

Terra Botanica visit

Discover Terra Botanica during the next International Blackcurrant Conference

The agenda of the International Blackcurrant Conference includes a visit of the Terra Botanica Interpretation Center. The participants of the conference will be able to have a short visit during a guided tour. And their companions have a whole day for free discovery!

275,000 species from around the world:

- in exceptional collections of orchids, roses, palm trees...
- in giant greenhouses or lush gardens
- from rice paddies to swamps, from generous vegetable gardens to dark primary forests
- from Mediterranean to oriental landscapes



The parc is an unusual, colorful adventure!

The frame

Angers, the French capital of plants, is the home of Terra Botanica. It reveals the secrets of 600 years of regional history of plants. In the 15th century, King Renè, who was fond of plants and flower gardens introduced Mediterranean essences. Then, the great explorers brought back many plants from abroad. They were first cultivated in the gardens of the castles along the Loire. Later, in the 19th century, they entered the nurseries which came to birth in Angers.

This heritage is the reason for the reputation of the Loire Valley: it is recognized and identified for its gardens and its vegetable productions.

Cassismanufaktur - From grapes to blackcurrants

“Cassismanufaktur” is the name that Heiko Danner has chosen for marketing blackcurrant based products. A small, but lovely and profitable business for his self-grown blackcurrants.

From wine growing to blackcurrant farming



Heiko Danner is a wine growing engineer. He grows wine grapes and has made his own wines for 14 years. He had taken over his father's farm, where wine-growing had always been part of the farming business. His ancestors had distilling rights and had always produced fruit spirits. At first, Heiko simply continued the tradition. But then, he turned towards



blackcurrants. In Stockheim, close to Heilbronn in Southern Germany, the fields are rather small and not very good for growing wheat or the like. But the soil is good for grapes - and why not blackcurrants? This is what Heiko thought after some years of wine growing. When it comes to blackcurrant growing, many agricultural aspects are quite similar to wine growing. Soil, plant protection, machines, climate - but the harvest is at another moment of the year. Diversification from wine growing towards blackcurrant growing is therefore a natural development.



Stockheim

Heiko started growing blackcurrants in 1991. Out of the 100 hectares he works on, half of them are now dedicated to blackcurrants, 24 hectares are still planted with white and red wine grapes. But he now sells them to a local cooperative and has stopped wine making. His passion has turned towards the small black power pearls. It has become a real passion: he collects and examines the behaviour of all kinds of blackcurrant varieties from all over the world on his land.

Finding and using the best blackcurrant varieties

Since 2010, 3.5 hectares are planted with three rows of each variety that Heiko wants to test. What is important to him is:

- the yield
- the growing behaviour
- the influence of climate (the yield of varieties from the Scottish breeding centre, the James Hutton Institute, will be lower if there is not enough winter chill than of varieties from Southern countries, for example)
- the aroma
- the sensitivity to certain diseases and pests
- the cutting method
- the size of the currants

He also tries to grow organically on one hectare - just for fun. Or to be able to



develop future projects.

From growing blackcurrants to making products at the “Cassismanufaktur”

Yet, for the moment, Heiko concentrates on the production of blackcurrant based soft and alcoholic drinks, sweets, condiments and jams. He launched his “Cassismanufaktur” in 2013 and has now, only four years later, a range of 20 blackcurrant based products.



products from Cassismanufaktur



Manufacturing unit at
Cassismanufaktur

For facing the time-consuming production and marketing, together with the traditional farming, he needed to employ. 4 to 8 seasonal workers help him all over the year. One person is dedicated to manufacturing the products in the specially arranged basement of Heiko's house. On the ground floor, there is a small shop and office room. But the biggest share of the commercialization is, of course, not the shop on his own farm.



“Home” shop

Cassismanufaktur - how to sell from local to international customers

“More and more people in Germany want to buy products “directly” from the producer”, explains Heiko. More and more “farm shops” open everywhere. And they are Heiko’s main customers. “I personally deliver my products to these shops, according to the orders they place. As for supermarkets, only few of them will sell local, manufactured products. My prices are too high, and demand too low. Because my production costs are, of course, higher than those of bigger factories. But I’m proud of using only my own blackcurrants. Thus, I’m sure not only of the quality of the main ingredient (blackcurrants), but also of the quality of the manufacturing process.”



Heiko preparing a delivery of his products



Heiko standing close to his new freezing machine

Indeed, Heiko does not produce the whole range of products himself. He has partners all around the region: a soapmaker for his blackcurrant soap, a vinegar manufacturer for his blackcurrant balsamico vinegar, and several more. Heiko trusts on relations. A friend of his is taking care of his logo, the design of his stickers, as well as his website.

Therefore, Heiko can concentrate on the commercialization of his products in regional and national trade fairs. He attends around 10 of them every year. Moreover, trade fairs are an excellent occasion to find new ideas, new producers, and new markets. “I now sell my products even on an international level. This is not my main business, of course. But it shows that we are growing”, smiles Heiko.



Heiko Danner, Winner of

Today, Heiko is sure of one thing: looking at the development of the blackcurrant market in Europe, he could not survive by selling his blackcurrants to the local fruit cooperative. The prices for blackcurrants are too low. But the demand for authentic or fancy products is growing, and his “Cassismanufaktur” has a role to play in this market.

Harvesting blackcurrants like a Kiwi

Johann Bullinger from Germany relates his experience as a seasonal worker in one of the biggest blackcurrant farms in New Zealand: the Tavendale farm.

School is over - what now?

When I graduated from high school in August 2017, I decided to spend some time abroad and work for a year, before starting my studies in university. At that time, I found it difficult to decide which direction I would like to take for my career.

For this reason, I helped my uncle Michael Bullinger with his blackcurrant harvest after finishing school. (*read our article on Michael Bullinger's farm*) In autumn, we worked on cuttings and plant propagation. This is what I had already

done the years before: I had spent a lot of time at my uncle's farm. I often worked with him on week-ends or during school holidays. I really appreciated this work, which I found very interesting and instructive.



My choice of New Zealand as the ultimate blackcurrant experience

Of course, I knew that my uncle was involved in the International Blackcurrant Association and in touch with people from all over the world. This is how I came to ask him if he could help me with contacts from different blackcurrant farmers abroad. I wanted to ask them if I could work with them for half a year. The opportunity to travel to New Zealand was ultimately the most attractive. Firstly because the country itself offers unique landscapes and beautiful nature. The second reason was that the harvest there takes place in late December - which I did not want to miss.

