



„Apple diversity“ in the Rhön

Protection by utilization

The UNESCO nature reserve of the Rhön bears fruits: apples turn into apple juice and cider from which apple sherry and sparkling apple wine are made. Apple orchards and fruit crushing and pressing plants turn into places people like to go to. The cultivation of new apple orchards and the fact that there are more than 400 sorts of apples show clearly what is meant by the diversity of species in the cultural landscape of the Rhön.

This success results from the work of the "Rhöner Apfelinitiative". This organization was founded in 1995 with the intention to link fruit-growers, owners of fruit presses, owners of restaurants and conservationists, and with the aim of emphasizing the meaning of the organically cultivated apple orchards. This should as well create new sources of income. So the "Rhöner Apfelinitiative" had taken up a project of the administration of the nature reserve of the Rhön and led it to an unprecedented success.



Initial state:

In the 1980ies the esteem for native fruit had been at an extremely low level. New housing estates caused the disappearance of the orchards that formerly surrounded the local villages. Because of the EU paying premiums for deforestation, and the preference for an intensified agriculture as well as the fact that native fruit was not valued any more led to a decline of the local orchards. This situation was accompanied by the fact that little owls, tree creepers, and fat dormice lost parts of their retreat areas. And yet the Rhön had provided an enormous amount of native sorts of apples years ago. Orchardists grew new varieties of apple trees by using wildlings of the wood of the Rhön just to their own taste and to the way the apples should have been used. There had been a great variety of different sorts of apples, apples that were used for cooking and baking, sorts like those for unfermented apple juice and the ones for fermentation; and as well sorts that had been well adapted to the rough climate of the Rhön.

"Applevisions" become reality



A parent organization originated in the foundation of the "Rhöner Apfelinitiative" which has been coordinating ideas of the devotees of apples since then. The participation in the work of this organization has not only been a hobby for these people, but rather developed to an interest in commercializing this product.

Success speaks for itself

Apple crushing and pressing plant exhibition

In 1997 an apple crushing and pressing plant was established to show visitors the making of apple juice and its processing to cider. People are also invited to become active themselves. Many workshops on the native sorts of apples are offered here, too. In the same place the popular "Rhöner Apfelsherry" (a sherry made from apples) originated.



Nature trail in the orchard Hausen

One can learn a lot about the growing of apple trees on this nature trail in Hausen, in the Franconian Rhön. This nature trail was created in 1999 and it is situated in the orchards that surround the village. There is also a garden that shows the great variety of sorts of apples in the native orchards.

Fruit crushing and pressing plant "Ausbacher Roter"

Ausbach, a village in the hilltops of the Rhön, has got its own sort of apple called the "Ausbacher Rote". The local fruit crushing and pressing plant has been running since 1995 and was named after this sort of apples – "Ausbacher Roter". When they started in 1995, customers could have their apples pressed for money. Today the apple juice is also pasteurized and bottled, and home made apple juice and cider is offered in addition to that. The apple schnapps "Ausbacher Roter", which is distilled from only one sort of apple, is the most popular product of this plant.

Fruit crushing and pressing plant "Elm" in Flieden

"Elm" Company is an efficient partner of the "Rhöner Apfelinitiative". In times of a good harvest/yield more than 1000 tons of native sorts of apples are processed in this plant per year. In cooperation with the "Rhöner Apfelinitiative" the company has developed different sorts of organic apple juice, the "Rhöner Apfelicidre" (cider), as well as the sparkling apple wine. The fruit crushing and pressing plant grants a guaranteed purchase of native sorts of apples and pays over average for them. The products made from apples of the Rhön are sold even in delicatessen shops of Berlin this could only have been realized by the help of the "Elm" Company. In beverage and supermarkets those premium products of the "Elm" Company have already been established for a long time.

Applebeer from "Rother Bräu"

A popular drink in this region is beer mixed with lemonade. This drink is called "Radler". But the fact that there are no lemons growing in the Rhön led to the brilliant idea of mixing organic beer with unfiltered apple juice. And this is what a small family brewery named "Rother Bräu" has done. The result was the "Rhöner Apfelbier". Meanwhile, this drink has become a popular alternative to the "Radler".

"Unterm Apfelbaum" (under the apple-tree) – a pub that sells products of the Rhön

Guests of the first Pub in Fulda (Johannisstraße 7) selling cider of the Rhön are looking in vain for typical German food like escalope chasseur or drinks like coke. This Pub specializes in processing and selling products exclusive to the Rhön, native sorts of apple included. There is for example the "Rhönsheep-apple-toast" with salami made from mutton and sliced apples. Another meal is fillet of the brown trout of the Rhön with apple horse-radish. The drinks offered in the Pub are mostly produced in the Rhön and one can also find many drinks made from native sorts of apples.

New products made from apple

Next to the traditional products made from apples of the Rhön like cider and brandy new fascinating products made from apples have been created: apple sherry, apple crisps, apple mustard and apple jelly. In the local restaurants new meals have been established like "Rhöner Pfannenpizza" (fried pizza with apples) or escalope coated with grated apples.

