



POLSKA...

tastes

good!

# Success of the School Fruit Scheme

Ten thousand schools taking part in the program and about 900,000 children eating fresh fruit and vegetables on a regular basis—this is the outcome of the EU's School Fruit Scheme in Poland.

The aim of the program is to prevent excess weight and obesity among European children by promoting healthy eating habits from children's earliest years. "It's worth developing these attitudes in children because the effects are the quickest and most lasting," said Marek Sawicki, minister of agriculture and rural development, at a conference summing up the campaign's latest stage.

The European Commission launched the Common Agricultural Policy's new program called the School Fruit Scheme as of the 2009/2010 school year. The program is 75-percent financed from the EU budget and 25-percent funded from national budgets. The Polish scheme, whose budget in the 2011/2012 school year is close to 12.3 million euros, has the fourth-largest budget among the EU countries taking part in the campaign. In Poland the scheme is targeted at children from primary school grades one to three. The main aim is a long-term change in the eating habits of children and teenagers by increasing the share of fruit and vegetables in their daily diet and promoting healthy nutrition through educational activities at primary schools.

Fruit is a product valued highly by dietitians and nutritionists. Fruit is a source of many vitamins and minerals as well as fiber. It is usually made up of water in 80-90 percent and a small amount of fats (0.1-0.3 percent, excluding nuts). Carbohydrate content varies from 3 to 18 percent while the amount of fiber, which is important in the human diet, ranges from 0.3 to 5.6 percent. Most fruit has a lot of vitamin C as well as provitamin A and small amounts of B vitamins, while lacking vitamin D.

Children taking part in the School Fruit Scheme are given fresh fruit (apples, pears, strawberries), fresh vegetables (carrots, peppers, radishes) and fruit, vegetable or fruit-and-vegetable juice. The fruit, vegetables and juice may not contain any added fats, salt, sugar or other sweeteners. The portion for each child in the scheme contains one fruit product and one vegetable product.

Europejski program  
„Owoce w szkole”

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ARR Agencja Rynku Rolnego

According to the Agricultural Market Agency (ARR), interest in the program in its third year is greater than in previous years. Lucjan Zwolak, vice-president of the ARR, said that the target group of the scheme in the 2011/2012 school year includes more than 1.2 million children from grades one to three. "This school year we will hand out 33 million portions of fruit and vegetables; throughout the scheme's duration this number will total close to 100 million portions," Zwolak said.

According to studies carried out by the National Food and Nutrition Institute in Warsaw, the program has caused an increase in the amount of fruit and vegetables children eat; it has increased children's knowledge on healthy nutrition as well as having a positive impact on changing children's attitude to eating fruit and vegetables. There have also been some good changes in behaviors related to children's nutrition in the parents of children taking part in the program. Equally important, the program is appreciated by school principals and teachers.

Summing up the School Fruit Scheme, Minister Sawicki mentioned another EU program run by the ARR: the school milk scheme called Glass of Milk in Poland. "The budget here is more than zł160 million (including zł118 million from the national budget and about zł40 million from the EU), and in this program Poland is first among all the EU countries. Moreover, Glass of Milk is financed in two-thirds from the national budget," Sawicki said. A.R.

## Honey: Tasty and Healthy

Poland is a leading producer of honey in the European Union. In terms of eating honey, though, the Poles are behind many European nations.

“Honey is the most obvious symbol of healthy food, because bees live only where the environment is clean and healthy and where agriculture uses methods that are safe to consumers,” said Marek Sawicki, minister of agriculture and rural development, at a recent conference on beekeeping and the honey market in Poland.

There are 50,000 registered beekeepers in Poland today and more than 1.2 million bee colonies. Beekeeping is developing steadily, with honey production growing accordingly, reaching 23,000 metric tons in 2011. “The beekeeping business has huge potential because as much as 65 percent of its output is sold directly to consumers at the apary,” Sawicki said. “Beekeepers earn the least when they use middlemen. That’s why I think they will find a place for themselves in the system of marketplaces being set up under the Agriculture Ministry’s *Mój Rynek* (My Marketplace) program.”

