

POLSKA...



tastes good!

Food Aid for the Neediest

In terms of agriculture, one of the biggest successes of Poland's turn at the rotating presidency of the European Union, from July 1 to Dec. 31, was that a political agreement was reached on a food aid program for those especially in need across the European Union.

The agreement of the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament, which was reached with much difficulty in December, ensures that the food aid program will continue to run in 2012 and 2013.

New rules were adopted for the program to expand the range of products it covers. Now market purchases will be a regular source of supplies for the aid program with a view to replenishing stocks. The program also gives priority to produce of EU origin. Moreover, the program will be wholly financed by the EU and the financing will cover the costs of transport and storage as well as administrative costs directly related to carrying out the program. The program has been running for more than 20 years, contributing to the achievement of important Common Agricultural Policy objectives, but also to building a civil society and social development.

The EU's food aid program benefits 18 million people across the bloc. These are not only unemployed and homeless people, immigrants, elderly, socially disadvantaged citizens and those underprivileged in other ways, but also large families and single parents. Over 80 million people are at risk of poverty in the European Union, including 20 million children.

The European food aid program for the most deprived persons (PEAD) was launched in 1987 after the adoption of rules by the European Council concerning the provision of public intervention stocks of agricultural products to member states that wanted to use them as food aid for the most deprived people in the EU.

In the mid-1990s, the program was modified to enable the replenishment of intervention stocks with purchases of food on the open market. This was expected to be only a stopgap measure for use in the event of a shortage of certain products. The program as a whole was to be still based on intervention stocks. In recent years, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has changed substantially. Intervention purchases have been either completely withdrawn as a market regulatory tool or significantly phased out in the case of certain products. Consequently, over the years, the food aid program's dependence on open-market purchases increased. The Commission predicted that this might lead to difficulties related to the program and proposed a change in it. Due to opposition from six member states—Germany, Britain, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, and the Czech

Republic—the proposal was blocked in the Council of the European Union.

In response to a complaint made in 2009 by Germany regarding the program for those especially in need, the European Court of Justice, despite the opinion of the Commission, ruled that most of the food under this program should come from intervention stocks. The current volume of intervention stocks is unable to guarantee assistance at a level sufficient to meet the needs of the most deprived citizens across Europe.

The European Commission prepared another proposal for legislative changes, introducing EU social cohesion objectives as the legal basis. However, despite the positive attitude of the European Commission and European Parliament, six of the EU's 27 member countries blocked the program.

The new rules enable the transfer of food from intervention stocks to designated organizations, which distribute it among the most deprived persons in the European Union. Although the program continues to run, the resources allocated to it for 2012 have been significantly limited. There is concern that in 2013 these resources will be further reduced or even completely run out.



The Polish presidency made efforts to work out a compromise to allow the program to continue in its full scope. The majority of the member states in the Council are in favor of the program, but there is a minority blocking it. Countries opposing the program substantiate their position in different ways. Most argue that the program meets the objectives of social policy, and social policy is the responsibility of individual member states. Therefore, in their opinion, the European Union should not support poor people from the EU budget. The European Commission insists that there are no budgetary or legal obstacles to continuing with the program. A total of 500 million euros annually is set aside for this purpose in the EU budget, and the program costs EU citizens no more than 1 euro a year per head. A.R.

Promoting Polish Produce

Poland's turn at the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of last year offered an excellent opportunity to promote Polish food.

As part of the Polish presidency, Poland's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development carried out a number of projects under the motto "Polska... Tastes Good!" aiming to highlight the selling points of Polish food and show that it will meet the expectations of even the most demanding consumers in Europe. The most spectacular campaigns included the tasting of Polish regional products in European institutions.

The start of the Polish presidency in July provided an opportunity to put in a plug for the quality and taste of Polish strawberries from the Kashubia region at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. Marek Sawicki, the Polish minister of agriculture and rural development, brought to Strasbourg a generous 3.5 metric tons of strawberries and distributed them—in packages of half a kilogram each—under the label "Polska... Tastes Good!" Sawicki said that such produce helps demonstrate the diversity as well as the quality and value of Polish food.

The first Polish fruit to be covered by protection under European Union law was the Kashubian strawberry (*truskawka kaszubska* in Polish, *kaszëbskô malëna* in Kashubian)—known for its distinct taste and aroma. Its name was registered in November 2009 as a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) in the EU.

