



Jordan Fox/NW Cider Association  
**The Northwest's cideries have survived the pandemic, fires and leaf-curling hot weather with innovative ideas that offset lower tasting room sales.**

# Cider industry: Overcoming challenges

By GAIL OBERST  
 For the Capital Press

It hasn't been easy, but Northwest cider producers and the orchardists who supply them have survived a pandemic, fires and a blossom-withering heat dome.

"We have a group of really passionate cidemakers," said Emily Ritchie, executive director of the Northwest Cider Association. The association members include more than 151 cideries, allied suppliers, orchardists and enthusiasts in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and British Columbia.

Recent trends were released in January in the association's Economic Impact Report. A few months earlier, the association released its Annual Report for 2021. Because the association's membership includes a range of the region's

cideries, from the largest to smallest, the findings are important to the 150 to 200 non-member cideries as well, Ritchie said.

The reports reflect an upward trend that continues despite challenges over the past two years, Ritchie said. Innovations beginning in 2020 that included direct shipping and online ordering have made access easier for customers who could no longer visit tasting rooms.

"If you can't get in front of people, it's difficult to sell," Ritchie said. Now in its second year, the association's cider club offers its subscribers an array of samples, most of which are rare or unique. Launched in 2020, as of March 2022, club members in 35 states now purchase nearly 600 boxes of samples per quarter.

The club is just one innovation among others inspired by the pan-

demic. In 2019, about 30% of the cideries were selling online. Today, Ritchie estimates about 70% of Northwest cideries now sell online. Regulations for shipping may vary from state to state, but the Northwest has the infrastructure and support for owners who are willing to invest in shipping.

Noting the trend, in 2019 the association hired an attorney to help its members navigate shipping rules. Software and experts are now available to help track products through state regulations and licensing.

Other recent trends reflect a maturing cider industry. With the ingredients, the markets, and the infrastructure in place locally for a new business, less capital is needed to start a cidery in the Northwest, Ritchie said.

As a result, it is easier for people

in this region, especially women, to start cideries than it is in other regions. Nearly half of the cideries are owned by women in an overall beverage world where women make up 10% of leadership roles.

Still, if the recent past is any indication of the future, challenges to the cider industry, along with wine and beer businesses, won't end as masks come off.

In 2020 and 2021, the Washington apple crop was down 6%. Washington and other producers in the Northwest saw crops wither in the heat or burn in fires due to conditions that may continue. Glass shortages and other supplies that come from outside the region have pushed up prices.

"Juice prices, endless pivoting, and never before seen obstacles make it even more challeng-

ing to meet new customers in new ways," said Scott Katsma of the Seattle Cider Co. and the association's board president.

From the report and the survey (2019 statistics released in January 2022), here are a few highlights of the Northwest cider industry:

- 160 ciders were entered in the 2021 Portland International Cider Cup, one of the largest cider competitions in the nation.
- In 2021, Northwest cidemakers purchased 80 million pounds of apples.
- 48% of the association's members are women.
- The average price for cider and heirloom fruits last year was 50 cents per pound.
- The annual Northwest Cider Symposium attracted 210 virtual attendees last year and more than 200 actual attendees this year.



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