

Polish Food in Asia

Poland is stepping up its food exports to Asian markets, especially Japan, Vietnam and China. Polish food is increasingly popular in these countries—and not only because it is offered at a competitive price. The main thing going for it is the use of modern processing technology and quality ingredients as well as original recipes highly valued on international markets.

Asian markets are increasingly opening up to Polish businesses and exporters. According to Poland's Agricultural Market Agency (ARR), the trade of food with China has grown growing rapidly since 2009. But Poland still has a deficit in this trade, which means that it is buying more food from China than it sells in that country. Last year, Poland shipped 158 million euros worth of food products to China and imported 278 million euros worth of goods. Meat and meat products accounted for 67 percent of total exports, and dairy products accounted for 18 percent. Meat sales are growing the most. In 2013, exports were worth 106 million euros, up from 39 million euros the year before.

Owing to growing pork exports, Poland's balance of trade with Japan has clearly improved. Recent years have also seen a rise in Polish food exports to Vietnam (last year they were up 66 percent on 2011), due to increased sales of fish fillets and milk as well as powdered whey.

Polish chicken feet are also conquering the Far East. In Poland, poultry feet are out of favor with consumers. Until recently, they were treated as waste, and, like chicken heads, thrown in the trash. Currently, chicken feet from Poland are welcome on Asian tables, and exports have been growing rapidly. The main buyer is Hong Kong, from where Polish chicken feet reach markets in China and other countries in the region.

According to experts, now is the right time to step up exports to the Asian market, because there is a fashion for European products there. In Japan, European foodstuffs are considered to be a premium product. That is why Polish producers should not just focus on competing in terms of price alone but should also highlight the quality and specific features of products from Poland.

According to experts, China is the most attractive and promising market for Polish producers—not only because of its size but also because China attaches great importance to food safety these days. And Polish products are known for the fact that they are healthy and free from genetic modification. Chinese consumers are increasingly health-conscious and have increasingly fatter wallets, as a result of which they are eager to reach for new dishes. Chinese people are also traveling more these days and making new culinary discoveries—a trend that benefits Polish producers.

So far, 69 dairies, eight meat processing plants, six poultry processing plants, and three cold stores in Poland have been authorized to export their produce to China.

Polish fruit growers, especially apple farmers, are also interested in China and other markets in Asia. Apples are an export that Poland specializes in. Even though China is the world's biggest producer of this fruit, Polish apples are in demand there.

Polish producers of cakes, sweet pastries, ice cream and vodka are also interested in Asian markets.

A recent visit by Marek Sawicki, the Polish minister of agriculture and rural development, to China helped promote Polish food in Asia. Sawicki visited the Sial China 2014 show in Shanghai and took part in the opening of the Polish national stand there. The stand, mounted by the Agricultural Market Agency, aimed to help more than 40 companies and trade organizations from the Polish food sector increase their presence in China.

An important objective of Sawicki's visit to China was a meeting with the Chinese deputy agriculture minister and officials from a Chinese institution responsible for veterinary inspections. The meeting focused on topics including the resumption of Polish pork exports to China after these were suspended due to the incidence of two cases of African swine fever (ASF) in wild boar near the Polish-Belarusian border. Sawicki tried to persuade the Chinese to start buying Polish pork again beginning in July.



Picnicking with Fine Food

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is holding its 11th Try Fine Food Picnic in the gardens of the Warsaw University of Life Sciences (SGGW) June 14.

This annual event, which is a fun-packed celebration of Polish food, will feature presentations and tastings of fine Polish produce labeled with the prestigious Try Fine Food emblem as well as other foods produced in compliance with Polish and European Union quality systems.

The picnic will offer opportunities to visitors to plan their summer vacations on Polish rural tourism farms and to learn about the activities of Local Fisheries Groups. Visitors will also be able to take in an exhibition of historic farm machinery and equipment, and tour a mini zoo with farm animals. Dietary advice will also be provided and special workshops will be held to enable visitors to round out a well-balanced diet based on produce showcased at the picnic. For the youngest guests there will be a number of educational games and food-related activities.

