

Apple Growing for Cider 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 satisfactory yields.

With the significant increase in cider sales, there is potential for extensive cider apple production.

Types of Apples

Apples produced commercially can be categorised as:-

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

Irish cider is produced from a mixture of the above three types.

The outlet for cider apples is Bulmers Ltd. based in Clonmel. Sales of Bulmers Cider has expanded significantly in recent years and Bulmers are willing to purchase more apples so an opportunity exists here.

Production

Cider apples can be grown profitably in favoured areas and even in less favoured areas with the provision of shelter and astute selection of varieties. Soil and site selection are very important. Apples require free draining soil, not exposed and fertile. Trees are planted in rows, for cider apple production 500-600 trees per ha. depending on variety and rootstock used.

Trees must be staked with a special treated fruit pole and a spray programme practiced to prevent disease and pest attack.

Production is gradual starting at year three and increasing from there on.

The crop matures between September and December, depending on variety and once heavy cropping has commenced, the apples are mechanically harvested



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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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Teagasc Fact Sheets present a brief overview of a topic. Further detailed advice should always be sought from relevant sources.

Costs and Returns

An estimated cost of establishing a cider orchard is €7,500 per ha. This consists of land preparation, purchase and planting of trees and shelterbelt and erecting guards to prevent vermin attack (rabbit and hare).

Annual production cost starts at 500 per ha. in year one – increasing to €1,500 as the plantation develops.

There are also capital costs in providing the necessary machinery, i.e. tractor, crop and orchard sprayers, grass topper and a harvester when in full production. Large units of production are required to justify the above investments.

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.

When in production, 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 €165 per tonne, profit should be in the region of €1,500 per ha. Any increase in yield would directly increase the profit and as the crop matures, much higher yields than the 25 tonnes per ha. are attainable on well managed orchards.

Summary

Cider apple production can be considered a viable alternative crop as a market exists for apples produced for cider.

Success depends on good site selection and attention to crop production requirements especially in the early years. It is not a crop that once planted, the gates are closed until production.

It fits well on many farms, where basic machinery exists, e.g. tractor and trailer, crop sprayer and grass topper.

Returns are in line with the more profitable agricultural enterprises.

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