

Cider Pommages for Nordic Regions

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PLANET**



INTRODUCTION

What is *Pommage*?

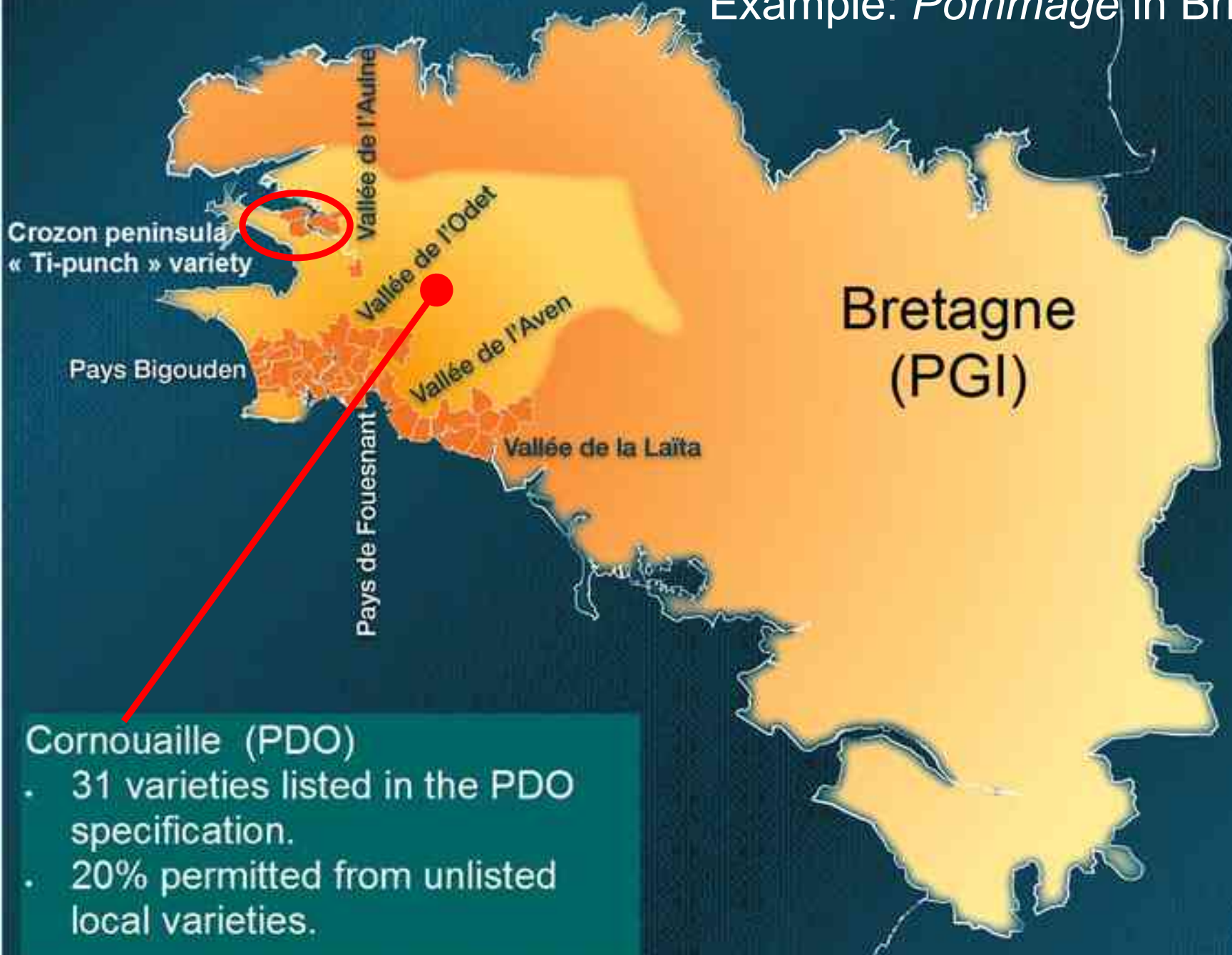
A French word indicating the

- selection
- collection
- or list

of apple varieties used in a region or by a cider maker.

Pommage <-> Region <-> *Terroir*

Example: *Pommage* in Brittany



Crozon peninsula
« Ti-punch » variety

Pays Bigouden

Vallée de l'Aulne

Vallée de l'Odéet

Vallée de l'Aven

Vallée de la Laïta

Pays de Fouesnant

Bretagne
(PGI)

Cornouaille (PDO)

- 31 varieties listed in the PDO specification.
- 20% permitted from unlisted local varieties.