Arrival at the Tavendale farm

My uncle met John and James Tavendale at the last Blackcurrant Conference in Ashford. Knowing them all now, I guess they certainly had a beer or two together there. He described them as being very friendly and kind people, whom I would certainly also like very much.

This is how I found myself on board of a plane on November 1st 2017, taking me from Frankfurt, Germany, to Auckland, New Zealand. On November 6th, James gave me a warm welcome on the Tavendale farm in Winchmore, a hundred



kilometres South-West of Christchurch.

Irrigation - essential on the Tavendale farm

The first thing that struck me was that every square meter of land on this farm is irrigated. Three irrigation techniques are used on the farm. The most modern among them is the pivot, which moves automatically from a fix pivot point in a circular movement across the field. In addition, the corners of the field are getting irrigated with permanently installed sprinklers. Other currant fields are getting completely irrigated with permanently installed sprinklers. As a third method, three waterguns are in use on the Tavendales' blackcurrant fields. For us workers, this method is most time costly, because it is necessary to reconfigure and adjust them every day. However, they have the advantage of being more mobile and can be used in variable ways.

Living in the middle of blackcurrants

The Tavendales' blackcurrant fields are divided into three farms (father and two sons with their families). Each of the farms is located between State Highway 77 towards Methven and the Ashburton River. They all have a family house, a pump station and a weather station, and all are surrounded by blackcurrant fields. The Tavendales grow varieties like Magnus, Murchison, Melina, Blackadder, Kepler, Ben Rua, Ben Ard, Isobel and some hectares of redcurrants. They also produce organic blackcurrants of varieties Ben Alder, Ben Ard, Blackadder, Melina,



Murchison, Reds, Hopkins and Hamilton.

The duration of a blackcurrant field on the Tavendale farm is of roughly 15 years, some even 19. Whereas at my home in Germany, we harvest for 12 years. During this long lifetime, regular pruning is necessary. What also struck me was the height of the currant shrub. They grow up to 2.5 meters and their lower branches are therefore very thick. Furthermore, what also differs from my grandparents' farm at home is that the blackcurrant cuttings are immediately planted at their final place. Whereas at home, we first plant them in a nursery close to each other in a row, and several rows forming blocks. Only when the shrubs are of about one meter's height, we transplant them to their final place.



Soil and harvest on the Tavendale farm

In my opinion, the Tavendale Farm possesses a very fertile ground of high quality compared to the rest of New Zealand. In the greater part of New Zealand, agriculture is not really worthwhile because the soil has virtually no humus content and is extremely stony. This is also the reason why most of the farmers in New Zealand live on pastures and livestock farming. However, in the district of Canterbury, farmers use the better soil for agriculture. All in all, I cannot compare the soil structure with the very loamy soil at home in the Hohenlohe



region.

The harvesting process also differs significantly from home. My stay here in New Zealand is a very rich experience also for this reason: I have learned many new points of view and processing steps. As an example, we harvest the currants with three harvesters: New Holland Braud SB58, 6060, 9060. It is an honour for me to be part of this three headed "Braud Gang".



Sorting blackcurrants

After the harvest, we drive the currants from the field to the washing station with the help of four tip trucks. These have trays made of stainless steel. We dump the freshly harvested blackcurrants in a water bath. Branches and leaves now float on the surface and we can easily remove them with a washing drum. As for the submerged blackcurrants, they come back to the water surface on a conveyor belt. We then rinse them again with water jets. There are two helpers on the conveyor belt, who control the quality of the now washed currants, and remove the remaining small branches or leaves. From there, the currants are packed in large crates and picked up by a truck.

One large box contains 400kg of blackcurrants, and we deliver them to local juice companies. We keep another part of the blackcurrants in a big freezing



warehouse.



Dangerous birds

There are many birds in New Zealand, which is quite dangerous for the farmers here. The birds like to nest in very narrow and dark protected from wind and lay their eggs there. The engine compartments of tractors are ideal places! When we took out the Braud harvesters from their “hibernation” in December, we found 5 bird nests in the engine compartment of only one harvester. It was hard to believe how the birds managed to build their nest in such a narrow space. In any case, it is very dangerous to drive a tractor without first eliminating the bird nests. They build them with dry branches and grass and can therefore catch fire quickly. This is why I was taught that when I leave the tractor for a long time (for example for a week-end), I should leave the hood open. We can thus avoid that the birds settle in the engine compartment behind the protective, closed hood.

Assessment of the blackcurrant harvest 2017/18

This year has been a difficult year for the blackcurrant market in New Zealand due to changes with the grower’s usual customers. Moreover, this year’s yield

was not really awesome. Due to various losses and frost in early November, it was somewhat disappointing. And finally, the blackcurrants were ripe as early as never before. While the harvest in previous years took place only in mid-January, this year's harvest started just before Christmas. November 2017 brought only little rainfall - less than ever since meteorological records exist. In addition, the average temperature has been higher than it has been in 75 years. Nevertheless, in comparison with my uncle's farm, it is a little easier to react to drought here. As mentioned earlier, a good irrigation of the fields is common standard - which is essential in such dry seasons.

Sarau Blackcurrant Festival

Jenny Leith from the organizing team reports from the most popular blackcurrant festival Down Under: the Sarau Blackcurrant Festival.

Some bit of history about the Sarau Festival

In late 2007, members of the Upper Moutere community in rural Nelson, New Zealand, got together to plan an event which would bring crowds and attention to their beautiful valley. They had a newly established Community Centre which needed to be used adjacent to a large sports domain. The decision was made to hold a country fair. And when we looked for a focus, we realized that this was an area known for its blackcurrant plantations.

Local Blackcurrant festival - watching the entertainment



The Sarau Festival was born. A festival held immediately post-harvest to celebrate the amazing qualities of the New Zealand blackcurrant. It was combined with a Country Fair to enable the many talented artists, crafters and growers who live in the valley to showcase their wares to the wider Nelson and New Zealand community.

Events within the event: Sports...



The first five festivals included a stunning 27km cross-country bike ride. It led through 8 different horticultural crops and ended in the midst of the festival. This event was keenly sought after by regular cyclists and those who just wanted to see more of the area by going off-road. In the last 3 years, a 12km (flatter) version of the ride joined the first version for those not quite so used to hill climbs. Once mountain biking became a regular part of our Nelson landscape, the interest in this event faded and the organizers made the decision to remove it from the festival events.

...Health...

