

POLSKA...
tastes good!



Top-Quality Food

Poland's first national system for rewarding and regulating the production of traditional food of the highest quality is called *Jakość Tradycja* (Quality Tradition).



Designed by the Polish Chamber of Regional and Local Products, a trade organization of producers, together with the Union of the Provinces of the Republic of Poland, the *Jakość Tradycja* system was approved in June 2007 by the agriculture and rural development minister as a national quality system and accepted as such by the European Commission.

The system's aim is to reward high-quality foods, including traditional products. Its recognition as a national food quality system enables its beneficiaries to take advantage of mechanisms supporting participation in the system and promotion of regional and traditional products along similar lines to those available for products registered in the EU quality system for regional and traditional products.

The primary focus of the *Jakość Tradycja* system is to reward the quality of food products. The system only accepts products whose high quality is the effect of their traditional character and whose special quality, reputation or other features distinguish them from other products from the same category. Ingredients, production methods and a product's character are considered traditional if the product has a history of at least 50 years (two generations). Traditional breeds and varieties are those that were in use before 1956.

A producer aspiring to recognition as part of the system declares they will maintain higher production standards and their products' unique qualities.

Before being allowed into the system a product is subject to detailed inspection according to the regulations for awarding the *Jakość Tradycja* mark. This mark is registered at the Patent Office and protected under the law on industrial property as a joint guarantee trademark.

A product for which the producer is applying for the *Jakość Tradycja* mark must be of high quality, as confirmed by supervision over production and proper quality control, and identifiable (traceable) at every stage of production. Producers must have a certificate of conformity to prove that the product is made according to specification.

Producers using the *Jakość Tradycja* mark of quality who are in the Food Quality System should make their products subject to inspection, the aim being to guarantee that the production method is the same as that specified in the application. The choice of inspecting unit is up to the producers themselves. This kind of inspection should not be confused

with official inspections to guarantee food safety that are conducted by veterinary or sanitary services.

The system is an open one, meaning it can be joined by all farmers, agricultural producers and processing businesses from Poland and other countries, members of the chamber and non-members. The sole criterion for a product to be accepted is its quality. Participation in the food quality endorsement system is completely voluntary.

Under the system's rules, products that receive the *Jakość Tradycja* mark have to meet stringent requirements. The ingredients used in production have to come from organic farms or farms that follow best agricultural and best breeding practices without any use of GMOs. The ingredients also have to be fully identifiable (traceability).

An application for the *Jakość Tradycja* mark is similar to applications for EU labels, and its added role is to prepare domestic producers for applying for EU labels by going through the procedure to obtain the *Jakość Tradycja* mark. The system is intended for individual businesses or producers. The fact that a specific product and its producer is granted the mark does not prevent other producers from obtaining the *Jakość Tradycja* mark for a similar or identical product.

So far the mark has been granted to 39 products from different regions around Poland. They include several varieties of butter and cheese from the Regional Dairy Cooperative in Olecko, the Regional Dairy Cooperative in Susz, the Rospuda Dairy Cooperative in Filipów, the Dairy Cooperative in Gostyń, the Jana Dairy Cooperative in Środa, the Top-Tomyśl Dairy Cooperative in Nowy Tomyśl, the Commune Dairy in Pierzchnica, the Jędrzejowska Dairy Cooperative in Wodzisław, and the Regional Dairy Cooperative in Chmielnik.

Another large group of products that have received this mark of quality are processed meat goods (including various types of sausage, ham, terrine, head cheese, bacon, liverwurst) from the Agricultural Production Cooperative in Kruszewnia and the Smak-Górno Meat Processing Plant. Several products from Firma Bracia Urbanek have received the mark as well: dill pickle puree, whole dill pickles, gherkins, beet horseradish sauce, and plum jam. The Ciecchan Brewery is another beneficiary of the system; it makes several brands of beer that have the right to use the mark.

A.R.

Polish Food Promoted in Berlin

More than 400,000 visitors flocked to this year's Grüne Woche (Green Week) international agriculture and food fair in Berlin Jan. 20-29. As last year, Poland took part in the fair under the motto "Polska... schmeckt!" (Polska... Tastes Good), a message illustrated by delicious-looking, mouth-watering Polish apples.

Held every year in January, the Grüne Woche fair is a world-famous event designed to promote food and agriculture. Many food producers use it to see how the market will react to their new products. The fair not only draws more than 1,600 exhibitors from nearly 60 countries and over 400,000 visitors, but also has about 300 conferences and seminars, discussion panels and workshops accompanying the main event. The importance of the event is best evidenced by the fact that the last fair attracted 70 agriculture ministers from around the world.