What do we aim for?

A Pommage that...

- is representative of a region, will give some unique character to the ciders of that region.
- is built on varieties that thrive in the region with minimal care (hardiness, low pest sensitivity, minimal production cost, productivity).
- includes varieties in different categories of cider apples for well balanced blends (bittersweet, bittersharp, sweet and sharp).

Evolution in time – this is a long term project

In Traditional Cider Regions

Things are fairly simple in traditional cider making regions:

- The *pommages* are well known and made up of cider apple varieties that have been grown in the region for decades (if not centuries...).
- These *pommages* have seen very little changes through the years.
- Any apple grower or cider maker can go to a nursery that will have all the cider varieties that he needs for planting a well balanced orchard with trees that will thrive in the region.

Special Challenges In Nordic Regions

- There is no such thing as ‘**Well established cider *pommages***’ in our regions... We have to start from scratch as there is no tradition.
- Most nurseries don’t sell cider apple varieties – and available varieties are generally not the best for cider making. Cider makers and cider apple growers often need to graft their own trees.
- Importing cider apple varieties from other regions isn’t always simple. Plus, these varieties may have issues because climate and growing conditions are different.

How do we get there?

There is a standard pattern for the evolution of *pommages* in new or emerging cider regions:

1. Use of existing dessert varieties grown for market.
2. Search for better apples...
 - A. Imported traditional cider apple varieties
 - B. Heirloom varieties that have been grown in the region
 - C. Discovery (or breeding) of native/local varieties, selected in function of their properties for cider making.
3. Test and select the best of all above to develop the local *pommage*.

Let us now see this in more details...

1- Existing Market/Dessert Varieties

The use of existing market varieties for making cider is the first, natural step when cider starts being made in a certain region where there is an existing apple industry but no tradition of growing cider-specific apple varieties.

- Advantages – already present and available, surplus or downgraded apples may be bought for low price.
- Inconvenients – not « cider apples », low in tannins, poorly balanced, high in nutrients, also often too expensive to grow for cider-only.
- Main use – basic apple flavor, inexpensive bulk juice.

Existing Market/Dessert Varieties

From a few contacts in the Nordic and Baltic countries, some important locally grown commercial varieties:

- Ingrid Marie (Denmark, 1924)
- Aroma (Sweden, 1973)
- Discovery (UK, 1962)

Other often seen varieties include
Gravenstein, Cox Orange Pippin,
Gala, Honeycrisp, Elstar...

A large part of the apples found in
food stores are imported
from other countries of the EU...



Ingrid Marie
photo Aatree Nursery

2.A- Traditional Cider Varieties

Many good quality English and French bittersweet and bittersharp cider apple varieties may be grown in some areas of Nordic and Baltic countries.

- Advantages – high quality, used for a long time in traditional cider making regions.
- Inconvenients – lack testing in nordic regions, may have problems (fire blight, productivity, hardiness, season of maturity).
- Main use – provide flavor, tannins and mouthfeel, improve acid/tannin balance of blends.

Traditional Cider Varieties

Bittersharps - may naturally have the right balance for acidity and permit making SV ciders (however not always as this balance varies yearly with conditions).

Kingston Black
is one of the best known
with high reputation, but
somewhat fussy...

also worth consideration:
Stoke Red
Porter's Perfection



Traditional Cider Varieties

Bittersweets - permit reduction of acidity of overly acidic juices from dessert varieties and improve balance, but not appropriate for SV ciders as pH too high.

Yarlington Mill and Dabinett are the best known and most planted all around the world.

(YM susceptible fire blight...)

Bulmer's Norman
early maturity and very hardy,
great for colder areas.

Also: Harry Master's Jersey,
Michelin, Muscadet de Dieppe,
Ellis Bitter, and more...



Traditional Cider Varieties (my personal experience)

During the 1990s, I thought the import of traditional European cider apple varieties was the “miracle” solution for improving the *pommages* in Quebec.

I have since tested about 50 varieties in my personal orchard, in order to discover some that would succeed in my soil and climate conditions. But many problems have arisen...

