

South Tyrol: Pesticide ban affects Italy's famed apple region

Detail Introduction :

In South Tyrol, apple growers are waiting for Italy's highest administrative court to decide if pesticides stay or go. For decades, there has been a reliance on chemicals to produce the food that feeds the continent. The work to make the small community of Mals, a village close to the Swiss and Austrian borders, pesticide-free is an ongoing battle. Almost eight years ago, the municipality, feeling let down by state and EU law, took pesticides, took things into its own hands. Agriculture in Mals had become intensive, and with this came heavy pesticide use. The rural community was determined to push back. In 2014, they held a referendum in which three-quarters of the residents voted to limit the use of pesticides radically.

The result alerted not only conventional farmers who already had fruit orchards in the municipality. It became an issue for the whole province of South Tyrol, where the apple industry has an annual turnover between €500 and €600 million. Half of all apples consumed in Italy are produced here, and 10 percent of those are consumed all over Europe.

The organic share of 14 percent is relatively high compared to the European average, and most farmers use an integrated approach, where pesticides are limited. Nevertheless, the majority of plantations still rely on them heavily.