With the emphasis on healthy living, the Festival used blackcurrants in their various forms to promote this focus. We had speakers and ran workshops looking at eye and gut health, longevity and muscle recovery after sport and surgery. We looked at how to grow currants, sold and gave away plants, and demonstrated with harvesting machinery.

...Cooking



More popular still was the blackcurrant cooking challenge with its 6 categories – baking, deserts, beverages, preserves, children’s, and innovative categories. We have been so grateful that for 11 years, Barkers of Geraldine have supported this event by providing blackcurrant product baskets as prizes. Each year, a guest

chef has demonstrated interesting and creative ways to use blackcurrants while cooking. This has been super popular and the hall is always full.



Entertainment at the Sarau Blackcurrant Festival for visitors from all around the world



Apart from these blackcurrant associated events, we have live music throughout, generously sponsored by GSK/Ribena. And approximately 100 stalls, each selling different arts, crafts, food and drink. There is a super active Kidszone and child care with associated activities and entertainment provided for younger festival goers. Indeed we have attracted festival goers from throughout New Zealand and the world. It has been a particular joy to welcome former growers Patricia and Peter Jeffares. They annually travel and join us from Co Wexford, Ireland.

... and lots of passionate volunteers!

The entire Sarau Blackcurrant Festival is run by a team of 40-50 volunteers who manage roading, parking, gate takings (still held at \$5 per adult after 11 years), marquees, sunshade, security, etc. Besides that, volunteers run a hugely successful book stall. They also sell Sarau Cream Teas with all proceeds going to the community. The event takes place in the late afternoon. And as the sun goes down in the western hills after a mellow and fun evening for all, Festival goers drift off to their homes. They have had another fun day in the Moutere Valley at the world's first blackcurrant festival!

Jenny Leith

International Blackcurrant Conference 2018: registrations now open

Invitation to the International Blackcurrant Conference 2018 from the French organizing team



The ANCG and Hexavalor, organizers of the IBA conference 2018, are happy to invite you to meet up with blackcurrants in June.

As announced earlier, the International Blackcurrant Conference 2018 will take place in Angers from 6th to 8th June 2018. Information and registration facilities

are now available on <http://www.blackcurrant-iba.com/event/>. On the site, you will be able to register and access information on:

- the provisional conference programme, as well as a specific touristic programme for your companion,
- practical information for the organization of your trip (online registration, access, accommodation...).

Events around the conference

The International Blackcurrant Conference 2018 is a wonderful opportunity to promote blackcurrants to the public. It is a comprehensive happening which lasts over more than three months until the conference in June. Among the events, there are:

- a culinary competition for chefs, organized within the New Product Development Unit of the IBA
- the second international blackcurrant product competition
- communication for the general public, partnerships with students and young professionals (Olympiades des Métiers...).

2nd blackcurrant products competition

We organize the second edition of the international blackcurrant products competition in close partnership with the ESA of Angers (University of Agriculture). The ESA will provide expertise in terms of sensorial analysis. We also wish to award a prize for the winners of the competition. You are all welcome to join in these events, whether it is directly or as our partner, or simply by sharing our information within your network.

We are looking forward to meeting you in Angers in June!

IMPORTANT! IBA members benefit from

discounted registration fees*.

*every IBA member will receive a promo code by email; should you not receive it and you think that you are entitled to reduced fees, please contact blackcurrant@free.fr

Blackcurrants and prestigious names - Les Deux Ormes



Varieties Andega and Andorine, with the Chapel of Ormoy in the background

None or only few of our readers may ever have heard about the farm called “Les Deux Ormes”. But to those who are a little familiar with France and history, some of the

following names will mean something. There is Chartres, Guillaume (William), Madame de Maintenon, Versailles, Néron (Nero) - and blackcurrants. The link is not very strong, but still...



William from “Les Deux Ormes”

When I went to Guillaume Marie’s farm “Les Deux Ormes” earlier this year, I hadn’t thought of any link with the first Norman King of England, William the Conqueror. But after my visit, I became aware of a governing principle: illustrious names! The village I was heading to is called “La Place” - The Place. Nothing more, nothing less. Apparently, there is no need to add anything: it is THE place!

La Place belongs to a township called “Néron” - Nero. This is the name of the famous last Roman Emperor of the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

And Néron is close to the renowned city of Chartres with its Gothic cathedral. It is one of the finest and best preserved cathedrals in Europe, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Chartres is situated in the fertile plain of “Beauce”, which is also called the granary of France. In sum, this place, a hundred kilometers South of Paris, is made for conquering the world with prestigious blackcurrants, planted by Guillaume (William, in English)!



View on the cathedral of Chartres

A typical farm in the Beauce

Guillaume is farming a total of 440 hectares with two permanent employees. The general structure is quite standard. “For being profitable when you grow wheat, corn and the like, you need 200 hectares per person”, Guillaume says. The farmland belongs to himself and several members of his family. The biggest share of the land (180 hectares) is planted with wheat (durum and common wheat). He also grows rapeseed on more than 60 hectares, and immediately after this come currants: red and black currants, on 40 hectares. On the remaining land, we can find potatoes, onions, beetroots, fava beans, flax, corn, peas and barley.



One of Guillaume’s employees



Guillaume checking his blackcurrants



Blackcurrants are unusual for the region

“We have decreased the share of blackcurrants over the last years”, explains Guillaume. “My family (father, 2 brothers and cousins of mine) had been farming blackcurrants and red currants as a diversification to cereals since the end of the 1980ies, on more than 100 hectares. Nobody else in this region grows currants. In the beginning, blackcurrants were much in demand, and prices were good. We belonged to an association called Sopafruits. The market for our products was of course France, but many blackcurrants were also exported. When Poland became a market economy in the early 1990ies, and finally joined the EU in 2004, the prices for our blackcurrants on the general market fell significantly.”

Les Deux Ormes

Guillaume had studied agricultural engineering and had not worked on the family farm at first. After his studies and for ten years, he had worked as director of a nursery for vegetable products and aromatic herbs in Morocco. When he came back to France in 2010, he took over the family farm. He has chosen the name “Les Deux Ormes”, which literally means “The Two Elms”, because the family farm brings together two places: the farm buildings and the dwelling-house where Guillaume lives with his family, and where an old elm tree had been standing for years. And his father’s farm one kilometer away, called “Ormoy”.



La Place



the dwelling house



Machinery for Guillaume



Ormoy

Where is Madame de Maintenon?

