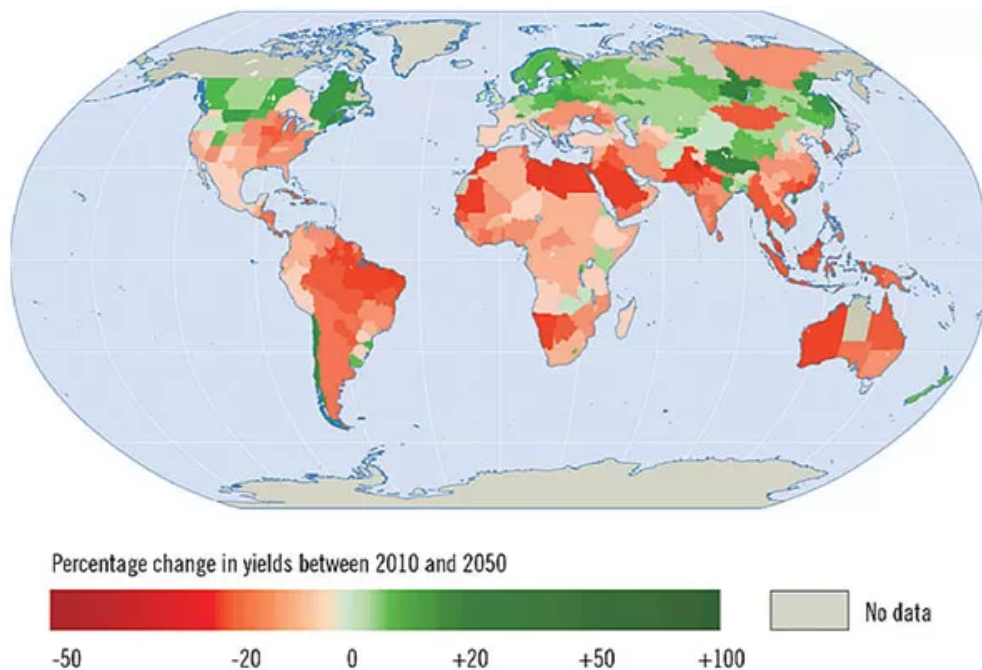


Can we grow a rosy future for British apples and the UK economy?

Climate change will increasingly affect where we can grow food in the world. Some countries will struggle to grow the crops they have relied on in the past. This will inevitably lead to mass movement of people and the need for the UK to rethink its food imports.

Apple production globally will also be directly affected by climate change. Regions of the world that have been big apple growers, will increasingly struggle to produce a decent quality or quantity of apples.

As can be seen in the World Bank projection map below (published in 2010), it will become more difficult to grow apples in continental Europe. The pink and red areas on the map denote reductions in yields.



Furthermore, countries in the southern hemisphere that have traditionally sold apples to the UK are increasingly looking at Asian markets in the search for better returns¹.

With fewer apples – and/or more expensive apples – to come from mainland Europe and the southern hemisphere, it's imperative that the UK takes steps now to secure the home-grown fruit our nation wants and needs.

Investment today in UK top fruit production would:

- Build food security
- Increase health and wellbeing
- Increase resilience of supply chains
- Reduce the chances of empty shelves in UK supermarkets
- Stimulate rural economic growth
- Support biodiversity and carbon sequestration

¹ <https://www.eurofresh-distribution.com/news/new-zealand-switches-focus-for-apple-exports-from-europe-to-asia/>

The benefits of increasing top fruit production in the UK

Health and wellbeing

Apples are a humble superfood, in the top 5 high metabolic quality fruits and vegetables, which lower the risk of chronic diseases like heart disease, type 2 diabetes and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)². Apples are full of dietary fibre, which is great for the gut microbiome, they are packed with vitamin C and full of antioxidants. The UK government should be promoting a healthy diet through an apple a day campaign. The current government should support the work of British Apples & Pears on social media through the provision of a digital marketing fund of £300,000 to extend our reach to a younger audience.

Food security and fewer empty shelves

With an increase in UK apple production, Britain would no longer need to rely on expensive and unreliable imports. We can feed ourselves and do so economically and environmentally. With security of home supply, the chances of empty shelves and unhappy shoppers are dramatically reduced. Today British growers produce c.30% of all apples sold in UK supermarkets. This could be more than doubled to 60-70%. Imported food will often be grown with:

- A much higher pesticide burden (UK growers have access to a far smaller range of crop protection products than most of our imported competitors)
- A higher water footprint (apples are often imported from countries requiring far more irrigation to grow them than in the UK, with lower water recharge rates than the UK)
- A higher carbon footprint (imported apples are transported long distances)
- Overall lower standards, including standards concerning ethical labour practices

The current government should ensure that every public procurement contract prioritises British produced rather than imported apples. The government should also implement the fair dealing clause in the Agriculture Act to improve supply chain fairness.

