.

Consistency in Seasonal Worker Schemes

Farming businesses are planning 5-10 years into the future and labour is often their biggest cost, so consistency of government support and communication around the seasonal workers' scheme is critical for managing finances, labour needs and workflow. Without this communication, there is a higher risk of confusion and exploitation by agencies in the worker home countries as well as greater risk and costs for UK commercial orchards.

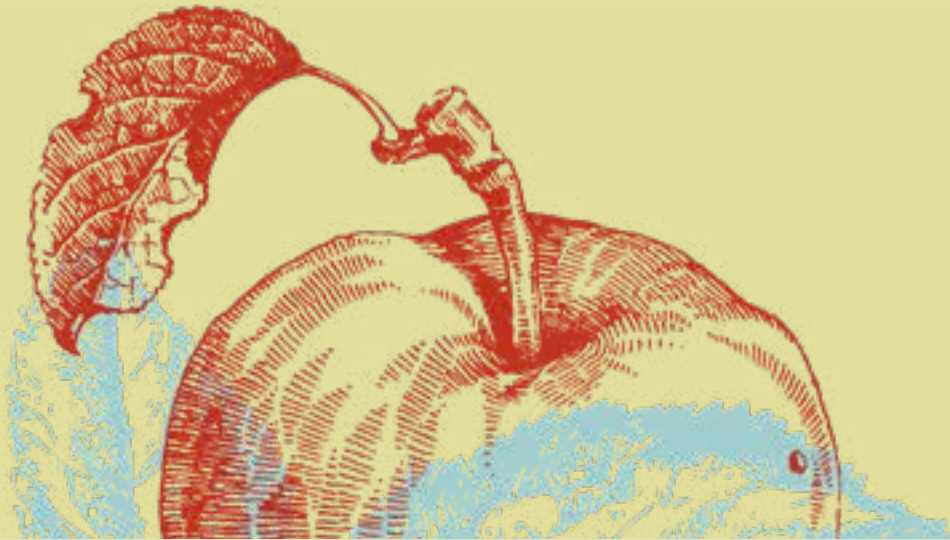
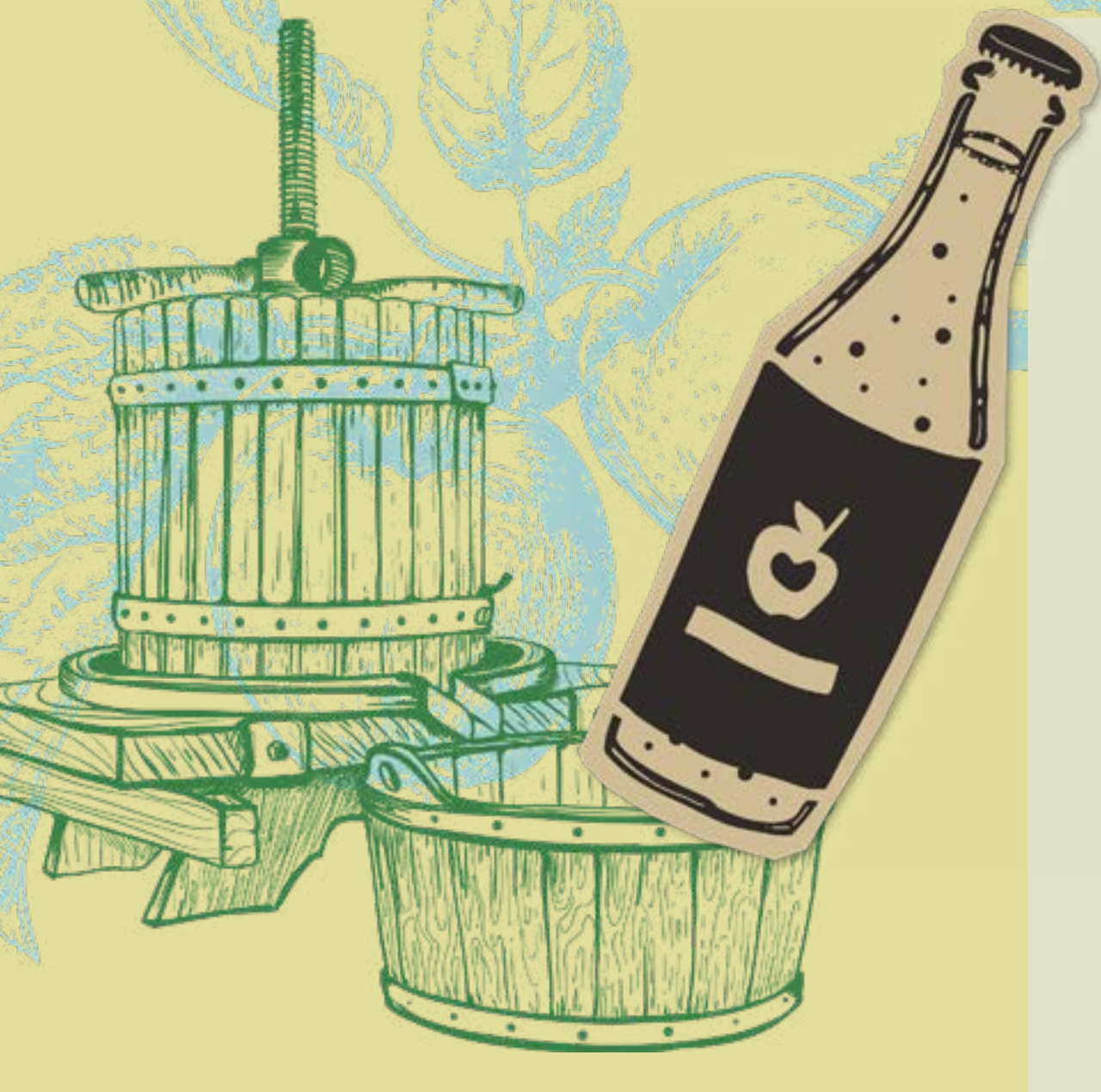