Ormoy, a chapel and farm buildings, had formerly belonged to Madame de Maintenon. The village of Maintenon with its chateau is in fact just 5 kilometers away. Françoise d'Aubigné had bought it - which is how she got the title of "Marquise de Maintenon". This lady lived in the 17th century - and was actually the second mistress and wife of Louis XIV (the Sun King, who had built Versailles). Some of this famous king's illegitimate children were partly raised in Maintenon.

Blackcurrant growing by Guillaume

Leaving French history behind, we come back to Guillaume's farm and his currants. He grows 40% of red currants, of varieties Jonkheer, Junifer and Rovada. But our focus is on the 60% blackcurrants. Guillaume mainly grows the varieties which the cassis liqueur producers in France need: Blackdown, Andorine, Andega, Andelène, and some Tiben. "The fruit association we belonged

to does not exist any more. We now are part of Vergers d'Anjou", says Guillaume.

Vergers d'Anjou is a cooperative for arboriculture and other fruits, spreading over four cereal producing regions in Northern and Western France. Storing, packaging and dispatching apples, pears, black and red currants, cherries and plums is their specialty. They will host the next international blackcurrant conference in Angers 2018. "Many of the farmers in this cooperative live and work far away from the head office of Vergers d'Anjou. But this allows us to be competitive with small amounts of fruits, compared to other producers."



Seasonal worker during harvest



Seasonal worker



Technical aspects

Guillaume loves his blackcurrants - even if they represent a tiny share of his business. During the harvest, which lasts three weeks, he needs to employ more people: there are two shifts of 8 people, one for the early morning work, one in the afternoon. Sometimes, Guillaume needs to irrigate his blackcurrants.



He generally rents hives for a better pollination. Rapeseed and blackcurrants grow not far from each other, they both attract bees and bumblebees. When he plants new fields of blackcurrants, Guillaume doesn't use plastic any more. "I used to plant them under plastic foil before, but I have stopped this. There will be weeds anyhow, and removing them is more complicated with plastic around", explains Guillaume.



New plantings of Rovada



Variety Blackdown



Growing blackcurrants is important for Guillaume, and he is well aware of their potential for our health. Nevertheless, he is not very optimistic for the future. “Not enough people buy blackcurrants - or rather blackcurrant products - because we do not yet sell them as IQF in France. I don’t know for how long I will continue, but I hope it will turn to the better.”

Guillaume does not yet have problems with scales, like other growers further South in France are experiencing. The climate is not the same, and plantations around are different. Luckily, the cassis producers in France can find their favourite varieties from this grower farthest North in France.



Guillaume sitting at his desk at Les Deux Ormes

Best of cassis smoothie contest 2017



There was a hustle and bustle all around the IBA booth during the Smoothie Contest 2017 in Nuits-Saint-Georges. Over 1000 visitors came to taste and evaluate the 8 different smoothies, prepared by food bloggers, smoothie lovers and chefs.

When the Tour de France 2017 arrived in Nuits-Saint-Georges, 8 professional or amateur cooks competed their own way. With the help of blenders, they prepared their own version of a blackcurrant smoothie. The spectators who were waiting for the cycle competitors to arrive were the judges. They could taste the 8 different smoothies and elect their favorite beverage. At the end of a busy day, the participants of the first "Best of Cassis" - contest prepared one last big glass of smoothie. But this time, it was for a panel of 3 professionals: a chef, a blackcurrant professional and the manager of a gourmet magazine. A smoothie contest like you have never seen it before!

Get an idea of the atmosphere of a lovely day in this picture review:

The booth in Nuits-Saint-Georges - and great public!

Evaluation by the professional panel at the Cassissium

Cocktail class for the participants and gifts for everyone



participants



**AUSTRIA
JUICE**



Nothing could have happened without them: Many thanks to all those who helped us to make this smoothie contest a great success!!!

As announced previously, the New Product Development Unit of the IBA, a core group of blackcurrant product professionals with the support of Austria Juice, launched this first “Best of Cassis” contest.

Of course, a contest needs competitors. We had limited the number of participants to 8. And found 8 highly motivated smoothie-makers: Karine, Baptiste, Nicole, Léa, Elaine, Chern, Diane and Hubert.

They made their smoothies with 35 liters of blackcurrant concentrate from Austria Juice.

Almost 400 kg of fruits, vegetables and dairy products came from the main sponsor of the Tour de France: Carrefour.

SEB, one of the leading producers of small domestic equipment, offered 8 brand new high speed blenders to the participants.

The Cassissium, the blackcurrant museum by Védrenne in Nuits-Saint-Georges, helped with the location, water, ice cubes, tables, helpers and many more. Finally, help, prizes and gifts came from many: Le Richebourg, Spa Hôtel La Cueillette, Château de Gilly, Le Cassissium, Vinésime, Castel de Très Girard, Nectars de Bourgogne, Mulot&Petitjean, Veuve Ambal, Anis de Flavigny, Moutarderie

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LA MOUTARDERIE

Find all the recipes here!

The “Cheese cake blackcurrant smoothie” by chef Chern has won the professional panel’s prize. Try it yourself!

If you want to read more about the contest or keep in touch with us for the next

one, follow us on our “Best of Cassis” page:



Blackcurrants - what else?

50 years of blackcurrant growing, development of mechanical harvesting systems, and associative engagement. Blackcurrant growing in Germany without Rolf, Emmi and Michael Bullinger is unimaginable.



In April this year, I have paid a visit to one of the German blackcurrant growers, Michael Bullinger. All those who have attended our conferences have certainly already met him. He is always present (although discreet), and he was also part of the organizing team of the German conference in Waldenburg in 2013. His farm, "Obsthof Bullinger", is in Kupfer, not far from Waldenburg. And it is a pure family business: no employees - only passion for blackcurrants.



Entering Kupfer, Obsthof Bullinger
on the left side

Michael Bullinger and “Obsthof Bullinger”

Michael grows blackcurrants on 70 hectares of mostly rented land, together with 35 hectares of red currants. “The share of blackcurrants is decreasing, whereas I am gradually increasing the red currants. Demand for red currants is getting higher, and the prices are better at the moment”, Michael tells me. We are sitting at a table, drinking blackcurrant juice and having a cup of coffee and a slice of homemade cake. His wife Anemone and his parents Rolf and Emmi are with us - I feel like at home. “We don’t have contracts with our buyers for blackcurrants. During the harvest, we negotiate the prices with a big producer of blackcurrant juice, who always buys a big share of my yield. We have a relationship based on trust: he knows that my currants are fresh and of good quality. I always respect the authorized residue level of plant protection products. This is our way to work with each other.” More than 10 years ago, Michael took over his parents’ farm. He has been trained as an industrial mechanic, but just like his father, he stayed with the family farm. Generation after generation, the Bullingers seem to have a passion for mechanics and love to fiddle about with machines. But their loyalty towards the farm is even stronger.