Poland is a European leader in honey production. In terms of eating honey it is quite a long way down on the list of EU countries, with annual honey consumption of just 0.62 kg per person. In Greece, the figure is 3.5 kg, 2.5 kg in Austria, and about 2 kg per person per year in Germany.

“It’s obvious that we still don’t eat enough of the healthy product that honey is. I’d love to see us eating at least as much as our neighbors across the Oder river,” Sawicki said.

EU estimates show that bees and their hard work generate about 15 billion euros for the EU economy as a whole. “There are 14 million bee colonies in the EU, so each of these colonies and their pollination gives national economies more than 1,070 euros,” said Tadeusz Sabat, president of the Polish Beekeepers’ Association. “That’s why the European Parliament has declared it will increase funding for beekeeping. This would significantly aid the development of beekeeping.”

The Agriculture Ministry is drawing up national beekeeping programs to improve the conditions for making and trading in honeybee products in Poland. This aim will be reached through technical assistance to individual beekeepers and beekeeper groups, accompanied by measures to combat a bee disease called varroosis, efforts to streamline the seasonal moving of beehives, funds to support laboratories analyzing the physical and chemical properties of honey, funding to support the stocking of hives in the European Union, and work with specialist organizations in carrying out research projects involving beekeeping and honeybee products.

One of the ministry’s beekeeping programs, which ran from the 2007/2008 season to the 2009/2010 season, covered beekeepers with a total of over 1 million bee colonies between them—of the 1.1 million registered by county vets nationwide. Now a new program, covering the 2010/2011-2012/2013 period, is under way with a budget of more than 15.1 million euros.

Support is also provided under special agricultural/environmental programs and direct subsidies for melliferous crops.

“The directions and opportunities are many and we can see that beekeepers are getting better at taking advantage of them,” Sawicki said. “The use of funding has grown from 54 percent in the program’s first year to about 91 percent over the past three years.”

In March, Sawicki met with beekeepers taking part in a “march in defense of bees.” Sawicki told them there was no reason for concern over the well-being of Poland’s bee population because the number of bee colonies is growing. There were about 950,000 in 2003 and 1,246,633 in 2011. Reports that appeared in the media early this year to the effect that bee colonies were allegedly dying in great numbers have never been confirmed, Sawicki said.

Sawicki also appealed to beekeepers to join forces. First of all, this would help the discussion on the Common Agricultural Policy after 2013, and secondly it would bring measurable benefits to the beekeepers themselves. People forming producer groups can expect extra benefits, for example supplementary funding for their operations.

“I regret to say there is not a single producer group among beekeepers,” Sawicki said. “Meanwhile, this kind of consolidation brings added benefits in the form of subsidies related to the value of products sold jointly. That’s why I encourage people to gather together in producer groups and work on better coordination within organizations for the purpose of even more effective utilization of available opportunities and funding to support their operations.” A.R.



## Regional and Traditional Products

# Honey from the Sejny Region

Honey from Poland's Sejny region, in the eastern Podlasie province, and Lithuania's Lazdijai region is the first product from two different countries to have been covered by the European Commission's Protected Designation of Origin program.



The honey is called *miód z Sejneńszczyzny* in Poland and *Lazdiju krasto medus* in Lithuania.

The application to the European Commission to register the honey was submitted in 2008 by the Beekeeping Club in Sejny and the Regional Association of Beekeepers in Lazdijai. Registration took place in late January 2012. Adam Baranowski, president of the Beekeeping Club in Sejny, says it was not easy to obtain the certificate because it needed to be proved that honey made in both Sejny and Lazdijai was of the same origin. The area where the honey is produced lies in the Niemen river basin on the Polish-Lithuanian border.

Only honey made from polyfloral nectar may be sold under the name *miód z Sejneńszczyzny/Łódziejszczyzny/Seinu/Lazdiju krasto medus*. This is a unique product that is closely linked to the area it comes from. The region abounds in meadows, peatbogs and forests. The honey is obtained from several dozen melliferous plant species typical for the area, such as various varieties of willow and maple, common dandelion, and white and red clover, in addition to papilionaceous plants. This is reflected in the honey's unusual, strong aroma and its slightly bitter aftertaste. The honey has a unique color that ranges from dark yellow to dark golden, with a slight cloudiness.