Increased supply chain resilience

The challenging weather patterns due to climate change are affecting apple production levels in Europe. With a growing population, the UK should be seeking to grow more at home for domestic supply and for export. UK growers can mitigate any risk associated with climate change by investing in new varieties that grow well in future climate conditions.

Rural economic growth

Our rural areas tend to be de-prioritised by national and local government for business and economic investment. And yet British apple farms are employing thousands of workers, provide permanent year-round work, accommodation and contracting work to many rural families and rural businesses.

Biodiversity and carbon sequestration

Apple and pear orchards are diverse ecosystems that support bees, butterflies, insects, mammals and birds. Growers install bee hives, bee 'hotels', beetle banks and wildflower strips to encourage the natural diversity that supports healthy fruit production.

Like all trees, apple and pear trees sequester carbon as they grow. They absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in their fibres. This can help to mitigate the effects of climate change. With more apple trees in the UK, we can sequester more carbon and support climate change goals.

² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0002916524005148>

The journey to increased production and self-sufficiency

Orchard expansion

Over the past 30 years, innovations in growing techniques have led to huge efficiencies in apple production. In fact, we doubled production per hectare between 1990 and 2010³.

With the vast majority of efficiencies now realised, we need to increase orchard acreage to increase apple production. Orchard costs are high with a commercial dessert fruit orchard costing £100,000-£170,000/hectare to establish. To double the current hectareage would cost £550-935 million. The market returns do not realise enough profit for growers to make these investments without assistance. The 2024 Farm to Fork Summit in Downing Street promised a £10 million orchard investment fund. The current UK government should fast forward this investment through match-funded orchard investment grants worth at least £55 million (10% of the total minimum investment requirement).

Investing in storage

Modern apple varieties store incredibly well. So well, in fact, that we can now enjoy home-grown, British apples all year round. However, this requires modern, energy-efficient storage solutions. Many growers have already invested in these facilities, but more would need to be done to store an increasing volume of picked British apples. Government could support orchard expansion by match-funded grants for new cold storage facilities and renewable energy solutions.

Securing access to labour

Despite innovations, we are still 10 years away from robotic picking for apples. The hand-eye coordination, dexterity and gentle touch required mean that picking will remain a labour-intensive job for a few more years yet. As a result, growers need medium-term secure access to labour – primarily from overseas. The seasonal worker visa scheme (SWS) works effectively to offer short-term, well-paid employment opportunities to those overseas. However, it is vital that the growers can plan several years ahead, with certainty. The government should commit to a five-year rolling SWS scheme, with the option for six- and nine-month visa stays.

Stimulating innovation

The 2024 Farm to Fork Summit in Downing Street promised £50 million of grant investment for packhouse robotics and automation. This investment would increase the efficiency of apple sorting and packing and help to keep the price of apples down for consumers. It is essential this £50 million grant investment is delivered quickly to stimulate innovation and resulting growth.

In a nutshell the government should:

- Support the work of British Apples & Pears through the provision of a digital marketing fund of £300,000 to extend our health messaging reach to a younger audience.
- Ensure that every public procurement contract prioritises British produced rather than imported apples.
- Implement the fair dealing clause in the Agriculture Act to improve supply chain fairness.
- Fast forward orchard investment through match funded orchard investment grants worth at least £55 million (10% of the minimum investment requirement).
- Support orchard expansion by match-funded grants for new cold storage facilities and renewable energy solutions.
- Commit to a 5-year rolling SWS scheme, with the option for six- and nine- month visa stays
- Establish a £50 million grant investment for packhouse robotics and automation.
- Roll over the existing Producer Organisation Fruit & Veg Aid Scheme for at least another three years after the current scheme ends in December 2025 to give POs and DEFRA time to engage to develop a new and improved scheme.

³ BAPL Trade Webinar 2022. Andersons Midlands (DEFRA data)

About British Apples and Pears

British Apples & Pears Limited (BAPL) is a grower-funded, not-for-profit organisation that represents all commercial apple and pear growers of dessert and culinary fruit in the UK. It is run by a committed board of grower directors who work hard to safeguard BAPL member interests and grow the market share of British apples and pears. Our ambition is for at least 60% of apples sold in the UK to be British by 2030.

Despite our ambitions, the value of orchard fruit decreased by 15% to £287m between 2020 and 2021⁴. Apple and pear production is part of the £4bn horticulture industry which is worth 20% of farmgate value from just 2%⁵ of the land area. It is a sector that should be being celebrated, promoted, and supported.

BAPL activities include industry representation, government liaison, data gathering and consumer awareness raising and promotion. The organisation also funds much-needed research and development to protect our wonderful crop.

www.britishapplesandpears.co.uk

#AnAppleADay #ValueAtTheCore #OrchardWatch #Superfood

⁴ ONS <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/agriculture-in-the-united-kingdom-2022/chapter-7-crops>

⁵ Defra: Health & Harmony:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683972/future-farming-environment-evidence.pdf