Blackcurrant field, Bullinger



Rolf, Emmi, Michael & Anemone
Bullinger



Obsthof Bullinger



Michael opening the gate to his machinery

Blackcurrants in Kupfer - How it all started

Michael's father Rolf confesses that his own passion for mechanics was one of the reasons why he started to grow blackcurrants. "My parents wanted me to take over the farm. But I didn't want to have cattle, so I chose to develop the fruits we already had: mainly apple or pear trees, but also some blackcurrants and strawberries." In the late 1960ies and early 1970ies, the market was favorable for blackcurrants. The growers got a very good price for their fruits - 5 Deutsche Mark per kilo (which would nowadays be worth more than 5 Euro). But they were handpicked! And whoever has already picked blackcurrants by hands can easily understand how fastidious it is - and the price was well justified. Rolf thought about specializing in blackcurrants, and needed to improve the harvest. Therefore, he worked on a machine that could harvest the currants. He built a harvester himself, with an existing chain saw that he adapted for rattling and removing the currants from the bushes.

Building up a German blackcurrant Association in the 1980ies

After his marriage with Emmi, they both specialized on blackcurrants only, and grew them on 75 hectares - which was almost half of the whole German blackcurrant grown surface. There had already been blackcurrant conferences on a European scale since the 1980ies. The German blackcurrant association is, by the way, closely linked to the Bullingers and would probably not exist without them. It was Rolf who created it in 1983.

Professional blackcurrant harvesters

In the same year, Emmi reminds, the Bullingers made a most memorable one-day-trip to Dijon (France) with a Cessna of one of their business partners. “We were told that there was an exhibition of blackcurrant harvesters, and that we should absolutely go there. Of course, it was interesting, but how could we go there? So he took us there with a plane, but we didn’t even know exactly where the exhibition was. Neither did we speak any French. When we arrived at the airport close to Dijon, we took a taxi. It was difficult to make the driver understand what we wanted, and of course, he didn’t know about this exhibition. We drove through the vineyards - and finally saw those harvesters. It was quite an adventure.”



Michael Bullinger and one of his sprayers

Machines - more than a hobby for Michael Bullinger

Nevertheless, when it comes to blackcurrant growing, technical skills are most welcome: Michael has worked on his New Holland harvester. By making some changes, he is able to deliver very clean blackcurrants: no twigs any more with the currants!



Blackcurrant field (Ben Tron),
Bullinger



spraying blackcurrants



spraying blackcurrants



red currant field (Rowada)

A tour of the farm - in cold conditions

We have finished our coffee, and Michael suggests to have a tour of the farm and his fields. It is quite cold outside for this season - and Michael is worried. The weather forecast predicts two very cold nights for the same evening already - and his currants are in full blossoming. "My yield will be decreased by 90% if we have such a strong night frost. -7°C will kill the currants."

Obsthof Bullinger

But not only the currants, also apples and pears will freeze - which are Michael's second income: his farm is a collecting point, where he is storing and fermenting the mashes for the production of industrial alcohol. "This has been done here for long years. But this year will be the last time. I want to stop this business and concentrate on my farming. Mashing my currants, which my buyers always fetch with their trucks, will be my focus. I don't sell any blackcurrants for IQF." Moreover, his parents are getting older. Without their help, Michael couldn't face the work on his farm and for the collecting point.



Collecting point for apples & pears



view of the soil around Kupfer

Michael Bullinger and his blackcurrant fields

Michael drives me through his fields, and black or red currants are all around the hilly landscape. The soil is not perfect, as he confesses. The layer of fertile land is not deep, and not all varieties grow well. He had a very bad experience in 2015 with Ben Hope, which completely dried out with the heat - whereas normally, it gives very good results. Michael chooses the varieties according to their sugar and acidity content. But of course, agronomic aspects take over. Variety Tiben doesn't give a good yield, and Michael now decreases the 16 hectares he had

already planted with them.



8 year-old field of Ben Hope, dried in 2015



Flowering field of Tisel

He looks concerned, while walking through his field of flowering Tisel. “They will all freeze tonight”, he declares. “But whatever, that’s how it is. I will have less work in July then - and more time for my machines, hobbies, and of course for my wife and third baby to come”, he smiles. “Next year will be better for my blackcurrants.”



Michael Bullinger looking at his flowering Tisel

Blackcurrant beer - another nice Polish initiative



A blackcurrant beer named “SALAMANDER Blackcurrant Berliner Weisse beer”. The inauguration took place in Poland in mid-July and is the outcome of a collaboration between the Polish Blackcurrant Growers Association (KSPCP) and Browar Stu Mostów

brewery.

For video “Blackcurrants bring together producers and brewers” please visit <https://youtu.be/bDwgBfc0USA>

Collaboration of Polish brewers and growers

The joint project brought together the competences of brewers and growers. Both enjoy a strong position: Poland is one of the leaders in the production of berries and one of the leaders of the beer revolution. The brewing market is one of the fastest growing sectors of the Polish economy. With more than 1.500 new beers launched every year in Poland, craft brewing builds the creative capital and strengthens the regional identity. For the first time in Poland, the project joins the forces of a trade organization of producers and a craft brewery. The aim is to promote the potential of collaboration between brewers and growers.



The product launch ceremony was held simultaneously in Wrocław and Lublin. Wrocław is the seat of Browar Stu Mostów. The city hosts the highest number of beer projects and the most important brewing events in Poland. People also call it the “Capital of Good Beer”. Lublin is the capital of the region, responsible for 1/3 of the global production of blackcurrant.

Partners

Collaboration projects and products created in Poland can have a significant effect on the popularity of blackcurrants worldwide. According to the KSPCP, the creativity of Polish brewers can significantly help growers.

Browar Stu Mostów is the most international craft brewery in Poland. It was the first one in Poland to make beer together with brewers from the US, Germany and Spain. Among other brands, the brewery promotes its WRCLW Schöps beer,

which is the wheat symbol of Wrocław, ART and Salamander. Beers of all three brands have won medals at the most prestigious competitions in Poland, Europe and the US.

