

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a dark blue jacket and blue jeans, stands in the center of a long, narrow aisle in a large cellar. The cellar is filled with rows of dark wooden barrels stacked on both sides. The ceiling is made of dark wood beams, and the floor is concrete. In the background, there is a large wooden barrel with a crest on it. The overall atmosphere is warm and industrial.

Unlocking the Potential of Dutch Cider

Sophie Horstink
NUFFIELD THE NETHERLAND 2024

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF DUTCH CIDER

01

Sophie Horstink

Sophie Horstink

I grew up in Rha, in the picturesque Achterhoek region of the Netherlands, on my family's fruit farm. Together with my brother, I cultivate mainly apples and pears, complemented by plums and cherries. A large share of our harvest is sold through our farm shop, which also offers other vegetables, fruits, and regional specialties, always with a focus on quality.

02

My journey around the world

At fifteen, I started my own cherry stall at a busy ferry crossing, selling fruit directly to consumers. During my studies in Business Administration and Agrifood Business at HAS Den Bosch, I based my graduation project on my own business. As the fourth generation, I added a new chapter to our family farm by launching Cider van de Groote Wei, named after the farmstead our family has called home since the 1920s.

03

Research question

In addition to making cider, I created an orchard terrace where visitors can enjoy homemade pastries or taste a range of ciders while overlooking the orchard, often combined with a guided tour. For several years, I have been producing cider from fruit that doesn't meet retail standards, ensuring every apple and pear has a purpose. The entire production takes place on the farm, keeping the process short and local.

04

Conclusion

Through my Nuffield Farming Scholarship, I am now exploring international cider traditions, orchard practices, and strategies to strengthen the position of Dutch cider at home and abroad.

Sophie's scholarship is supported by



NUFFIELD
Farming Scholarships

02 My journey around the world

The Nuffield trip took me to a wide range of countries: Brazil, Australia, India, Qatar, Ireland, Mexico, England, Luxembourg, Spain, the United States, Germany, France, and Norway. Everywhere I gained new insights into the agricultural sector, both positive and negative. It made me reflect on global food security, the abundance of food available year-round, and how we treat people, animals, and the environment. It also helped me clarify the path I want to take to run a profitable and sustainable business.

Beyond knowledge, the trip also brought a lot on a personal level. I built friendships, learned about hospitality, and reflected on what truly matters in private life: choosing a life partner, valuing family, and how we treat one another. Stepping out of my comfort zone allowed me to better understand how people react differently to situations, which gave me greater insight into human nature. Above all, it gave me a deep appreciation for my background and family, and a sense of gratitude for where I come from and where I am today.

03 Research question

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF DUTCH CIDER

3.1 Fruit Cultivation

Apples are essential for cider production, and there are roughly four main types used in the cider world. **Sweet apples** are low in acid and tannins, such as Jonagold. **Sharp apples** are high in acid but low in tannins, with Goudreinet being a well-known example. **Bittersweet apples** are low in acid but high in tannins, while **Bittersharp apples** are high in both acid and tannins. A good cider is often created by balancing these four flavor profiles.

On a global scale, apple production is dominated by a few major countries. China is by far the largest producer, followed by the United States, Poland, Turkey, and India. Together, these countries account for the majority of the world's apple market, although the intended use of the fruit varies per region, from fresh consumption to processing into juice or cider.

During my trip, I observed how differently apple cultivation and usage are organized across countries and regions. In **Somerset (UK)**, I visited commercial orchards such as Thatchers, where cider apples are produced on a large scale. Harvesting is mostly mechanized, making it feel more like arable farming than the fruit cultivation typical in the Netherlands. This contrasts sharply with our own orchard in the Netherlands, which is smaller in scale and focuses mainly on hand-picked apples for cider production.

In **Luxembourg**, they work with collective orchards: private owners receive a small payment to maintain their old high-stem orchards, preserving the landscape and ensuring the continued availability of cider apples.

In the **United States**, I saw great variation: on one hand, enormous monocultures of varieties such as Honeycrisp, mainly for fresh consumption, and on the other hand, small artisanal orchards dedicated entirely to cider production with specific varieties. In **Spain**, most cidemakers buy their apples from farmers, often older, small-scale producers who grow cider apples alongside other crops or livestock. In **Normandy (France)**, cider is often a by-product of mixed farming: cows graze under high-stem trees, making the land multifunctional while keeping the cider tradition alive.

