

The trend in fruit market results

The statistics for the fruit markets show a steady decline after 2013 and we kept a record of the various influences which caused this.

Plum harvests used to be predictably ripe for a market on the last Saturday of August, but between 2013 and 2017 the plum harvests were a week late and in some years they were also poor. Some of the orchards which originally supplied the market were sold to new owners who did not have the time to participate. This made it hard to predict the amount of fruit available for the markets, and in turn hard to publicise the markets effectively in advance. Sometimes customers would arrive to find that the plums were sold out, which discouraged them from coming the following year. Apple harvests have been steadier than plums but the public has much less interest in them, most people preferring clean, shiny apples of standard varieties which they buy with their weekly groceries.

In broad terms, the downward trend has been due to unpredictability of the crop, declining ability of the orchard owners to pick their fruit, reducing ability of our volunteers to pick the fruit and difficulties of communication with both the orchard owners and the buying public.

In 2021 we conducted a survey to test the attitude of the public as an aid to planning the future of NOG. We had 40 online responses and 6 responses on paper. The responses were very positive about the relevance of the fruit markets and pruning classes, and there were some interesting comments about how they might be extended. Also, new people had moved into the town who were unaware of the existence of the fruit markets and the history of the orchards until the survey reached them.

In the early years, orchard owners had been identified by a survey of Newburgh's fruit trees and communication with their owners was mainly through personal contact, local newspapers and shop window posters. As those channels became more difficult or less available, we began to communicate more through our website, e-mail and, more recently, Facebook.

However, the survey revealed that many of our customers and growers use only one or two of Facebook, e-mail or internet, and some use none of these, relying still on personal contact, posters or newspapers. This presents us with a challenge to reach all of the possible suppliers and customers by whatever means is suitable for them.