The blackcurrant beer was launched under the Salamander brand. Salamander is an old beer, which emerged at the beginning of the 19th century in Wrocław. It shows the power of meeting over a beer, friendship and respect. Up to the present day, during feasts held by German student corporations, they still cultivate and practice this custom. Product-wise, it is of course a new-wave beer.



What makes the specificity of this blackcurrant beer?



“In addition to the colour, the flavour and the aroma, blackcurrant also adds extra acidity. Beers of this kind are gaining popularity, with the Berliner Weisse style going through a real revival. This is a trend we should take advantage of” claims **Mateusz Gulej**, Chief Brewer of the Browar Stu Mostów brewery. The blackcurrant beer is a very interesting beer. It has a very low gravity, and only bright malts - Pilsner and wheat - have been used. That is what makes the beer so light. The low, almost impalpable bitterness is due to the use of the noble Tettnanger hops. The brewers add the blackcurrants at the late stage of fermentation and aging. Blackcurrants gave the beer its

characteristic flavour and aroma and emphasized its acidic profile even more. The Salamander blackcurrant beer is available at the best multitap pubs and beer stores across Poland and in the Czech Republic, Germany, Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Spain.

Berliner Weisse - a bit of history

The “Berliner Weisse” is a hazy, acidic, wheat style of beer with low alcohol content; a regional, historic beer from Northern Germany, particularly Berlin, where it has been brewed since the 16th century. By the end of the 19th century “Berliner Weisse” was the most popular alcoholic beverage in Berlin: 50 different breweries produced it. Today, the number has dropped to just two.

The visit of the IBA Exec to Poland

The IBA Executive (President Anthony Snell, vice-president Jens Holme Pedersen and General Manager Stefanie Sharma) visited the world’s biggest blackcurrant producer: Poland. Their 3-days trip was very nicely organized by Piotr Baryla, the Polish vice-president of the IBA and president of the KSPCP. It allowed a deep insight into the situation for blackcurrants in Poland. A short, but very constructive and busy trip.

The scope

When Anthony Snell took over the presidency of the IBA in 2016, he clearly expressed his wish for the IBA to reconcile supply with demand on the global blackcurrant market. As Poland is currently producing more than half of the world's supply, he felt the need to learn more about the Polish production. The tight 3 days schedule included visits of farms, collecting points and processors. Very interesting discussions could take place. Thanks to the support of the KSPCP (the Polish blackcurrant association), SVZ, Weremczuk and Bayer, the cost of the trip could be kept low for the limited IBA funding.

Blackcurrants in Poland - first impressions



The IBA Exec members and Dr Dorota Jarret from the James Hutton Institute in Dundee met small, medium and big growers all around Lublin. This is the main blackcurrant growing area in Poland. When driving through the countryside, you can see blackcurrant fields all around. Sometimes just a few rows, evidently belonging to a small farm nearby. Sometimes huge fields of several hectares. Of course, there are not only blackcurrants. Lublin is an area where you can find all kinds of fruits: cherries, raspberries, red currants, strawberries, apples, gooseberries, blackberries - there is no end to the list. Not to forget the vegetables and any other farming product.



raspberry plantation



gooseberry plantation



blackcurrant plantation

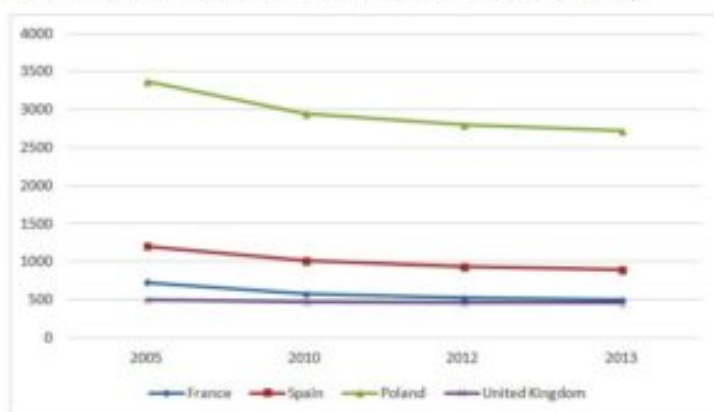
Agriculture in Poland

Compared to other European countries, the population economically active in agriculture in Poland is very high. This is already the starting point of the Polish specificity among the other blackcurrant growing countries: Poland's population of roughly 38.5 million inhabitants is still very attached to agriculture. Almost 40% live in rural areas, and 6% of the total population is employed in agriculture (2.3 million people). But this number doesn't take into account all the people who have their main occupation - and who have some fields and practice agriculture in

their “leisure” time.

In 2014, according to the GUS (Central Statistical Office of Poland), about 52 percent of the private farms were smaller than five hectares. Of the remaining farms, 22 percent were between five and ten hectares and 11 percent were between ten and fifteen hectares. Only 14 percent of private farms were larger than fifteen hectares. It is interesting to note that this distribution has only slightly changed since 1987.

ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE POPULATION IN AGRICULTURE (in thous.)



A long visit in a few Pictures



small blackcurrant field of a non professional grower



Jens Pedersen and Anthony Snell
evaluating a blackcurrant field



well entertained blackcurrant field



spring frost affected 2017
yield



row of blackcurrants as a fence in
front of a house

Talks with a farmer and manager of a collecting point
(on the right)



“Our break-even point is of 1.5
zloty/kg over 6 years.”



Andrzej Szwaczyna from SVZ,
showing one of his farmers'
blackcurrant bushes

Dr Dorota Jarret in talks with a KSPCP grower,
together with journalists from “Jagodnik” and “Plantpress”



talks with a young grower (non

KSPCP member) in a field of Tisel



“My best yield of Tisel was in 2015, when I got 21t/ha. Normally, it gives 16t.”



Evaluation of spring
frost damages

Independent blackcurrant grower



“Before Poland entered the EU, prices were better for blackcurrants.”



visit of one of the private farms



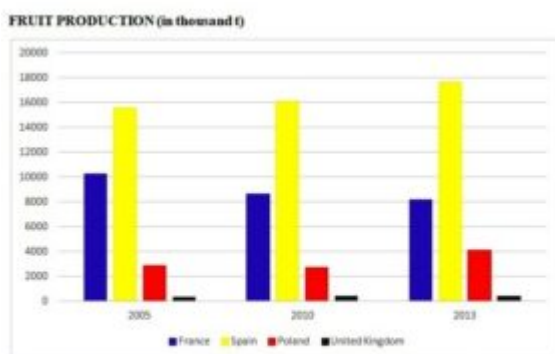
Anthony Snell interested in the machinery of one of

the farmers

Growing blackcurrants in Poland

Our visits led us only on private farms, some of them belonging to members of the KSPCP (the Polish blackcurrant association), some to non members. Actually, it is important to remind that Poland produces around 130.000 tonnes of blackcurrants, for a global blackcurrant market of an estimated volume of 600.000 tonnes annually (according to the ierigz - The Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics). Russia is the global leader in terms of blackcurrant production volume, however it mainly produces for its own market. Therefore, the production of blackcurrants in Poland is currently the highest for the global market.