Try Fine Food is a program run by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development with a view to singling out quality food using the Try Fine Food emblem. Any food producer active in the European Union may apply for the label. The main aim of the Try Fine Food program is to create a positive image of Polish agri-food products and motivate producers and processing businesses to improve the quality of their products. The Try Fine Food label informs consumers that the product they have chosen is made from proven ingredients and has the correct labeling. The label placed on the packaging is designed to help consumers single out quality, safe and tasty products among the many goods on store shelves. Participation in the program is voluntary and free of charge for producers. The Try Fine Food label is granted by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to agri-food products that meet the requirements of the Try Fine Food program and receive a positive recommendation from the Chief Agri-Food Product Quality Inspector (GIJHARS) and are positively evaluated by the Scientific Committee for Food Quality set up under the Try Fine Food program. The Try Fine Food label is awarded for three years, which is designed to ensure consistent high quality of agri-food products with this label.



The annual Try Fine Food Picnic aims to promote Polish food and make it even more popular among Warsaw residents. Over the years the event has proved to be a success, as evidenced by the number of participants. Last year's picnic drew almost 20,000 visitors, who could taste products with the prestigious Try Fine Food label in addition to other food produced in compliance with national and EU quality systems. Also showcased were various traditional and regional products as well as organic food.

This year, as in previous years, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is encouraging Warsaw residents and tourists to stop by the SGGW gardens for this encounter with Polish food in front of the university rector's office. Visitors to this year's event, both adults and children, can expect many attractions for families. They will be able not only to try, but also buy the products on display, take part in joint cooking sessions, see exhibitions focusing on the countryside and agriculture, and find out what rural tourism farms from different regions of Poland have to offer. Those stopping by will also be given an opportunity to improve their diet at a makeshift "dietary clinic" and take part in many games, fun-packed activities and food-themed events. This year's attractions for visitors to the picnic are courtesy of the Agricultural Market Agency, the National Council of Agricultural Chambers, the Federation of Agricultural Producer Trade Organizations, the Polish Chamber of Milk Producers, the National Poultry Council, the Polish Meat Association, the National Association of Dairy Cooperatives, and the Union of Meat Industry Producers and Employers.



Rural Tourism

Łódź Province

Rawka River

Łódź province in central Poland has the potential to develop a strong rural tourism sector with a wealth of sightseeing opportunities and convenient access to other parts of the country.

Located in the center of the country, Łódź province is less popular with tourists than other destinations in Poland. Most Poles know little about the region, despite its scenic landscapes, lush natural beauty and important role it has played in the history of Poland, particularly in the history of Polish industry.

The province's most appealing sites include the picturesque valleys of the Pilica and Warta rivers, the Sulejów Reservoir and the Niebieskie Źródła (Blue Springs) nature reserve in Tomaszów Mazowiecki. Nature lovers enjoy the Jeziorsko Reservoir and like to stay at vacation centers in

Spała, Sulejów and Inowłódz. Some of the most scenic areas in Łódź province can be seen along right-bank tributaries of the Bzura River and the Rawka River, which cuts across the Bolimów Forest. Łódź province has many protected areas, including 65 nature reserves and the scenic parks of Załęcze, Przedbórz, Spała-Inowłódz, Sulejów, Łódź Hills and the Warta and Widawka River System.

Sites of historical and tourist interest in the Łódź region include the towns of Inowłódz, Przedbórz and Piotrków Trybunalski as well as Rawa Mazowiecka, Uniejów, Sieradz and Wieluń. The history of all these towns dates back many

Blue Springs



centuries. Tourists also come here to see former aristocratic residences, such as a palace in Nieborów and a Romantic-style English landscape park in the nearby village of Arkadia. Historic manor houses are located in Walewice and Poddębice, while local folk art is showcased at museums in the towns of Łowicz, Łęczycza, Opoczno, Sromów and Sieradz.