WHAT IF there was the tech and AI to monitor fruit trees grown in our local area like there is in commercial orchards? A dedicated UK apple app could tell us how our tree is doing and when it is time for the tree to be pruned. It could also tell us who is available locally with the skills needed to look after the tree.



WHAT IF pruning and harvesting were taught in schools and all kids had regular Forest Day trips to their local community orchard to practice their skills?

PROMOTING FINE CIDER INTERNATIONALLY



One of the government’s current priorities is to support economic opportunities and growth of food businesses across the UK.

Imagine if that opportunity was also coupled with great environmental outcomes such as storing carbon and increasing biodiversity. Traditional orchard fruit has been used to make traditional cider and perry in the UK for hundreds of years. Cider making was once a staple activity of local communities and the tradition lives on in many places in the UK. In 2025, there’s a resurgence of traditional cider making that presents an opportunity to protect orchards and create economic opportunities for local communities. While sales of all ciders represent a £3 billion market in the UK, craft ciders are growing ahead of the market.¹

¹ <https://craftynectar.com/blogs/cider/growth-of-craft-ciders-in-the-uk>



Just 35% of the content of commercial ciders is fruit juice, and often juice concentrate, which is mixed with water and sugar.

THE CHALLENGE

Misaligned Economic, Social and Environmental Opportunities

We need more economic opportunities that create multiple benefits for people, our places and the planet. With 90% of traditional orchards having been lost since the 1900's due to neglect, development or conversion to more intensive modern agriculture and 45% of those remaining in declining condition as habitats, we need more avenues and opportunities for those orchards to remain thriving and viable.