- lack of winter hardiness
- apples that don't ripen properly in a short and cool season
- different sicknesses, cankers
- poor vigor or productivity

At this time, the only variety I found that I could recommend for planting is **Bulmer's Norman** – a few others are promising...

Traditional Cider Varieties

Plantings of European cider varieties should still be considered as experimental, insufficient testing has been done at this time, many have their own issues (susceptibility to sicknesses and pests, climate adaptation).

There are some successful plantings, e.g. on Fejø Island in Denmark.

We should see their use as a **transition step** in this journey to develop local *pommages*, as these ideally should mostly contain native or traditional varieties of the region.

2.B- Heirloom/Ancestral Varieties

Heirloom is a word often used for older or historical apple varieties that may have been but are not anymore produced in large scale for the market. They are often seen in gardens.

Each region has its own collection of older traditional varieties... For example, Māris Plūme here in Latvia enumerated the following: Sīpoliņš, Antonovka, Lietuvas Pepiņš, Telissaare, Talvenauidig, Safrāna pepiņš, Beforest, Rīgas rožābele, Vidzemes Zelta renete.

Of these, **Antonovka** is fairly well known everywhere in Nordic and Baltic countries, and appreciated for cider.

Heirloom/Ancestral Varieties

These apples generally have more tannins and mouthfeel than market vars, but not as much as traditional cider apples. Also they are rather acid forward and will bring this dimension to the blend. They blend very well with bittersweets to yield balanced and rich musts.

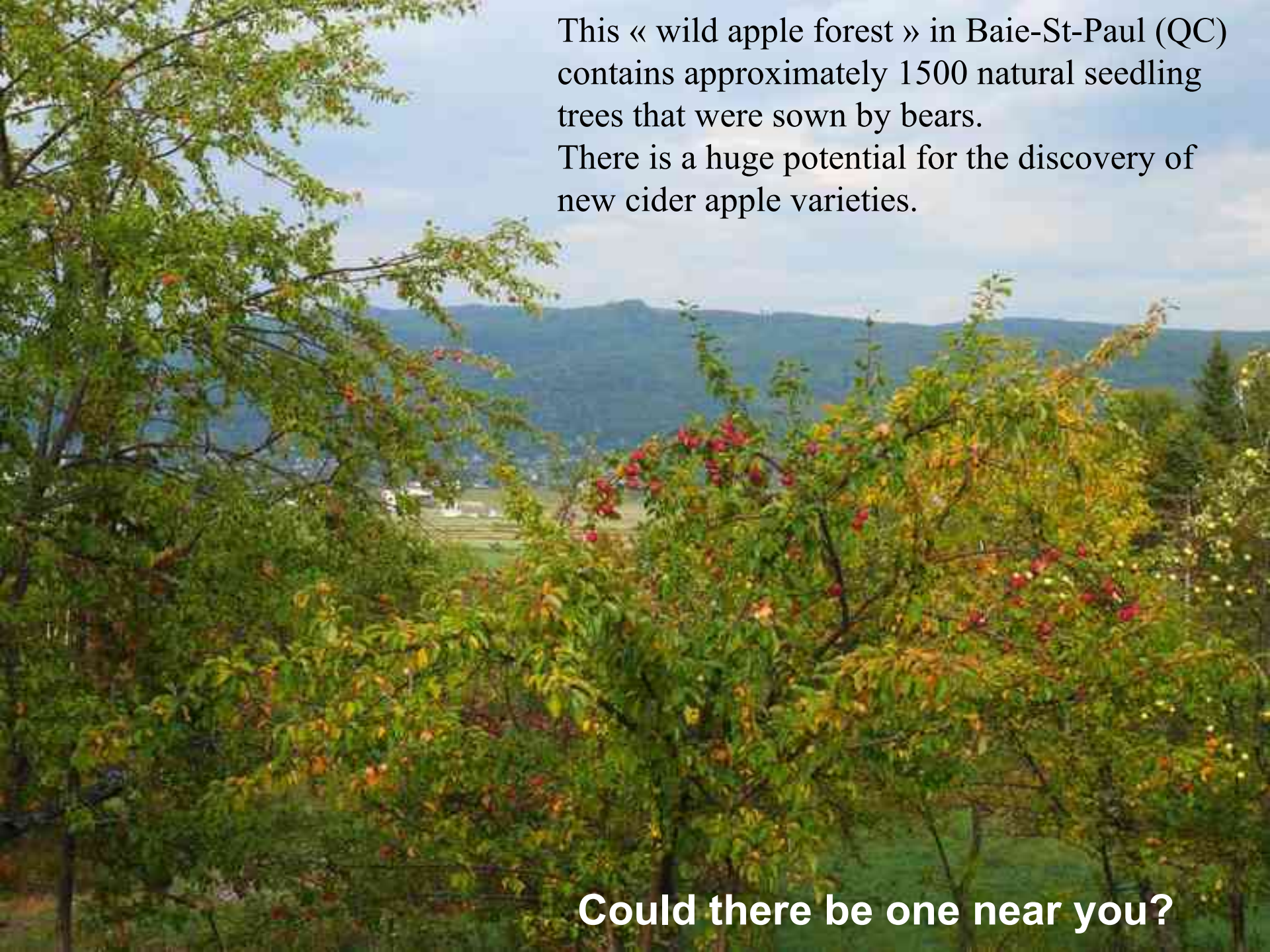
Gravenstein is an old favorite now 'rediscovered' by cider makers. (image from *Le Verger* by Alphonse Mas).