This year's fair was officially opened by the German minister for food, agriculture and consumer protection, Ilse Aigner, in a ceremony that was attended by the Polish agriculture and rural development minister, Marek Sawicki. The latter said that Grüne Woche is a prestigious event and that Poland has been a regular participant for several years. "It's a great place to discuss issues important to agriculture and food security in the broad sense," Sawicki said. "We take advantage of this opportunity. Poland has a wide range of produce to offer. We are proud of our quality produce. Consumers already appreciate the fact that Polish ham tastes like ham, sausage like sausage, and eggs like eggs. These products, despite the crisis, are selling very well on European markets."

Aigner said that German consumers are already familiar with the taste of Polish food and that Polish products can increasingly be found on German tables. Around a quarter of Poland's agri-food exports go to the German market. In 2011, these exports increased by 11 percent from 2010, to 3 billion euros.

Poland's national stand at this year's fair consisted of a stand put up by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and 12 regional stands. The ministry's stand featured 27 companies whose products carry the Try Fine Food label. There were also performances by Polish folk groups and combos as well as art shows. Producer associations known as Local Action Groups also showed their wares at the ministry's stand. The associations included Leśny Krag (Forest Circle) and Zielony Pierścień (Green Ring) from Lublin province, Na śliwkowym szlaku (The Plum Route) from Małopolska province, and Zywiecki Raj (Zywiec Paradise) from Silesia province.

The regional stands enabled visitors to taste many traditional and regional specialties of Polish cuisine, and other attractions included demonstrations of weaving, playing a pedal concertina, pierogi making, wood carving, and juice pressing. Visitors could also find out about the history of Poland's regional *oscypek* cheese, see how "peasant soup" is made, how pierogi are prepared, how to decorate porcelain with traditional ornaments, and how to paint Easter eggs. Polish fruit wines made from blackcurrants, rowanberries, chokeberries and rosehip also attracted a lot of interest.



Ilse Aigner, German Federal Minister for Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection; an interpreter, and Marek Sawicki, Polish Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

Grüne Woche is not only an opportunity to promote food, but also a venue for debate about key agricultural policy issues. Berlin also hosted the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture this year, accompanied by the Berlin Summit of Agriculture Ministers. The latter was organized by the German Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection. The main theme of this year's forum was "Food security through sustainable growth: farming with limited resources."

Summit participants agreed that the issue of food security should continue to top the political agenda at both the global and national levels. They also said that the global food situation remains tense. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the number of people afflicted by hunger worldwide approached 925 million last year, with the total world population at around 6.9 billion. The world population is expected to rise to over 9 billion by 2050.

Poland's Deputy Agriculture Minister Andrzej Butra took part in the summit. He said, "In the area of food security, Poland assigns a key role to sustainable production growth and aiming at sustainability of agriculture that takes into account issues relating to climate, protection of natural resources, particularly access to potable water, and care for biodiversity. To this end, we should take adaptive measures by applying biological progress, but also counteract the increasing effects of climate change and support the development of agricultural production through sustainable growth."

Butra added that agriculture also faced the task of adapting its production processes to the changing climate and of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. "We cannot forget that we live in a dynamically changing world and that the solutions we apply today may turn out insufficient to respond to the challenges of the future," he said. "We should take the long view. The European Union should lead the way in this area by showing in practice what the idea of sustainable development is, how to strengthen the competitive position of producers, ensure food security and preserve environmental assets at the same time." **A.R.**

Regional and Traditional Products

Fasola Wrzawska Beans

This January the European Commission registered *fasola wrzawska* ("runner beans from Wrzawy") as a protected designation of origin. This is the 33rd Polish product registered in the EU system encompassing protected designations of origin (PDO), protected geographical indications (PGI), and traditional specialties guaranteed (TSG).

Fasola wrzawska beans, which are produced in Tarnobrzeg and Stalowa Wola counties in Podkarpackie province, are characterized by the large size of the beans, a thin seed coat and delicate structure and consistency. The beans have a special sweet flavor that makes them a highly valued culinary product.

The unique quality of *fasola wrzawska* beans is due to a special combination of natural factors (climate and soil) and local farmer skills and expertise in bean cultivation. The applicants for the EU registration of *fasola wrzawska* were producers from the Piękny Jaś Runner Bean Producers' Association in Wrzawy.

The region where *fasola wrzawska* beans are grown has high-quality alluvial soils and a unique microclimate, the effect of the proximity of two large rivers. The beans are grown in Podkarpackie province on the Tarnobrzeg Plain and in the Lower San River Valley. The Vistula River marks the area's northwestern boundary. The San River cuts across the region, flowing into the Vistula near Wrzawy. This is the northern part of the Sandomierz Valley.

The area in question is warmer than neighboring regions and enjoys a long frost-free period that extends the growing season. The lowland nature of the region, protected as it is by surrounding uplands, means winds here are less strong, resulting in a high-quality crop since beans are sensitive to wind. The natural features of the geographical region combined with human skills, which include proper staking, manual and gradual harvesting of the beans as they ripen and drying them in the open air, result in a product that is truly unique.

