

traditional orchards in europe

For decades, European landscapes were distinctively shaped by traditional orchards. In the first half of the 20th century, roughly two million hectares of Europe, mainly in France and Germany but also in Switzerland, Austria, Slovenia, Poland, England, Belgium, and Spain, etc. were covered with traditional orchards.

Over the past 50 years, this multifunctional ecological system has significantly declined and lost up to 90% of its extent. While modern growing and planting techniques lead to increased harvests, they also caused a significant reduction of quality (e.g. taste), biodiversity (e.g. use of pesticides) and genetic resources.

Over the past two decades in some European countries NGOs, private initiatives, farmers, the public sector and wineries tried hard to protect and promote traditional orchards. Their motivation is to preserve traditional orchards as habitats, for landscape management, and nature conservation and not at least for production. With their unique cultural value, traditional orchards are also valuable to serve recreational and touristic purposes.



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the esto project

The ESTO Project, 'European Specialist in Traditional Orchards' is a project funded by the Leonardo da Vinci Lifelong Learning Programme. It involves partner organisations and other associated experts in the field of traditional orchard farming, management and education from six European countries - Austria, Poland, Hungary, Denmark, France and Germany.

Over the decades, orchard farming in Europe has had a changeful history. Only few regions still have an agricultural infrastructure, securing continuity and further development of these 'hot spots' of biodiversity. In most other regions changes in land use, lacking marketing activities and loss of expertise is severely threatening their viability.

Thus the absence of educational schemes, presenting comprehensive expert knowledge on different aspects of traditional orchard care and management, is our initiative's main motivation.



esto objectives

The project's overall objective is to sustain traditional orchards as a multi-functional (ecological and economical) system, ensuring high biodiversity. Developing of new innovative ways for teaching and learning should help to preserve traditional landscapes in a 21st century environment.



Qualification

One of the project's objectives is to develop a curriculum, based on ECVET criteria (European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training). It will cover the most important aspects of traditional orchard farming; e.g. as pomology, management, care, processing and marketing of orchard products. The curriculum will be made available to adults and students at vocational schools, universities and other non-formal educational institutions. The project's goal is to offer qualification in the field of traditional orchard care at a standardized level, generally accepted and agreed upon by European experts.

Improving awareness

The curriculum will be exploited within the EU-wide consortium network and will increase awareness for and knowledge of traditional orchards. The 'National Competence Centres', established during the project, will facilitate networking activities and knowledge transfer among professionals and organisations at national and international levels.

Continuity

Making education and qualification on traditional orchards and their produce commonly available, will foster their development and use. Thus orchards will remain a source of healthy regional food. In rural areas, an increased demand for expert skills will be created.



what are traditional orchards?

Traditional orchards are defined as groups of standard fruit and/or nut trees at low densities in grassland and crops, determined by low intensity management, high biodiversity and high profile landscape aesthetics.



Why are traditional orchards important?

- High biological diversity with more than 10,000 animal and plant species and more than 5,000 varieties of fruit.
- Excellent cost-effectiveness of the system (integrating ecological aspects) with simultaneous grass production, longer life cycles and ecological benefits in direct comparison to intense plantations.
- Archetype of sustainable agriculture with low pressure on the environment and high quality produce.