Comparison of Europe's largest fruit producers



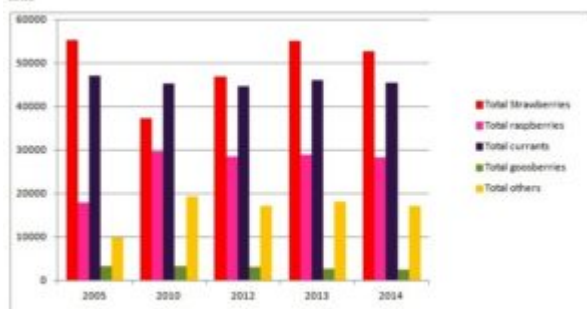
Whereas fruit production is stable in the UK, it decreases in France. It keeps increasing in Spain and Poland.

Source: GUS Statistical Yearbook of Agriculture 2013

Berry plantations in Poland

CULTIVATED AREA OF BERRY PLANTATIONS

in ha



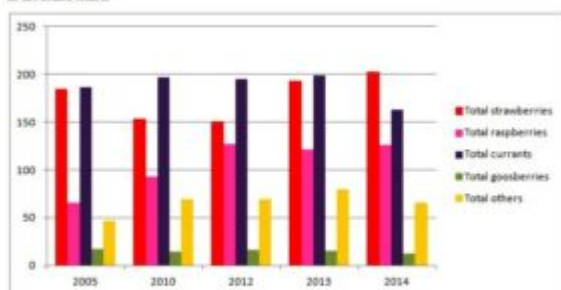
Until 2014, currants (red and black currants) had the second highest ground of cultivated areas. The cultivation of currants is obviously of a great importance in Poland.

Source: GUS Statistical Yearbook of Agriculture 2015

Berry production in Poland

PRODUCTION OF BERRY FRUITS AND HAZELNUTS

in thousand tonnes



Currants have the highest production level (except 2014).

Source: GUS Statistical Yearbook of Agriculture 2015

Keeping these figures in mind, the producers who are members of the KSPCP are only few: around 50. And they do not even produce 10% of all the blackcurrants in Poland. As mentioned above, half of all farms are smaller than 5 hectares – but they account for a huge amount of the agricultural production in Poland. The production of more than 70% of all blackcurrants in Poland is therefore mostly uncontrolled and impossible to cover statistically.



Piotr Baryla with his son Michal and
Miroslaw Korzeniowski (Bayer)

Piotr Baryla, Vice President of the IBA and President of the KSPCP keeps reminding that it is important to ally forces in order to be stronger. His association is working hard for the promotion of blackcurrants, the creation of new products, and of course the sharing of information. “Sustainable blackcurrant growing is one of the major challenges of the coming years. We work closely together with Bayer for this. But most of the growers in Poland are mainly interested in prices. And as long as we don’t have the majority of the Polish blackcurrant growers in our association, we have no strength. Making contracts with the processors and guaranteeing sales of the currants of our members for a good price is what we work on.”

Big players and KSPCP members



Wieslaw Blocki, sharing experiences with
another KSPCP member



Wiesław Blocki talking with Michał Piątek
(magazine “Jagodnik”)

The situation for the numerous small growers is, of course, totally different from big growers, like the Blockis. Those who have attended the 2014 conference in Poland know them well, and have even visited their farm: they work together with seven other big growers for selling their currants. And they farm a total of 800 hectares of blackcurrants.

Of course, they try to sell their fruits under contracts, and are able to produce certificates. Although this is a proof of quality for their production, these certifications are now considered standard on the global blackcurrant market. But in comparison with products from the small farmers, they still justify higher prices. Traceability is more and more important.

Processing blackcurrants in Poland



from l. to r.: Piotr Podoba (Döhler),
Jens Pedersen, Stefanie Sharma,
Anthony Snell



Döhler plant in Mogielnica

Our visit to one of the 4 major processing plants in Poland belonging to Döhler confirmed this: the 32 professional juice concentrate processors in Poland look for traceability of their raw material. They can get it from the members of the KSPCP and a few independent big growers.

But the requirements of course depend on the requirements of their own customers - who mainly look for good prices.



Collection point

Situation for small growers

The small growers bring their currants to collecting points. These collecting points belong to private farms, the owners of the farms are in charge of their administration. As far as the infrastructure is concerned, the European Union has financed a huge part of it over the past fifteen years.

We could therefore see very nice facilities, very modern and perfectly equipped. Some of them directly process the fruits in freezing tunnels for IQF. One of the collection points we have visited collects between 80 and 100 tonnes of blackcurrants per day during the harvest - which amounts to a total of over 2.000 tonnes over the whole harvesting period! These blackcurrants come from around 200 growers.



grower arriving at a collection point

Now, there is of course not just one collecting point in whole Poland - but one or two per fruit growing village. In total, there may be between 3.000 and 4.000 collecting points for blackcurrants in whole Poland, of different sizes. The KSPCP estimates the total number of blackcurrant growers in Poland at 15.000. Given these figures, everybody can easily understand how difficult it is to give a clear and complete view of the situation.

Harvesting blackcurrants in Poland

If there are still some ignorant people who think that farmers in Poland pick their blackcurrants by hands, they will be surprised. Most of the blackcurrant growers in Poland, even those who have less than 5 ha, have their harvester. Weremczuk, one of the main manufacturers of harvesting machines, has its headquarter not far from Lublin. We therefore had a short visit to their production unit. In fact, since the origin of the company, their business changed from the manufacturing of mainly blackcurrant harvesters to harvesters for almost every fruit. Robert Weremczuk told us that today, he can see big growers reducing their blackcurrant production.



The Weremczuk headquarter in
Niedzwica Duza



ready to sell machinery



Robert Weremczuk proudly showing
rewards



a Weremczuk blackcurrant harvester

3 days to evaluate the situation: is it enough?