The honey's quality owes a great deal to the special skills of local beekeepers who have had to adapt to the difficult climatic conditions in the area in terms of where to locate their apiaries, how to breed bees and run traditional bee farms. Among other requirements, this means using wooden beehives and complying with stringent rules as regards supplemental feeding of bees.

To date, 34 Polish products have been listed in the EU register of protected products. A.R.



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By Marek Sawicki, PhD,  
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# 50 Years of the CAP

**This** year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Common Agricultural Policy. It was introduced in 1962, though work on it began five years earlier. At the foundation of the European Union's agricultural policy was the drive to ensure the necessary amount of foodstuffs for the Community's consumers while maintaining the proper relationship between food prices and farmer incomes. It was decided that the basic production unit in agriculture would be the family farm. The fact was also highlighted that agriculture is a special sector of the EU economy that is intended to ensure self-sufficiency in terms of agricultural produce. This is why agricultural policy required separate legal regulations.

Today I sometimes think some people forget about this. Agriculture is and will be largely dependent on weather conditions. Despite the best work and greatest efforts, farmers can never be sure of what harvest they will gather in a given year. Take last year's harvest, which was one of the most difficult in the past several decades. This was a harvest of crops that had to be stolen from nature.

This obvious dependence thus requires regulations different from those based only on the most obvious market behaviors at the supply and demand level.

The creators of the Common Agricultural Policy understood this. They applied the principle of a common market, but also the principle of financial solidarity, meaning costs would be financed by all the member states. Today this is done through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

However, life has a way of changing needs and rules. This is also true for one of the oldest EU policies. The system's first reform took place in the late 1960s; this was the Mansholt Plan, whose aim was to change the agrarian structure. It was not fully implemented. More changes took place starting in the mid-1980s. The Common Agricultural Policy toughened quality requirements and introduced production quotas. The real-term level of prices set began decreasing gradually as well.

Subsequent corrections began in 1992. What were known as the MacSharry reforms introduced significant changes in existing EU mechanisms, and involved abolishing subsidies for agricultural produce prices in exchange for direct subsidy payments that were not linked to the amount produced.

Compulsory "set-aside" (fallowing) was also introduced. Funding for market interventions and export subsidies was reduced. Funding was shifted to environmental protection,

afforestation and early retirement. Some funds were allocated to pre-accession programs. These were the funds we took advantage of before joining the European Union. The latest major reform, the Fischler reform, took place just before our accession and soon afterward. This was when payments were separated from production and the Single Payment Scheme was introduced.

We need to remember that the Eastern Bloc countries found themselves in the unique situation of changing their entire economic systems. No one before had traveled the road from communism and a centralized economy to capitalism. Particularly intensive changes occurred in Poland in the time directly preceding EU accession. And though the terms on which we joined the EU were not advantageous, as soon as the possibility emerged to bring about fundamental changes consisting of the modernization of farms and processing plants, we took advantage of this and were hugely successful.

Suffice it to say that in the first years of the 21st century, food processing plants were modernized in an absolutely unbelievable way, especially in the dairy and meat sectors. Radical changes also had to take place at the farms that supplied those plants with raw materials. This was when modern farms specializing in dairy cow breeding were set up. The number of milk suppliers dropped by half, but the quality of milk improved dramatically. Over a few years, the amount of top-class milk delivered to dairies grew from 40 to more than 90 percent.

Such transformations in this sector had taken place in the 1970s in the countries of the EU 15, but had taken much longer. It is no wonder, then, that today Poland's dairy and meat processing sectors are among the most advanced not only in Europe but also in the world. Confirmation of this can be found in the steadily maintained positive balance of trade in foodstuffs, hovering around 3 billion euros. These changes, however, came at the cost of hard work and many sacrifices on the part of farmers and processing business owners.

Today we face new challenges. With the extensive experience of the pre-accession period and following accession, I know that the best celebration of the CAP will be its deep and responsible reform. Having a common market, we have to take care to ensure equal conditions of competition, whereas the biggest factor hindering this are the direct payments. We have to do everything in our power to make sure they are based on the same terms for all, stemming from objective criteria and not the country of origin. Moreover, the new CAP should be as simple as possible and comprehensible to farmers and consumers alike.