The province's principal city of Łódź holds a special place in Polish history and has a distinctive flavor created by eclectic, Art Nouveau architecture that dates back to the 19th century. That was when Łódź began to rapidly develop into a center for industry and turned into a melting pot of nations, including Poles, Germans and Jews. Surviving to this day in Łódź are glamorous palaces and huge red-brick factories left behind by 19th- and early-20th-century industrialists.

Łódź is home to some of Poland's finest relics of Jewish culture as well as unique attractions such as a comic book center, a filmmaking museum and the trendy Manufaktura shopping mall. Housed in a converted factory complex, Manufaktura combines a regular mall with a center for arts and culture and is the largest such facility in Europe. Many stores are also located along Piotrkowska Street, a famous shopping street that cuts across the center of Łódź and has more than 100 pubs, cafes and restaurants.



West of Łódź is the town of Uniejów, which has recently become one of the province's chief attractions thanks to local hot springs. Using EU funds, the town has built the largest water park in Poland, with thermal waters and swimming pools. The complex is located at the foot of a 14th-century castle that has inspired Uniejów's other major attraction, a medieval-style tournament held in summer. Medieval culture fans can take in a similar event 30 km away in Łęczycza, a town boasting a 14th-century castle built by Polish King Casimir III the Great. Legend has it that the castle's dungeon is inhabited by Boruta the devil, who guards a hidden treasure. Łęczycza is a stone's throw away from Tum, whose 850-year-old church stands as one of the finest examples of Romanesque art in both Poland and Europe. Other than being a place of worship, the church was used as a venue for important church conventions and as a shelter for the local population when the area was invaded by the Lithuanians, Prussians, Tartars and Teutonic Knights.

Visitors with an interest in nature rather than history should check out an arboretum in Rogów whose collection comprises over 2,000 tree and other plant species from temperate climate zones around the world. Part of the Rogów collection is a unique rock garden with highland plants. South of Rogów



Palace in Nieborów

is Tomaszów Mazowiecki with the Nagórzyckie Caverns, which are unique manmade caves on the site of a defunct sand mine. Fans of military history can visit German bunkers from World War II in the nearby village of Konewka. Other highlights of Łódź province include a 1920s wooden church made of larch wood in the summer resort of Spała, which was "discovered" by Russian Czar Alexander III.

One of Łódź province's most famed nooks and crannies is the area around Łowicz, whose distinctive folk traditions, music and outfits are sometimes cited as the quintessence of Polish folk culture. Łowicz is home to the former Primate's Collegiate Church, often nicknamed as the Wawel Hill of Mazovia, after the Wawel Hill in Cracow where many Polish kings were crowned and buried. The village of Maurzyce holds an open-air museum of the Łowicz region.

Łódź province has plenty to offer to people who like to stay active while on vacation. Fans of water sports can explore canoeing trails on the Pilica and Warta rivers, while those who like to ride a horse might want to try what is Europe's longest horse riding trail. Stretching for almost 2,000 kilometers, the trail spans over 200 stables, stud farms, horse riding centers and rural tourism farms. The Łódź region also has over 100 bike trails.

Open-air museum of the Łowicz region in Maurzyce





High potential

Even though Łódź province is not commonly associated with rural tourism, this form of tourism is among the region's main selling points, according to the Tourism Development Program for Łódź Province in 2007-2020 and Poland's Marketing Strategy for the Tourism Sector for 2012-2020. The local rural tourism sector is growing, but for now its key role is to supplement cultural and recreational tourism, which prevails in the region.

According to *An Expert Analysis of the Potential of Rural Tourism Products in Poland and Their Competitiveness on Regional, National and International Markets for Tourist Services*, a document compiled by the Polish Tourism Development Agency, Łódź province could benefit from its cultural heritage in its efforts to further develop its rural tourism sector. Another boon is the region's natural assets with numerous protected areas and an extended network of rivers, lakes and reservoirs. The towns of Łowicz, Sieradz and Opoczno are major folk culture centers that boast distinct colorful outfits, unique customs and crafts such as weaving, pottery, embroidery and paper cutting.