Of course, no one can get a clear view and learn everything about blackcurrants in Poland in only 3 days. Yet, thanks to a nice organization of the trip and thanks to all the people involved in the visit, we could understand a lot. And we can only encourage everyone who wants to know more about the Polish position in blackcurrant growing to have a look at his or her own. Within a few visits (and the Polish farmers will give a warm welcome!), it is easily understandable:

There is a long lasting tradition of growing, processing and consuming blackcurrants in Poland. Agriculture in general is still very important for a majority of the population. Machinery and knowledge about plant protection, variety research and growing methods are there. Many big farmers perfectly know what they do and produce fruit of very good quality. On the other hand, there are thousands of small farmers who more or less respect modern growing methods. They continue to produce a huge part of the agricultural output.

Want to know more?

Will the production in Poland increase or decrease in the coming years? Will the processing industry put more pressure on the farmers for the quality of their fruits? At the IBA conference 2018, Anthony Snell will further speak about his thoughts on the Polish industry and its effect on world production and prices.

In the meantime, if you want to read more about the trip, please check out the articles from the two journalists of Jagodnik and Plantpress who came along with the IBA representatives, on <http://www.blackcurrant-iba.com/press/media-releases/>



(picture taken after the interview with press)

from l. to r. Stefanie Sharma (General Manager IBA), Anthony Snell (President IBA), Dr. Dorota Jarret (Fruit Breeder, James Hutton Institute), Jens Pedersen (Vice-President IBA)

Windmill Hill - an insight in the IBA President's farm



**Anthony Snell,
President of the
International
Blackcurrant
Association since
June 2016, opens the
doors of his farm for**



us.

Professionalism, perfection and experience in Herefordshire, UK.

Visited in March 2017



The first impression of a visitor at Windmill Hill in Western England will be “WOW”. And it will also be the last impression, after having a deep look into Anthony Snell’s business. As it proudly shows on banners, Windmill Hill is where you will get the “berry” best from Herefordshire.



For many years, Anthony Snell and his wife Christine have been running the family business in beautiful hilly and green Herefordshire. Berries are their speciality, and among these: blackcurrants. Anthony has a field manager for the strictly agronomic part of his business, but keeps an eye on everything - and knows everything about blackcurrants.

**“Blackcurrant production must meet the demand of the market”
says Anthony Snell**

Anthony's blackcurrant farm is of average size - and average in the UK means 70 - 100 hectares. He is one of the 8 blackcurrant growers in Herefordshire, who are part of the British Blackcurrant Foundation. The other members of the foundation, in total around 40 blackcurrant farmers in the whole United



Kingdom, grow their blackcurrants for the needs of Ribena. This represents 90% of the crop in the country. Ribena, a blackcurrant based British soft drink brand owned today by Suntory, contracts the blackcurrant growing for their needs with British growers.

The “Ribena-system”

The contract between Ribena and the British Blackcurrant Foundation is the basis for good relationships between growers and processors. Here, the production corresponds to the needs, and everybody is happy: a certain price level is fixed approximately within a contract that lasts for seven years. Prices are, of course, adjusted after the harvest, according to the quality of the currants. But it ensures the growers to sell their currants, and it ensures Ribena good growing conditions for “their” currants.





Anthony buys blackcurrant cuttings of “Ribena varieties” from a certified producer. And he only plants a certain amount of blackcurrants, paying royalties for the amount of cuttings he plants. “Last year, I had to remove blackcurrants from some areas (variety Ben Hope), because I produced too much”, explains Anthony. Five times a year, Harriet Roberts, agronomic adviser from LRS (Lucozade Ribena Suntory), visits every farmer. Together with a newsletter that she sends twice a month, this part of the contract. It helps the growers with professional agronomic advice.

Organic blackcurrants from Windmill Hill



Where there is no place for “Ribena”-blackcurrants, Anthony grows organic. Blackcurrants of variety Ben Tirran represent 20% of the total area. Here, hand weeding and hand fertilizing is taking over from spraying and work with huge machines for the first 2



years of the plantation. The strict respect of organic growing methods will guarantee a good yield - which is half of the conventional yield. “In conventional growing, 7 tonnes per hectare is a good average”, says Anthony.

Windmill Hill sells its organic blackcurrants to companies who make organic yogurts or cordial, for example. But this is not all: Anthony has his own storage and packing facilities for IQF berries - and he sells them online.

The “berry” best from Herefordshire



Apart from blackcurrants, Windmill Hill produces



raspberries (40ha), a thousand tonnes of strawberries a year, together with some blueberries, chuckleberries and blackberries. During the harvesting season, around 300 seasonal staff join the permanent workers. They come from Bulgaria, Romania or Poland, and Anthony and Christine are very concerned by their well-being. They provide accommodation in mobile homes on the farm for some of them, and they have their football and tennis facilities for spare time activities.





During the tour of the farm, Anthony gives some details about his blackcurrant farming. “Ben Alder is the variety which has the best yield here with 4t/acre (10t/hectare). It is a very consistent variety”, explains Anthony. “We have an average of 600mm of rain per year. When we plant

cuttings, we keep them under polythene for the first 3 years. This is part of the recommendation of Ribena: it keeps weeds away and moisture in. We keep our plantations for 10 to 12 years, in general.”



Furthermore, hedges delimit the blackcurrant fields. It is part of the environmental commitment from the Ribena growers. Hedges, flowers and wildlife are present everywhere on the farms.

At the end of the tour, Anthony shows us his machinery. Not far from harvesting machines, tractors, sprayers and all the other farming material, some cows have their paddock. “This is Christine’s hobby”, smiles Anthony. Because even though fruits have become an expanding activity in the Western Midlands, Hereford cattle is probably still its most famous export.



Whether growers or processors are concerned: the right variety can make a huge difference!



Lots of blackcurrant varieties exist all over the world. New cultivars are being bred in almost every blackcurrant growing country. It is certainly difficult to make the right choice among over 150 cultivars. The criteria of the fruit growers may be economic (time of flowering and harvesting, yield potential...) or agronomic (resistance to diseases for example).

What is of interest to processors, though, has much more to do with the chemical composition of the fruits: acidity, sugar content, color, taste... Some processors will accept only certain currants to achieve the best result in their products.

This is the case, for example, for the production of Ribena in the UK. Or on the other side of the Channel, French liqueur manufacturers like Vedrenne or others, will not accept more than four or five very specific varieties. What matters to them is the taste of their products. And not to forget: the insurance to have the best quality from contracted growers.