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Apple is one of the most widely produced fruits in the World and appreciated – as fruit in general – for its health benefits. With more than 18,000 ha South Tyrol has the largest contiguous apple growing area in the World, accounting for more than 12% of the EU-28's apple production. Contrary to the global trend of increasing farm sizes, South Tyrolean apple orchards are run by small farmer families, which own ca. 2.5 ha land on average.

Two key factors helped to overcome the numerous challenges in apple production and the fragmented land ownership: innovation and cooperation. Today, more than 90% of the production are marketed by cooperatives, making the small family holdings competitive on the globalized apple market. The last decades have seen a significant increase of productivity, but also a focus on sustainability. The region pioneered the integrated production in the late 80's and is leading the European organic apple production with up to 40% of the EU-28's harvest. However, numerous challenges, including climate change, invasive pests, and changing consumer expectations threaten the fruit production in South Tyrol and in the EU in general. In the future, an increased focus on innovation and sustainability will be required to serve the World's population with even more delicious, healthier and more sustainably produced apples.