The province's central location in Poland, not far from Warsaw and within a radius of 200 kilometers from a number of other large cities, is another major strength, making Łódź province a convenient weekend destination for big city dwellers who seek a quiet refuge out in the open, want to explore folk culture and are keen to find out what rural Poland has to offer.

For now, Łódź province specializes in active forms of relaxation, with a special focus on equestrian sports. Many of the province's 200 farms with accommodation for guests offer horse riding opportunities. Nevertheless, according to *An Expert Analysis...*, the province should put more emphasis on its rural areas and promote them through traditional farms catering to tourists, especially visitors from nearby metropolitan areas.

Greatest hits of rural tourism

Łódź province is home to many recommendable farms with accommodation for tourists and inventive products and services. Two of these have been put on a list of "the greatest hits of rural tourism" compiled by the Polish Tourism Development Agency.

One is the Synowcówka Settlement in the village of Tkaczewska Góra, 25 km from Łódź. This farm combines traditional rural tourism services with facilities suitable for business events and corporate training. Located near a forest, meadows and a river, the settlement is part of a nationwide network of so-called learning homesteads, offering activities during which visitors can test the purity of water and study the local fauna and flora. In the local vegetable garden, root cellar and smokehouse, the staff also conduct workshops and classes in traditional food processing and storage methods. The nearby pine forest is excellent for mushroom picking and encourages bike rides and hiking, while a stable in the village of Pustkowa Góra, 2 kilometers from Synowcówka, offers horse riding.

The other rural tourism highlight is the Uroczyisko Kepa farm in Karnice, Puszcza Mariańska district. Combining agriculture, environmental protection and handicrafts, this farm is in the immediate vicinity of the Bolimów Scenic Park. In 2006, the owners turned to organic farming and have since grown fruit and bred goats and ponies. Subsequently in 2009, they started an environmental protection program for which Uroczyisko Kepa has been certified as an organic farm. Like Synowcówka, this farm is a learning homestead and teaches visitors about plant and animal production, food



processing methods, environmental protection and consumer rights, in addition to rural cultural heritage, traditional professions and folk arts and crafts.

Not on the greatest hits list, but worth checking out is the Gajówka Pilica (Pilica Forester's Lodge) rural tourism farm in the village of Lęg Ręczyniński. The farm specializes in equestrian tourism and canoeing expeditions, but also offers ecology classes and sports activities for teenagers.

The Agroturystyka Konarzew farm in Konarzew, in turn, is ideal for those who seek peace in a friendly, family-like setting. Child visitors to Konarzew are encouraged to see how bread is made "from the grain to the loaf," as the farm specializes in baking traditional bread. Guests are also offered horseback rides and when the day is done, they can roast sausages over a bonfire and relish in the house speciality, a soup called *zalewajka*.

The main draw of a rural tourism farm in Zmysłona is its proximity to the Warta River, where visitors can catch fish and go kayaking. Alternatively, they can explore the nearby woods for mushrooms or just take a bike ride. The lady of the house offers full board with dishes prepared fresh from organic ingredients grown on the site. Recreational activities are also the speciality of a farm called Brzozowy Gaj (Birch Grove) in the village of Skoczylasy. Visitors to this farm are encouraged to take a stroll amid the local meadows, fields and forests, to go fishing, play volleyball and boules-type games and even try their hand at archery. The staff also organize kayak trips and biking tours of the neighborhood.