Members of the European Parliament and other EU institutions also had a chance to sample Polish apples as part of the "Polska... Tastes Good!" promotional campaign. The tasting of Polish apples from the Łącko Valley took place at the end of September last year at the European Parliament and European Council headquarters in Brussels. The apples, known for their slightly tart taste and firm texture, were brought by Polish Agriculture Minister Marek Sawicki. A total of 12,000 apples were served to Eurodeputies and others participating in a meeting of the EU council of ministers responsible for agriculture and fisheries and members of task forces that convened at the Council building.

Finally, the *rogal świętomarciński* (St. Martin's roll), a crescent-shaped sweet bun traditionally made in the midwestern Polish city of Poznań and other towns in Wielkopolska province, took Brussels by storm in November. Sawicki brought with him 5,000 of these delicious products, famous for their taste, to treat other EU agriculture ministers and delegations to the meeting of the Council, as well as Council employees. The *rogal świętomarciński* owes its fame to the traditional methods by which it is made and the use of specific ingredients. Its quality largely results from the use of a rare filling from white poppy seeds combined with almond flavoring. This delicacy has been popular in Poland for more than 150 years.

The tastings of Polish regional delicacies in EU institutions are only the most spectacular example of efforts to promote Polish food on European markets. Promotion is key these days. Agricultural production is not a problem; selling the produce is becoming a



growing challenge. With the progressive liberalization of global trade, the promotion of and information about individual products are increasingly important. It is important to make consumers aware about the quality of products. In Poland, this goal is served by the Agriculture Ministry's Try Fine Food program for promoting high-quality produce.

Most Polish farmers use traditional methods to produce food. Thanks to this, Polish food is increasingly popular with consumers in Europe and elsewhere. Despite difficult weather conditions, Polish farmers have coped well amid international competition. Preliminary data show that the trade of Polish farm produce and foodstuffs in 2011 was at a record high. The Ministry of Agriculture expects that the total value of exports of these products will exceed 14 billion euros, with a 3-billion-euro trade surplus. These figures are in part due to promotional campaigns.

Promotional efforts are generally made at three levels: local, European and global. One of the most important events during the Polish presidency was an informal meeting of EU ministers for agriculture and fisheries in the southwestern Polish city of Wrocław, where officials discussed future policy for promoting agri-food products in both EU and non-EU countries. Topics included ongoing work on the European Commission's "Green Paper on promotion measures and information provision for agricultural products."

In turn, officials taking part in a meeting of the Council of Ministers for Agriculture and Fisheries, held in Brussels in December, managed to reach consensus—for the first time in years—and agree on conclusions for the future agriculture promotion policy.

A.R.

Regional and Traditional Products

Cracow Bagels

The Cracow bagel, a kind of ring-shaped baked dough usually sprinkled with poppy seeds, sesame seeds or coarse salt, is one of the symbols of the southern Polish city of Cracow. In October 2010, the Cracow bagel—or *obwarzanek krakowski* as it is called in Polish—was entered into the European Union’s Protected Geographical Indication register.

The ring-shaped dough of the Cracow bagel is spirally twisted. The product ranges in color from gold to golden-brown and has a glossy surface. It is made of wheat flour, with a possible addition of 30 percent of rye flour, fat, sugar, yeast, salt and water. The dough is left to grow, then cut into small pieces and rolled into “ropes.” Two or three “ropes” are then twisted spirally with each other and their ends are fused to form a ring. The bagels are left to rest again. Then, they are put into boiling water for a while, drained, sprinkled with seeds or salt and baked.

Bagels made according to this recipe and called *obwarzanek krakowski* may be produced in the city of Cracow and in Cracow and Wieliczka counties. They may be sold without labeling and packaging from appropriately marked sales outlets.

The bagel-making tradition is very old in Cracow, with the first recorded mentions of it dating back to the 13th century. Cracow’s city charter issued by Prince Bolesław Wstydlivy in 1257 contains the first historical information about the local bakers. The charter gave them the right to sell their products in Cracow’s market square. The document *Senatu Consultum de pane cogendo et de mercedes familiae pistorum* directly refers to Cracow bagels: “Also those who bake bagels (*circinellis*) should use

one *korzec* of flour at a time to make sure the bagels are always fresh, nice and tasty.” In 1496, King Jan Olbracht granted Cracow bakers the exclusive right to bake and sell bagels. The guild documents contain mentions of the guild’s authority over bakers expected to make bagels during a given year.

Initially, bagels were could only be baked during Lent by bakers specifically assigned to do so by the guild. Under a resolution adopted in 1611, the Cracow guild of bakers had the right to decide who was allowed to sell bagels and where. This strict supervision by the guild lasted until 1802, when every baker in the guild gained the right to bake bagels when their turn—determined by a draw—came. This form of

choosing the privileged bakers was used until 1849. After that year, all bakers were allowed to make bagels, or at least such a conclusion can be drawn from historical records. Traditionally, bagels were sold from bakers’ stalls, which opened daily at 6 a.m. Eight guild members were responsible for supervising these. From the 19th century to the 1950s, Cracow bagels were sold directly from wickerwork baskets.