Finally, in **Norway**, cider production is largely based on hand-picked apples. Farmers often use Class 2 apples, which are not suitable for the fresh market but are perfectly suited for cider. This highlights the differences between countries: some plant specialized cider apple varieties, while others make use of surplus or imperfect fruit from hand-picking.

An interesting question that arises from this is the ratio between cider production and own apple production. Some countries, like France and Spain, have a centuries-old tradition in which cider apples are central, whereas in other countries, such as the Netherlands and Norway, cider is mainly made from apples intended for fresh consumption that are given a second life in cider.

3.2 Production

Global cider production reached approximately **2.53 billion liters** in 2022. The largest share comes from Western Europe, accounting for almost half of the total production (50%), followed by Africa (18%), Southern Europe (10%), and North America (7%). Eastern Europe (7%), Australia and New Zealand (7%), and Latin America (6%) also contribute, though to a lesser extent. This shows that cider is not only deeply rooted in European traditions but is increasingly gaining a foothold worldwide.

There are different production methods that strongly influence the final product and its price point. **Non-alcoholic ciders** can be made through heating, filtration, or by blending alcoholic cider back with water or juice. Fruit additions also vary: in **co-fermenting**, apples are fermented together with other fruit, such as strawberries, whereas in **flavoring**, the fruit juice is added after fermentation.

Production costs depend largely on the method used. A cheaper approach is to add sugar to apple juice, increasing the alcohol content during fermentation. This cider can then be diluted back with water or juice. While simpler and more cost-effective, this process is considered less artisanal than pure apple-based fermentation. To stabilize cider, it can be **pasteurized** or **filtered**, with filtration having the advantage of preserving more flavor.

According to Nuffield scholar and cider expert Neill McDonalds, there are roughly three categories of cider on the market. First, **0.75-liter craft bottles**, often intended as a special product to pair with food or for celebratory occasions. Second, more accessible **authentic craft ciders in 500 ml bottles**, typically priced around £2–3 per bottle. Finally, there is **mainstream cider**, produced by large brands such as Thatchers, which appeals to a broad audience and is consumed widely on a daily basis.

3.3 Experience

The experience surrounding cider is as important as the product itself in many countries. In some cases, the experience is even decisive for a producer's success. A striking example is **Wilkins Cider** in Somerset. Each year, they sell over 100,000 liters of cider without a label or logo, often in bag-in-box or plain jerrycans. The appeal lies not in the packaging but in the name and the experience on the farm, people come specifically to be part of the tradition and atmosphere.

Another example from Somerset is **North Down Orchard**, where 200 to 300 visitors gather every Friday and Saturday evening during the summer between 6:00 and 9:00 pm. With a food truck, cider taps, and live music, it creates an accessible and enjoyable social setting. The cidery also presses apples for third parties, but the majority of their own cider is sold directly on these summer evenings. This demonstrates how direct contact with consumers and an experience around the product strongly contribute to success.

Larger initiatives also cater to this demand. The **Somerset Cider & Apple Juice Route**, for example, brings together around twenty producers who open their doors to visitors, linking cider to tourism, local identity, and education.

In the **United States**, a different model is common: cider taprooms are almost everywhere. These are often more extensive, combining food, drinks, education, and orchard tours. It is not just about drinking cider, but about a complete experience where gastronomy and hospitality come together.

In **Asturias (Spain)**, cider is not just a drink but an essential part of the regional culture. There are specialized cider restaurants where the traditional pouring method is central. Cider is also widely used in cooking, and tours are integrated into daily tourism.

In **Normandy (France)**, cider is also closely linked to gastronomy. It is common to serve cider at lunch, often paired with local dishes. Furthermore, a tourist route connects different producers, with tastings and tours enhancing the overall experience.

These examples show that the value of cider lies not only in the glass but also in the stories, traditions, and interactions surrounding it. The experience strengthens the identity of the product and creates an emotional connection between producer and consumer.

3.4 Tasting

Cider has a wide range of styles and flavors worldwide. In general, sweet ciders are often considered less complex or more accessible, while drier varieties are more appreciated in the craft sector. Serving temperature plays an important role: **light body ciders** are best served at 7–10 °C, **medium to full body ciders** slightly warmer at 10–15 °C, **sweet ciders** at 6–7 °C, and **draft (tap) ciders** slightly cooler at 3–7 °C.