Traditional cuisine and regional dishes

The cultural diversity of Łódź province is reflected in the staple dishes of different counties and regions within the province. One such speciality is *kugiel*, a kind of casserole from Przedbórz. Straddling the Pilica River in Radomsko county, Przedbórz was a predominantly Jewish town until World War II and, while the local Jews and Poles were constant competitors in economic terms, their cultures and traditions mixed and the *kugiel* dish became a product of this interplay. The casserole was traditionally prepared on Saturday from grated potatoes, eggs, bread crumbs, fried onions, salt, pepper and bits of greasy meat. Poles usually used pork, while Jews opted for goose meat. The ingredients were combined and put in a pot and then baked under a lid in a bread oven or a stove. Today *kugiel* has been slightly modified in Poland and often takes the form of a regular casserole with spare ribs and pig's knuckles chopped into pieces a little larger than in the case of goulash.

Many of the Łódź region's distinctive dishes have been put on Poland's official list of regional products. These include horseradish soup, cabbage with peas, plum jam from the Łowicz area, and the *zalewajka* soup.

Made of the most readily available ingredients such as potatoes, onions and leavened flour, *zalewajka* soup was the most popular dish in Łódź and nearby towns in the 19th century.

The famous plum jam from Łowicz stands out with its thick texture and clearly seen bits of plum skins. Produced in the area for over a century, the jam is usually made from a



local variety of the *Prunus domestica* plum, whose juicy and yellow flesh has a distinctive flavor and is easily separable from the stone. The locals also like to use older plum varieties. The production process is largely the same as it was a hundred years ago, with the ripest fruits being first boiled and then put aside to let a part of the water evaporate. Sugar is added to the hot mixture afterwards and then the jam is poured into jars and sealed tight.

Apart from its delicious food, the Łódź region offers visitors several distinctive beverages. They include a range of fruit tinctures and raspberry cordial made in the village of Nagawki from cowberries, blueberries, currants, cranberries, elderberry and grapes. The fruits are picked in forests around Łowicz or supplied by local fruit farmers.

As you tour Łódź province make sure to stop at one of the many inns where traditional dishes are served. You can also explore the regional cuisine during local festivals, such as the *Zalewajka* and Strawberry festivals in Buczek and the Onion Festival in Grabowo. Most of the events take place in summer, but autumn has several Baked Potato Festivals in store—in Andrespol, Brzustów, Wolbórz and Tuszyń. Tasty local dishes and beverages aside, audiences at such events are entertained with music concerts, games and a host of other attractions.

A.R.



Regional and Traditional Products

Kukielka Lisiecka

One of the most famous baked goods from Małopolska province entered on the List of Traditional Products is a white bread roll called *kukielka lisiecka* made with yeast. It owes its name to the village of Liszki near Cracow, where the traditional method of making these rolls is followed to this day.

The region where the art of baking *kukielka* rolls emerged and developed is Małopolska, or more exactly Cracow and its environs. *Kukielka* rolls became a well-known product after Duke Kazimierz the Restorer granted special privileges to the Cracow bakers' guild. In Cracow and surrounding areas the name *kukielka* was used for an elongated roll made from bread dough. Historical sources report that *kukielka* rolls were made either in Kleparz (a district of Cracow) or bought from bakers from Golkowice and Liszki, hence the names *kukielka golkowska* and *kukielka lisiecka*.

Since the late 18th century the traditional method of baking *kukielka* rolls is only followed by bakers from Liszki.

A typical *kukielka* roll weighs about 250 grams, its length ranges from 25 to 30 cm, and it is 7 cm wide at its thickest.

The outer color is golden to dark brown, the crumb is milky white with visible large holes. A *kukielka* roll is springy, going back to its original shape after being pressed down. Some people compare the flavor to an Italian ciabatta, but according to gourmets the crust is much tastier.

Making *kukielka lisiecka* rolls the traditional way is no simple matter. The kneading process is time-consuming because it takes about eight hours from making the leaven to taking the bread out of the oven. The first thing to do is make the leaven from flour, salt, yeast and water. The dough is formed into spindle-like shapes, then left to rise on a wooden shelf for about 30 minutes. Before they are put in the oven, *kukielka* rolls are brushed with *zanka*—wheat starch of the same consistency as cream. On each *kukielka* you have to place a small roll of dough that stops the bread from cracking at the sides during baking. Pricking the dough with a fork does the same job. A so-called *przybierka*, made of small rectangles of dough, is placed on top of each *kukielka*. The rolls are then placed in an oven fueled with pinewood mixed with deciduous wood, and baked at a very high temperature for 10-15 minutes.