Loss of Biodiverse Habitats

We also need opportunities that enable orchards to be managed in ways that are not detrimental to nature, using less chemical fertilisers and pesticides and protecting biodiversity. Fruit trees age in a unique way that creates a wide range of habitats for many, often rare, species in the UK. The loss of traditional orchards and older trees, particularly through land conversion to other uses, comes with the loss of the unique range of habitats they provide and their unique genetic repository.

Growing Markets

The UK is one of the largest makers and exporters of cider in the world. Ireland, the US and Canada are our largest export markets for cider, but all have seen declines in the past 10 years with US tariffs creating more uncertainty about the US as an export market. Although British cider consumption by volume is also falling, there has been an increase in the sale of craft and champagne method ciders which is captured in the value of the cider category overall growing to £3.06 billion in 2023¹. Champagne method cider making is a commercial possibility evidenced by Bulmers who made cider this way until the 1970's.

¹ <https://www.just-drinks.com/news/uk-cider-sales-decline-in-volume-but-value-market-share-grow-in-2023/?cf-view>



Find and Foster manage five traditional orchard sites around the River Exe in Devon. “The income we generate from making traditional cider enables us to care for and maintain the orchards so that they produce fruit and provide a beneficial habitat for nature and wildlife. The income also enables us to look after a flock of Shropshire sheep who grazes in the orchard, replacing the need for mowing.”



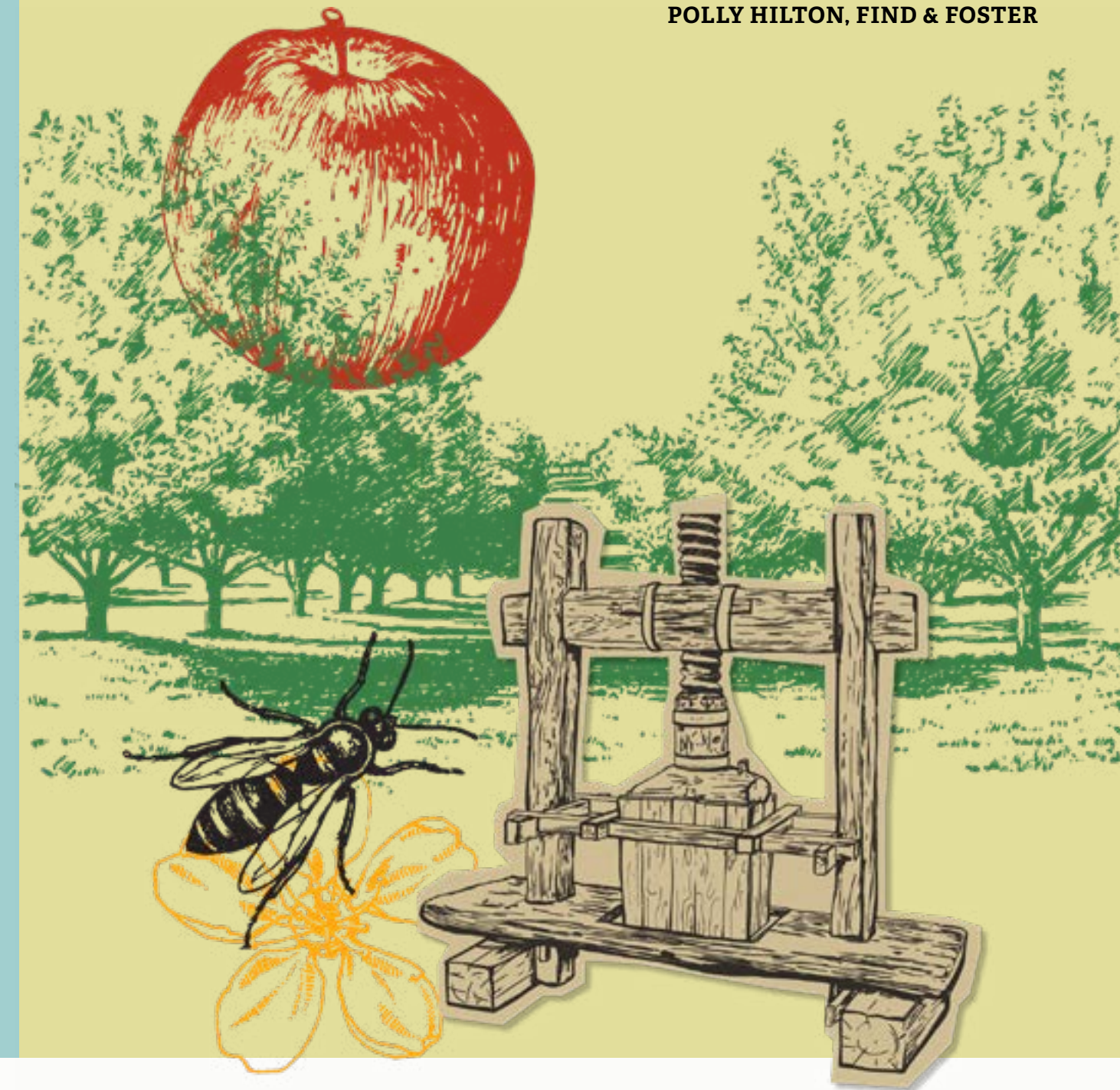
Organic commercial growing. The Johnson family have been farming in Peterstow at **Broome Farm** since the 1930s. “We converted the farm to an apple farm in the 1970s to sell fruit to Bulmers for their cider production, as well as making a small amount of our own cider. In 2010, we decided to stop spraying our orchards, and focus on a more holistic approach with no chemical inputs and more sustainable practices like sheep grazing, and natural pest control like bird boxes. Although we suffered from disease immediately after this decision, within a few years we found that the orchards produced a sustainable amount of fruit, and indeed more than we can manage. We also found that pest and disease are naturally managed, and indeed at levels as low, and sometimes lower, than when we were spraying. Due to these practices the quality of the fruit has also increased.”