Cider's versatility is particularly evident in culinary pairings. The interplay of flavors can enhance or balance each other. For example, combining **acid and salt** can make a cider feel less dry, while **sweetness and umami** can make a cider seem drier.

Some concrete pairings illustrate cider's broad applicability:

- **Light body cider** pairs beautifully with oysters, brie, or bacon.
- **Hopped cider** works well with fresh goat cheese.
- **Semi-dry cider** complements fried calamari.
- **Sweet ice cider** is surprisingly strong with blue cheese.
- **Dry cider** pairs excellently with a hearty schnitzel.

Beyond food pairings, cider can also play a role in **cocktails**. By replacing soda or sparkling wine with cider, it adds freshness and complexity, making it a versatile ingredient that can stand alone or elevate existing drinks.

04 Conclusion

Conclusion – Fruit Cultivation

Internationally, some countries grow specialized cider apple varieties, while others mainly use second-class hand-picked apples. This shows that there is no single route to making good cider; local conditions and traditions are decisive. For my own business, using our second-class hand-picked apples is a valuable and sustainable choice. It demonstrates that I can produce a high-quality product with existing resources while reducing waste.

Conclusion – Production

Global cider production is highly diverse, ranging from artisanal to large-scale industrial. The production method not only determines the price but also the positioning of the product. For my business, there is an opportunity to strengthen the artisanal character through natural fermentation and minimal additives. This sets me apart from mainstream ciders and allows me to tell a stronger story as a local producer.

Conclusion – Experience

Cider is associated worldwide with hospitality, tourism, and regional culture. Whether it is taprooms in the US, cider restaurants in Asturias, or summer evenings at orchards in Somerset, the experience around the product is central. This underlines the importance of our orchard terrace and cider festival: here, I can not only let visitors taste the cider but also share the story of the orchard and my production. This turns the farm into a place where people experience cider, not just drink it.

Conclusion – Tasting

Proper serving temperature, food pairings, and even use in cocktails show that cider is more versatile than many people think. For my own business, this means I can act as a guide for flavor experiences: inspiring guests with pairings, offering tastings, and promoting cider in the hospitality sector. In this way, my product becomes not just a drink, but a culinary discovery.

Overall Conclusion

To increase the awareness, appreciation, and distribution of Dutch cider, it is essential that the sector strengthens its position both collectively and individually. International examples show that success depends not only on production, but even more on experience, education, and culinary integration.

Strategically, the Dutch cider producers can focus on three pillars:

1. **Increase awareness**

Raising public awareness requires collaboration between cider producers, *CiderNederland*, and regional tourism boards to develop cider routes, organize public festivals, and communicate the story of Dutch fruit cultivation and sustainability. The government can play a facilitating role by supporting regional product promotion and sustainable agri-food initiatives.

2. **Enhance appreciation**

To elevate cider's reputation, producers, hospitality schools, and professional associations can link cider more closely to gastronomy and culinary pairings. Structured tastings, professional training (such as cider guides or sommeliers), and joint events can help position cider as a fully recognized beverage category alongside wine and beer.

3. **Improve distribution**

Strengthening collaboration with the hospitality sector and specialty retailers will be key to expanding market access. Joint marketing efforts, partnerships with food concepts, and engagement in international networks can increase visibility and sales opportunities. Public programs that encourage innovation, export, and sustainable production could further accelerate this growth.

For my own business, this means not only continuing to refine my products, but also actively contributing to the development of a shared Dutch cider identity. Through storytelling, on-farm experiences, and collaborations with the hospitality sector, I aim to showcase that Dutch cider deserves a distinct place on both the national and international stage.

Cider Festival – 16 August 2025

As the final outcome of my Nuffield project, I organized a cider festival at De Groote Wei in Rha. The event brought together Dutch cidemakers, food trucks, and visitors from across the region to celebrate local cider culture in the orchard. During the festival, I also gave a presentation on my Nuffield travels and key findings. The day highlighted how on-farm experiences can connect consumers with producers and strengthen the identity of Dutch cider. A short impression video is available on my Instagram: [**@degrootewei**](#).