Seal for organic food of the Rhön



Since 2005 many local apple products have been marked with the "Biosiegel Rhön". The logo "Rhön" has been added to the nation-wide standardized seal for organic products, and thus gives the organic products of the "Rhö-

ner Apfelinitiative" a clearly higher status. The new "Biosiegel Rhön" was officially presented at the trade fair for organic products in Nürnberg in 2005. The fruit crushing and pressing plant "Elm" has again led the way for the "Biosiegel Rhön" by their range of products called "Öko-Produkte ... aus der Rhön!" (organic products of the Rhön).

Research in the field of apples

Research has been done systematically: Pomologists (scientists of apple-growing) have rediscovered more than 400 sorts of apples of the Rhön.

Cultivation of native fruit species

The NABU Dreienberg (a nature conservation organisation) has been laying out a garden of species (like an orchard) with old native fruit trees. More than 3,000 fruit-trees have been raised by now mostly from the layers of old trees.

Cooperation with tree nurseries

Commercial tree nurseries have also rediscovered the importance of the old native tree species of the Rhön, and they offer again a range of robust sorts of fruit trees. The

tree nurseries "Georg Leinweber" in Niederkalbach and "Schlereth" in Hammelburg cooperate with the "Rhöner Apfelinitiative".

Apple trade fairs – a center of communication about the apple of the Rhön

The apple trade fairs of the Rhön are an important forum for all apple friends of the Rhön. They are organized nationwide every two years and they have a great public appeal.

"Rhöner Apfelbörse" – a calendar of events

The "Rhöner Apfelinitiative" published a calendar in which all events and activities (nation-wide) are listed. Interested people can find different activities for example picnicking in an orchard, identify different sorts of apples, apple-event-days, cider-seminars, or courses in cutting back fruit trees, and organized weeks of fasting with apples as well as evenings at the fireside enjoying the lovely cider of the Rhön.



A delivery point for apples

The "Rhöner Apfelinitiative" has created a network of delivery points to simplify the trading for the fruit-growers and to shorten ways. There are eleven delivery points in the Bavarian, Hessian and Thuringian Rhön. The suppliers can also exchange their apples for more than fifty other products of either organic or conventional quality (it is called "Lohnmosttausch-System").

The book "Rhöner Apfelträume"

The book "Rhöner Apfelträume" which has been published by Parzeller is a bestseller. Meanwhile you can buy the third edition.

It shows clearly what is going to come out of a mere idea. It has changed into a project that is characterized by creativity, diligence and cooperation, and which is of great importance for the regional economy. Aspects of ecology and economy as well as protecting jobs are all to be considered in that project.

Apple-trees need care

Many courses in cutting back fruit trees and in cultivating them, which were offered in the last few years, were very well attended. Nevertheless there is one obvious problem: many fruit trees lack cultivation/care. The old trees have not been looked after for decades and so they hardly produce any yield. In most cases the owners are too old to cut back their trees by themselves. If this problem appears, the employees of the Nature reserve of the Rhön try to find a solution together with the owners to succeed in cultivating those orchards. The registration of the stock of orchards in 2005 was a decisive step. Employees of the Nature reserve settled this for the Hessian and Bavarian Rhön, and for the Thuringian Rhön staff of the "Landschaftspflegeverband Thüringische Rhön" were employed.



It all depends on the sort

The experts of the "Rhöner Apfelinitiative" have compiled a list of those sorts of apples which have the ability to cope with the rough climate of the Rhön and its condition of the soil. Another criteria for their selection was the fact that the apples had to be suitable for fruit pressing, and would only need only a minimum of care.

And if you now feel like planting an apple-tree in your garden, you should have a look at the following list:

Standard sorts of apples

Erbachhofer Weinapfel	Gehrsers Rambour
Rheinischer Krummstiel	Wiesenapfel
Biesterfelder Renette	Krügers Dickstiel
Hauxapfel	Danziger Kantapfel
Goldparmäne	Jakob Fischer
Maunzenäpfel	Hornburger Pfannkuchenapfel
Linsenhofer Sämling	Rheinischer Bohnapfel
Kaiser Wilhelm	Harberts Renette
Brettacher	Jakob Lebel
Baumanns Renette	Bittenfelder Sämling
Rheinischer Winterrambour	Luxemburger Renette
Schafsnase	Landsberger Renette
Schöner von Nordhausen	Prinzenapfel
Graue Herbstrenette	Prinz Albrecht von Preußen
Ausbacher Roter	Mostwunder Hilde
Rote Sternrenette	

1,000 new apple trees

An analysis of the orchards of the Rhön brought to light that most of their trees are too old. This could lead to the assumption that fifty to sixty percent of today's orchards will gradually die within the next ten years. So it is incredibly important to plant new trees. The "Rhöner Apfelinitiative" has set its heart on planting 1,000 apple trees per year.

To reach this aim the "Rhöner Apfelinitiative e.V.", the fruit crushing and pressing plant Elm and the tree nurseries "Schlereth" and "Leinweber" created a draft for a contract which should support the purchase and planting of robust native sorts of apples. Fruit-growers who are prepared to cultivate their fruit in an organic way according to that contract and who are ready to deliver it to the fruit crushing and pressing plant Elm, can acquire fruit trees for the special price of 15 €. The fruit-growers are given a guaranteed purchase for their fruit and are provided an assured minimum price of 13,50 € per 100kg

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