Cherry production in Sweden

...in the old days and in home gardens

Cherries have been grown in especially the southern and southwestern parts of Sweden for at least 400 years. The origin of this material is unknown but is thought to derive from Germany in most cases. Commonly mentioned are various colour forms of ‘amareller’, ‘morelér’ and ‘bigarråer’ as well as ‘Maikirschen’, ‘Spanska kirsrbäär’, ‘Brysselska Bruna’, ‘Oranienkirschen’, ‘Prinzenkirschen’, ‘Prinzensankirschen’, ‘Kentiska röda’, ‘May Dukes’, ‘Pragiska muskateller’, ‘van der Natt’, ‘Weichsel von Montmorency’ and ‘Doctor-Kirsch’. Some of these older cultivars are still being grown in home gardens together with Balsgård cultivars like Heidi and Nordia.

Cherry breeding at Balsgård

In Sweden, the breeding of cherries through directed crosses has been undertaken only at Balsgård (a unit within the Swedish University for Agricultural Sciences) in the southernmost part of the country.

Sweet cherries were thus bred at Balsgård in 1950–1980, resulting in four cultivars: Almore (Napoleon x Frogmore), Heidi (Allmän Gulröd Bigarrå x Büttners Rote Spåte), Huldra (Erianne x Allmän Gulröd Bigarrå; selected in co-operation with the fruit- and berry centre at Njøs in Norway) and Rivan (Early Rivers x Annonay). During 1970–1990, three sour cherry cultivars were bred: Kirs and Pernilla (Brysselska Bruna x Rubin), and Nordia (Tscheronorkorka x BPr24179 (Vladimir x Brysselska Bruna)). All cherry breeding at Balsgård has now been discontinued, and breeding activity has been severely reduced also in other fruit and berry crops.

and presently in the commercial orchards...

By contrast, commercial cultivation is based mainly on well-known, international sweet cherry cultivars like Stella, Van, Lapins, Merchant, Kordia, Sweetheart, Regina, Ulster, Summer Sun and Skeena. Production has, however, decreased substantially in recent years and nowadays reaches only 100–150 tonnes/year, generating a value of approximately 1.5 mill. Euros which is less than 5% of the total fruit production in Sweden. Major constraints are the fluctuating temperatures in spring which often result in devastating frost injuries during flowering, and severe berry cracking caused by rain in the summer.

As for sour cherries, commercial cultivation has ceased due to competition from imported berries, and the future looks bleak.

Conservation of genetic resources

29 cherry cultivars have been awarded a ‘mandate cultivar’ status, i.e. cultivars that have been developed or grown for a long time in Sweden. Trees of 21 mandate cultivars are preserved at the national cherry collections (clone archives) under the auspices of the Centre for Cultivated Diversity (POM, Board of Agriculture).

The largest cherry collection in Sweden is maintained at Balsgård, with 50 sweet cherry and 30 sour cherry cultivars, including both mandate cultivars and more recent material of importance for breeding and commercial production. About half of this material has been genotyped with SSR markers. The future for this collection is however uncertain, since previous funding from the University and the Board of Agriculture has been terminated.