Moving to 100% juice cider

“In 2015, Heineken (now owner of Bulmers) wanted to cut our apple contract short so we made the decision to use the apples for our own 100% juice cider. Today our natural cider and perry is produced using only whole juice, as opposed to the 35% minimum in mass produced cider, and with natural fermentation. We would like to see more Government support for naturally managed bush orchards like our own, as well as more government support for full juice cider made in a slow, and holistic method.”

“We should increase the timeframe of CSS payments for pruning traditional orchards, to reward farmers who have perviously maintained their orchards”

POLLY HILTON, FIND & FOSTER





WHAT IS THE VISION AND HOW DO WE DELIVER IT?

Creating Economic Value for Traditional Orchards

Cider making and in particular fine cider, champagne method and perry making provides an avenue to protect traditional orchards and their biodiversity benefits, by creating economic value from the fruit grown. In many traditional orchards, this fruit would often go to waste, or trees would be neglected so that fruit production is low or poor. The income gained through cider production can remunerate those who own traditional orchards on farms and provide the funding for the maintenance and care of the orchard.

Government Support for Traditional Cider Making

In many places in Europe, such as the Asturias in Spain², the government supports traditional industries such as cider making through marketing, regulation and incentives. This ensures that the cultural heritage from these industries is valued and maintained. The UK government could create the opportunity for a strong export market for the UK through the premiumisation of British cider and cider making. This could be supported through strict requirements about the acceptable varieties of apples and methods used as well as the percentage of apple juice content needed. Currently commercial ciders only need to use 35% apple juice concentrate to be labelled as 'cider' and this juice can be imported from anywhere in the world, where as craft ciders contain 100% apple juice. Government support could also increase the number of jobs in the sector, increasing these to be more like the employment of people in the wine making industry in France, for instance.

² <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/asturian-cider-culture-01959>



The Future of
**UK ORCHARD
FRUIT**