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*Biodiversity in traditional meadow  
orchards and valorisation of their  
produce*

Landcare Europe Spanien Workshop

**BIRKENFELDER**  
Originale  
von heimischen Streuobstwiesen





# Meadow orchards

- High-stemmed fruit trees scattered over meadow areas in contrast to intensive fruit plantations.
- Part of the German cultural landscape.
- Comparable to agroforestry systems in Southern Europe such as the Iberian *Dehesas*, olive or almond groves.
- Recognized as an intangible cultural heritage by the German UNESCO Commission in 2021.





# Meadow orchards in Europe

- Over the centuries several agroforestry systems were developed in Europe:
  - Meadow orchards
  - Chestnut and olive groves
- Between 1930-1950 about 2 millions hectares were covered by traditional orchards in Europe, mainly:
  - France and Germany
  - Switzerland, Austria, Slovenia, Poland, England, Belgium, Spain
- Fruits (apple, pear, cherry) are processed into different products:
  - Cider, apple juice, poiré, and cherry juice
  - Vinegar, calvados





# Ecological importance

- Formative element of cultural landscape
- Large variety of different apple and pear species, important gene pool
- Due to extensive underuse, meadows are very rich in species
- Long tree lifespan creates important structures for the animal world (insects, birds, small mammals, bats, etc.)
- One of the most biodiverse habitats in Europe





# Meadow orchards in Germany

- **Classic agricultural dual use**
  - ❖ Meadow or pasture
  - ❖ Table fruit, juice and wine
  - ❖ (firewood and timber)
- **Steady decline of fruit trees over the years**
  - ❖ Abandonment of use due to big manual labor and high costs
  - ❖ Clearing for new development areas and commercial areas
  - ❖ Obsolescence of the trees
  - ❖ Lack of maintenance
  - ❖ Loss of traditions and knowledge





# Hunsrück

- Low mountain range (400-800 m) in the southwest of Germany, near France and Luxembourg in the federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate





- Foundation: 1995
- 70 members, including 35 municipalities
- Cooperative approach between politics, nature conservation and agriculture
- No full-time employees, about 10 volunteers (board and members) in the field of orchards and environmental education

- Activities:**
- Environmental education
  - Marketing of orchard products
  - Conservation of species-rich grassland



# Orchard initiative

## *Birkenfelder Originale*

### Objective / Rationale

Preservation of the orchards by increasing the added value

### Elements

- Marketing
- Qualification
- Planting
- Environmental education
- Regional identity and traditions





# Environmental education

- Orchard Experience Trail
- Excursions with school and Kindergarten classes
- Fruit press festivals
- Orchard box





# Qualification, maintenance and new planting

- Orchard tree maintenance
- Tree cutting workshops
- Planting new trees
- Reproduction of old varieties (through grafting)
- Consulting owners







**LPV Birkenfeld e.V. is the head of the initiative**

## **Own initiative**

- Marketing
- Organisation of apple harvest
- Product sale: direct marketing & regional super markets
- Logistics & transport

## **Production (to order)**

- Juice press



# Birkenfelder Originale





# Harvest

## Principle: Exchange apples for juice

- Target group:  
Private fruit tree owners
- Up to 800 participants
- Harvest quantity 20 – 200 t
- Advantages:  
Identification of the owners with  
the initiative
- Important multipliers





## Lead Product

- Forgotten regional variety
- Appeal on social media
- Typical use
  - ❖ Christmas tree ornaments
  - ❖ Jam
- Over 500 trees newly planted
- Slow Food Germany „Arche Passagier des guten Geschmacks“





## No concepts on paper - Just people doing it

- Volunteer work at the beginning
- Broad social basis
  - ❖ Environmental work
  - ❖ Cultural heritage
  - ❖ Landscape conservation
- Multipliers:
  - ❖ Local media
  - ❖ Apple tree owners
  - ❖ Elementary school & kindergarten
- Good Business Plan
- All partners in the value chain benefit
- Open-minded partner (supermarket)
- Startup capital (local bank, EU?)







- Oldest and most successful orchard initiative in Rhineland-Palatinate
- Over 800 fruit trees are used again
- More than 500 participants
- Market share of 10% in the region (approx. 80.000 L annually)
- Economically viable



# Biodiversity in traditional meadow orchards and valorisation of their produce

Many thanks for your attention

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