2.C- New Native/Regional Varieties

There is great hope that such apples will provide a very important contribution to future *pommages*.

- Discoveries from natural/wild apple seedling trees.
I estimate that approximately 1 out of 10 natural apple seedlings may have good cider making properties. There are possibly millions of such natural seedling trees...
- Breeding and testing of new varieties.
Hopefully, some research facilities will in the future introduce new cider-specific apple varieties after having bred and tested them.
Such breeding/testing may also be done at a smaller scale by individual growers who would dedicate a small part of their orchard for this.

A scenic view of a wild apple forest in Baie-St-Paul, Quebec. The foreground is filled with lush green trees, some of which have small red apples hanging from their branches. In the background, a valley opens up, showing a small town and rolling green hills under a clear blue sky. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

This « wild apple forest » in Baie-St-Paul (QC) contains approximately 1500 natural seedling trees that were sown by bears. There is a huge potential for the discovery of new cider apple varieties.

Could there be one near you?

New Native Varieties – Wild apples



Two examples of recently introduced varieties from natural/wild seedling trees in N.America:

Douce de Charlevoix is bittersweet for cold/short season (currently being tested in Latvia).

Franklin Cider (photo by Bill Mayo) is bittersharp from Vermont, currently distributed by Stark in the US.



Many small cider makers in North America use *foraged* apples (i.e. from natural seedlings or abandoned orchards), a trend that is also starting in Nordic/Baltic countries.

e.g. “Apple safari” by Māris Plūme

New Native Varieties – Breeding

- Need to establish and fund breeding/testing programs for the specific purpose of developing cider apple varieties.
- Such varieties should be in the bittersweet and bittersharp classes to provide tannins to the blends and improve the acid balance.
- These would be better adapted to local conditions of soil, pest and climate than traditional European cider apple varieties. And would provide flavors that are unique and different – character of the *terroir*.

3 – Testing and Final Selection of a New Variety

Testing is a crucial part of the process.

After one finds a promising variety (for example a wild seedling tree), this apple should be tested. For example:

- The finder can graft the variety in his orchard and observe it for a number of years.
- Scion wood may be distributed to other growers in the region who wish to test the potential variety and report on its performance.
- It should also be tested in an independent facility (government or other) in typical production orchard conditions.
- These tests should evaluate agronomic factors (vigor, productivity, pest sensitivity) as well as properties and qualities for cider making.

Only after extensive testing should a new variety be selected for release and propagation in large scale – this is a long process, and not all potentially good new varieties will succeed in becoming part of our *pommage*!

CONCLUSION

From my experience searching and testing apples for cider in a nordic region of Canada since the 1990s...

- Using local wild/natural seedling trees has proven more efficient in terms of results than using imported varieties from traditional cider making regions of Europe.
- Using ancestral local varieties that have historically been grown successfully in the region is also a good starting point although these usually don't have ideal balance for cider and need to be blended.
- All these apples are naturally well adapted to the local conditions of climate and soil – which is a crucial factor.
- Such apples will also give a *Terroir* flavor to the ciders from a given region, as the *pommage* will then be distinctive.

CIDER PLANET

Exploring the Producers, Practices, and
Unique Traditions of Craft Cider and Perry
from Around the World



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