Fasola wrzawska beans are the dried seeds of *Phaseolus multiflorus*, a multi-flowered runner bean. The weight of 1,000 seeds (beans) ranges from 2,100 to 2,900 g depending on the soil and meteorological conditions during growth. The seeds should be flat, kidney-shaped,



clean, whole, ripe, well developed, with moisture of no more than 18 percent, not shriveled, without holes made by insects. The beans have a glossy seed cover uniformly white in color.

Fasola wrzawska seeds are 40 to 90 percent bigger than other kinds of multi-flowered beans. They can absorb 20 percent more water than beans from other geographical areas. They are sweet with a natural individual smell; they take about 10 minutes less to cook than beans from other areas. A.R.



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Don't Waste Food— Respect Farmers' Work

By **Marek Sawicki, PhD,**
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

Everybody is talking crisis and 15 percent of the citizens of the European Union, which is home to some of the world's wealthiest countries, live below the poverty line. That adds up to 79 million people. At the same time, an estimated 89 million metric tons of food goes to waste in Europe every year. Put next to each other, these are shocking figures. People are starving and yet so much food ends up in landfills. What also goes to waste is the labor of farmers and people who work in the food-processing industry. Addressing the issue, the European Parliament Jan. 19 passed a resolution on How to Avoid Food Waste: Strategies for a More Efficient Food Chain in the EU. The resolution points out that, according to a study by the Food and Agriculture Organization, when the global population reaches the projected 9 billion, food deliveries will have to grow at least 70 percent by 2050. Meanwhile, European agriculture may lose a lot of its competitiveness on the global market if the EU fails to really reform its Common Agricultural Policy after 2013, and at the same time little is being done to prevent food waste.

Those who drafted the resolution have used statistical data and scientific research to make us all realize that an average of 14 percent of harvested crops is wasted during production, and another 15 percent goes to waste during distribution and is thrown away by households. These figures clearly show that even now three-fifths of the total needs forecast for 2050 could be satisfied if less food were wasted. The European Parliament's resolution highlights the problem and proposes measures to be taken, but it is up to every single one of us whether such huge amounts of food will continue to be thrown away. We hardly stop to think about it on a daily basis and it is only the combined figures that show us the real magnitude of food waste.

This state of affairs could also improve if legal regulations were changed so that, like food producers, distributors who donate food to charity would not need to incur any extra costs and pay taxes on it. Such changes in law would mark another step toward solving both the problem of food waste and help reduce the number of malnourished people. If, ideally, Europe reached a point where no food is wasted, the result would be four kilograms of food for each malnourished person a day. I believe the problem of malnutrition could be solved even if we managed to reduce food waste in Europe by just 50 percent.

Changes in lifestyle triggered by fast-paced life in the world of today have also led to changes in eating habits and Poland is no exception here. Polish people used to have a lot of respect for bread as a symbol of food in general, but now the tradition,

which once had people picking up every crumb that fell to the floor, is sadly gone. Thankfully, just recently there has been a backlash against eating meals in a hurry. There is also a growing movement to encourage traditional ways of having meals. Other than restoring traditional interpersonal relations, the movement is also about appropriate eating habits.

If people are made aware of the work that has to be put into producing food and when a large part of the public accepts the fact that food produced in traditional ways has to cost more, the amount of wasted food may decrease. Unfortunately, at the other end are consumers who live below the poverty line and cannot afford to buy even the cheapest food. This is why the EU program under which surplus food is delivered to the poorest citizens, is so important. It might seem that rich Europe has no such citizens, but in reality 16 million people receive food aid supplied by charitable organizations.

In 2008, several member states joined forces in an attempt to put an end to the European program which provides aid to the poorest. It was only the Polish presidency of the EU last year that was able to break up this coalition so the program can continue. The European Commission will assign 500 million for the program, which is comparable to the amount assigned last year.

As an active participant in talks on reforming the Common Agricultural Policy, I always look at its demographic, economic and social aspects. Agriculture is a special branch of the economy and consequently its products cannot be compared to anything else. As a result, agricultural products require special distribution and every price change affects the public. Now that we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Common Agricultural Policy and discussing changes in the policy after 2013, I want to take the opportunity to call for brave reforms. I consider it a scandal that when so much food is going to waste there are still malnourished people on our continent. We need to take these aspects into account as we reform the agricultural policy. On the one hand, we will need to ensure higher food production and better distribution of food and, on the other, we have to radically reduce the waste of the results of farmers' painstaking work. We all want to be respected for our work and so we should also have respect for the work of other people. We can show our respect for the work of farmers and people in the food-processing industry by shopping rationally and refraining from wasting food at each distribution and consumption stage. That way, not only will we look after the poor, but also prevent damage to the environment and to our own pockets.