

Craft cider is surprisingly good for the environment

July 26 2024, by Ufuk Alpsahin Cullen



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Apple cider vinegar seems to be having a moment. People on social media report drinking it to lose weight and improve their health—although not everyone agrees about its purported benefits.

But what about the less acidic, tastier, alcoholic version of apple juice? Cider too has become [fashionable again](#) in recent years, thanks mostly to expensive marketing campaigns and extensive PR.

Yet there is a slower, softer side to cider making and drinking, which is worth seeking out—not just for the taste, but for its social and environmental impact.

[My research](#) shows that traditional full-juice craft cider—made from the whole juice of fresh pressed apples rather than concentrates—is a product which epitomizes the idea of a "[circular economy](#)", a way of producing things that restores and regenerate resources.

Circular economies—whether they are in fashion, furniture or food—bring [ecological, social](#), and [economic](#) advantages throughout the production chain. Unlike a traditional linear [economy](#), which takes a more [disposable approach](#), circular economies prioritize waste reduction and sustainable development.

And small-scale full-juice craft cider, with its focus on the principle of [staying local](#), encapsulates all of these elements.

The apples are usually sourced locally through donations from anyone who grows apples, whether it's in a back garden or an ancient orchard. Once the apples are collected, the equipment used to press the fruit can be easily built or borrowed.

The resulting cider is usually sold—or given to the apple donors—and enjoyed close to where it was made. (The amounts involved are so small, sometimes just a few thousand liters, that transporting it further would not be economically viable.) And the primary waste product, called [pomace](#), can be used as fertilizer, perhaps to grow new apple trees.

In essence, a small craft cidery is a natural born circular enterprise.

And as well as cider drinkers, there are many who stand to benefit from these [small businesses](#). The [Ross-on-Wye Cider and Perry](#) company in Herefordshire for example, aims to preserve local traditions and apple varieties as part of its mission. Meanwhile, [Wasted Apple](#) in Cornwall works with bee conservation groups to enhance local ecosystems and the natural environment.

Even the act of picking and clearing fallen apples prevents them from attracting rats or rotting on the ground. And craft cider makers often welcome volunteers who enjoy mucking in and spending time outdoors with their families.

There are also strong ties between the cideries that make "[industrial symbiosis](#)"—collaboration between companies—another key feature of the sector. This might involve sharing marketing channels and other areas of expertise, while established cideries support new ones, promoting community cohesion and local business growth.

The bright cider life

It was Mark Rudge, the founder of Wasted Apple, who introduced me to this world six years ago. Since then, I have immersed myself in craft cider, [gathering data](#), volunteering and interviewing the people involved.

My students helped with the research, joining me on visits to cideries and participating in apple harvesting. And the main reason I brought them along was to show them how circular economies generate ecological, social and economic value.

By fostering community cohesion, preserving traditions, and promoting sustainability, traditional craft cidemakers create a positive impact that

resonates across their local communities.

Of nearly 500 cider makers in the UK, [80%](#) are small-scale craft cideries. If you live or find yourself close to one, I can recommend a visit—and not just for the cider itself (please drink responsibly).

For these small rural enterprises provide a fascinating glimpse of how circular economies create social value and demonstrate sustainable agricultural practices. They produce small amounts of a high quality product which is well worth making your summer tippie, not only for its delightful taste, but also for its positive social and environmental impact.

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