

# Apple Production

## Introduction

Irish apples have been grown commercially for over a century and considered a lucrative crop in suitable areas. Decline occurred once we joined the EU in 1973 when tariffs were lifted from imported apples. Hectarage and number of growers have since reduced and presently there are in the region of 40 specialised growers producing 600 Ha. of apples.

Suitable areas stretch along the east coast from Louth, down to west Waterford and inland to Kilkenny and Tipperary. In the midlands, site selection is critical as late frost can cause havoc. Along the west coast, high winds and rainfall militate against producing quality apples.

## The Market

There are three types of apples produced commercially, viz.

- (1) Dessert apples
- (2) Culinary (cooking) apples
- (3) Cider apples

The Irish production is approx. 1/3 of each of the above.

Dessert apples are the most common type of apples. Our annual consumption is valued at 80M€ per annum. and we only produce about 2M as Supermarkets prefer imported eating apples as it suits scale of purchase (central buying) and the texture of imported apples makes spoiling more difficult. Irish apples on the other hand are softer, therefore need more careful handling but are succulent and have a more distinctive taste.

Demand for Cooking apples has decreased over the years due to change in diet and cooking practices. Our climate is very suitable for production and there is no problem with imports from warmer countries.

Cider apple production consists of 1/3 of the acreage being grown with special varieties. Also, the outgrades from both the dessert and culinary apples are used in cider production. With cider sales continuing to expand, this is a very buoyant sector.

Most satisfactory sales of Irish apples occur through farmgate sales and Farmers Markets. Also, in recent years, certain varieties and outgrades of dessert varieties have been used for juice production and there is an expanding market for this quality product.



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*This is one of a series of fact sheets on potential income generating activities.*

*All fact sheets are available in the Advisory Section of the Teagasc Website*

**<http://www.teagasc.ie/>**

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## Production

Soil and site selection are very important. Apples requiring free draining soil, not exposed and fertile. Trees are planted in rows, the density depending on the variety and rootstock used. In general, depending on the system between 500 and 2,500 trees per acre are planted.

Trees must be staked and a spray programme must be practiced to prevent disease and pest attack.

## Costs and Returns:

The cost of establishing an orchard vary widely, depending on type of apples, density and varieties. In general, the greater the density the quicker they come into production and the shorter the life cycle of the apple. Dessert apples planted at 1200 trees per ha. have a life of about 12-15 years, while extensive production of cullinary apples would last 25-30 years.

Overall, total cost of production per ha. are:- €13,570 per ha. for dessert varieties and €11,500 for cullinary and cider. The annual production costs are between €2,000-€2,500 per ha..

No grants are available for establishing orchards but grants have been available for purchase of equipment, specialised machinery and ancillary buildings. This grant amounted to 35% of costs of investment.

The gross margin varies widely from year to year depending on yield and price. On an average yield of 25 tonnes per ha. and a price of 50c per Kg. profit should be in the region of €8,000 per ha. Any increase in price would directly increase the profit.

## Summary:-

Apples can be grown profitably in the favoured areas and even in less favoured areas, with provision of shelter and astute selection of varieties.

Local grown fruit is widely appreciated by consumers, and keenly sought after. Apples can be highly flavoursome with minimal “air miles” attached and they meet all the criteria of a modern consumer.

If one is in a position to supply the local markets as outlined above., i.e. farmgate sales and farmers markets, apples are worth considering and units of a hectare upwards are feasible.

Apples ripen from August to November and with barn storage can be kept until Christmas. For longer storage, special controlled atmosphere stores would have to be installed and this would require large investment with scale production.

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