

A visit to a biological fruit farm

This Tuesday the pupils of our cooking group went on a small trip to a biological fruit farm. When we stopped at the farm, we saw a small barn with a shop attached to it. The keepers of the farm sell vegetables, fruit and drinks. The fruit and some of the drinks are homemade, but the vegetables are from other farmers.

The farm itself is quite small. It's only 20 hectares in which only fruits are cultivated. They don't plant any corn, only fruits like strawberries, raspberries, cherries, apples and pears. Of the 20 hectares of ground, about 9 hectares are used for the growth of strawberries, which in comparison to other farmers isn't that big. They also have 1 hectare reserved for the growth of raspberries, which is a lot of space in comparison to other farms.

The farm itself has some really old apple trees, some of which date back to the 1930's. It's quite extraordinary that some trees are that old, because every two years there's a new demand in apple varieties. So every 2 years or so, farmers have to plant or produce new or additional apple trees in order to keep the customers happy. This may pose a problem for some of the smaller farmers, since in the first and second year of a tree's life it only produces about 2 kg per tree. Only after 5 years a tree produces 20 kg or more.

The farm has also planted lots of strawberry plants. The strawberries grow in quite small fields under some kind of plastic sheet. The sheet's purpose is to provide heat. In the morning, when it's still cold outside, the temperature beneath the sheets can be up to 30 degrees. At noon it has already dropped to 20-25 degrees. The farmers use this method with the sheets because they want to produce the strawberries in a biological way, which means they can't really use greenhouses or other ways to keep the berries warm. At the end of May the farmers expect their first batch of strawberries.

Just a few years ago, these farmers started growing cherry trees, too. But cherry trees need a few years time in order to mature, after which they start becoming edible and great cherries.

Throughout the years, the farm has never had to water its plants. There has always been enough rain, but due to the recent climate changes the farm has also had to do quite some adaptations to its infrastructure because now it's become dryer, it doesn't rain as much any more, and last year was the first year that these farmers had to water their plants.