

An Apple a day keeps the Doctor away... but for how much longer?

There is an old joke about apples – what's worse than finding a maggot in your apple?



Apple tree in blossom

Everyone recognizes the benefits of healthy eating and the role that apples play in our diet but if Members of the European Parliament are successful in amending current legislation, apples may no longer be on the menu in the near future.



A fruitful harvest in prospect?

About 27,000 ha of apple trees are grown in the UK worth an estimated £80 million. Production of good quality apples requires careful management balancing the judicious use of inputs, such as insecticides, that are required to maintain yields and quality, with the need to sustain a healthy environment. Organic production of apples will not meet demand, as yields from organic production are 50-80% less than those produced using conventional integrated pest management techniques.

Proposed revisions to the way in which the European Union already regulates the use of crop protection chemicals (Directive 91/414) will result in a significant loss of the effective tools that have been developed over the past half-century to control voracious pests of apples.

Reducing the number of crop protection chemicals in the toolbox will result in a greater reliance on remaining products that could cause resistance to develop with subsequent loss of control of pests and a dramatic loss of yield and quality.

The situation would be similar to the position we are in now with antibiotics in the medical field. In short, we must maintain the diversity of products in the crop protection toolbox if we are to avert a potential disaster for our nation's apple crop.

Existing legislation already regulates the crop protection industry so that its products are used in a safe and efficient manner to control pests that would otherwise consume and spoil most of our apple crops before they can be harvested.

Controlling pests in apple orchards, such as apple maggot, is already a sophisticated and highly regulated process involving sustainable integrated pest management techniques that have been thoroughly researched by independent scientists in a number of countries throughout the world.



Damage caused by Apple Maggot – would you eat this?
(Photo courtesy of East Malling Research[®])

Programmes have been developed that minimize the risk to the environment and the consumer but if just one product used in the programme were to be lost, the impact on these safe and carefully planned programmes might result in complete failure and rejection of the crop.

There has already been much publicity about the decline of English apples such as Cox's Orange Pippin and Laxton's Superb – are we prepared to lose them altogether?

We do not need further regulation of the crop protection industry.

There are many guardians in the food supply chain from growers to regulators to supermarkets. Apples are carefully scrutinized for residues so that consumers can be assured of a healthy, risk-free diet that still contains apples. Consumers expect and deserve quality apples at a reasonable price but this cannot be done without sustainable crop inputs.

The loss of valuable crop protection products that might result from further revisions the 91/414 Directive will jeopardize apple production and increase the cost of that daily apple.

So what is worse than finding a maggot in your apple?

Half a maggot!