At present, Cracow bagels are made by members of the guild who have their bakeries in the city of Cracow and in Cracow and Wieliczka counties. Residents of Cracow and visitors from other parts of Poland view the Cracow bagel as a traditional local product. Many contemporary bakeries continue the tradition of the well-known Cracow bakers who started this line of businesses in the 1960s. This is confirmed by documents, decisions, recipes, statements and photographs.

The Polish name *obwarzanek* refers to the process of boiling the bagel dough in water before baking.

Today, around 99 percent of Cracow bagels are sold from mobile street stands. There are around 180 such stands in the city. On average, almost 150,000 bagels are sold daily in Cracow’s Old Market Square on weekdays. A.R.



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Polish Meat in Asia

By **Marek Sawicki, PhD,**
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Before Poland joined the EU, the Polish public heard frightening predictions that food from Western Europe would flood the market in Poland. While the predictions were really propaganda by those who opposed European integration, some concerns were nevertheless there, because no decision maker in Poland and abroad could have predicted what happened afterwards. Nobody expected that Polish food and agricultural products would become the only Polish exports to show a trade surplus year after year. The value of the exports has risen steadily, and judging by preliminary data, last year's food exports probably exceeded 14 billion euros with a trade surplus of 3 billion euros.

EU member states are still the main buyers of Polish exports and the statistics are clearly topped by neighboring Germany. It is only natural that sales are the highest between countries which lie closest to each other, especially as far as trade in food is concerned. Still, the world keeps shrinking and long distances no longer matter as much as they used to.

The demand for food will continue to increase, especially in the most populous regions of the world, Asia in particular. Asia is home to more people than any other continent, and China alone has a population of 1.3 billion. Coupled with the rapid GDP growth in China that began many years ago, the increasing demand for food comes as no surprise. When a society becomes more affluent, not only luxurious goods sell better, but the public's eating habits change. Wealthier societies seek food of high quality that tastes good, as they can afford to pay more for it.

Asia's opening to international trade is good news for Polish exporters. Poland is highly interested in such developments, because 27 percent of Polish agricultural production is now sent to buyers abroad. Consequently, Poland is making efforts to promote agricultural produce in different corners of the world. We keep searching for new markets and take part in numerous trade fairs and exhibitions. Funds earmarked for promotion by the government during its previous term play an important role here. Good results can only be accomplished with appropriate financial resources, continually improved absorption of EU funds and efforts undertaken by exporters themselves.

As far as the Agriculture Ministry is concerned, the chief task is to define and negotiate conditions on access to different markets. I have visited many countries over the past four years to discuss opportunities for Polish food and agricultural products to be exported to Asian markets. The conditions under which Polish food can be put on local markets have been negotiated for countries including Japan, China, Vietnam, and Singapore. There has been an upsurge in exports to Turkey, and Poland has also resumed exports to the United Arab Emirates.

In March last year, the Association of Polish Butchers and Processed Meat Producers signed a contract with the Agricultural Market Agency on a two-year promotional campaign in five countries: Russia, Ukraine, China, Thailand and Singapore. The campaign is a follow-up to the "Meat and Meat-Based Products—Tradition and Flavors" campaign which was conducted in China, Japan, Russia and Ukraine. Similar to the first campaign, the promotional activities focus on trade fairs. The new campaign, entitled "European Tables—Tradition, Modernity, Quality," concerns fresh, chilled and frozen meat and meat products, including fresh, chilled and frozen beef, veal and pork. The campaign's budget totals 3.1 million euros, including an EU grant of 1.55 million euros. Polish public funds for the campaign exceed 930,000 euros and the remaining 620,000-plus euros are the meat sector's own resources.

Meanwhile, the Union of Meat Industry Producers and Employers (UPEMI) has been conducting an information and promotional campaign entitled "Tradition, Quality and European Flavors." The campaign, funded jointly by the EU and Poland, is being carried out simultaneously on the markets in Vietnam, South Korea and the United States.

I am confident that, combined with these campaigns, Polish exporters' improving insight into the market and the international public's increasing familiarity with Polish food will soon trigger greater interest in Polish products across Asia. It is a highly interesting and absorptive market and finding new markets is beneficial to Poland, because, as I said, 27 percent of the country's agricultural production is sold abroad.