In the Małopolska region the name *kukielka* was used for other kinds of bread as well. *Kukielka uszewska* from the village of Uszew, Gnojnik commune, is a roll 30 cm long with a special braided pattern made from two strands of dough on top. The tradition of baking *kukielka uszewska* dates back to the 14th century – and the rolls are still popular today. This product is part and parcel of local traditions and these *kukielka* rolls are found at harvest festivals and all kinds of contests and exhibitions. *Kukielka podegrodzka* is a traditional bread baked for *wiazowiny*, or a christening. In this tradition, the godmother brought her godchild a *kukielka* measuring up to 1.5 meters and weighing up to 10 kg. The recipe for this bread, specifying how to prepare and decorate it, was passed on from mother to daughter. *Kukielka podegrodzka* has become popular again, and even though the *wiazowiny* custom has disappeared, many young women learn how to make this traditional sweet bread. A.R.



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

Cautious is a good thing, but never in excess. The embargo on Polish pork is still in force even though not a single new case of African swine fever (ASF) has been detected in Poland after two wild boar infected with the ASF virus were found dead near the Belarusian border six months ago. And not a single case of the disease has been reported among domesticated pigs in Poland.

The most puzzling thing is that our closest neighbor, Ukraine, was one of the first countries to impose the embargo and the Ukrainians did not announce until mid-May that they were ready for talks on the matter. At the same time, they made no mention of any plans to lift an embargo on Polish beef that they imposed back in 2007. I hope we will be able to settle that soon as well.

Pork exports are extremely important to us, especially when it comes to markets in Asia. Polish food has a very good press in China and is regarded as premium quality food, almost like organic food. An estimated 400 million people in China are now able to afford to buy products at prices above the average. China also buys the kind of animal products that we do not sell anywhere else. I should mention that the value exports of Polish pork to Asian countries has approached that of pork exports to markets beyond Poland's eastern border.

Exports to Asia are a vital issue for us. We have been working to win these markets and once you drop an anchor in a market, it is worth expanding your range of products in order to stay there, as it is much harder to return to a market that has been lost. For that reason, in mid-May I went to China, Singapore and South Korea, where I talked with many veterinary officials in charge of allowing our pork onto those markets. The procedures take a very long time, but there is a chance they will not take the longest they possibly could and that our pork will be back. We need to remember that China has vast herds of livestock and it is only natural that the Chinese are extra-cautious in fear of African swine fever. I presented in detail the measures that Poland had taken to prevent the spread of ASF. I would say those were model measures. We prevented the dangerous virus from penetrating any further inside the country, so I can see no reason that the embargo should continue. The situation we are dealing with in Poland shows that many ASF-related procedures should be reviewed at the international level, especially those that pertain to foreign trade restrictions.

During my visit to Asia, I was accompanied by Krzysztof Jajdzewski, the acting chief veterinary officer, and

Krzysztof Niemczuk, the head of the National Veterinary Research Institute in Puławy. They also took part in a highly important seminar in Beijing. After clarifications had been made, the Chinese for the first time in history said they were willing to propose for pork imports from Poland to be divided into regions. If an inspection finds that everything is in order, a door will open for Polish pork exports to China to resume. I need to add that exports to Vietnam and Hong Kong continue undisturbed.

While in Asia, I also attended food fairs in Seoul and Shanghai. Over 40 Polish companies came to Seoul and around 60 companies to Shanghai to exhibit their products there. It's clear that Polish enterprises are interested in those markets, which augurs well for the future of Poland's agricultural and food exports. For the time being, 10 Polish poultry processing plants, eight poultry breeders and 69 dairies have access to the Chinese market. This shows that efforts started several years ago to ensure access to the Chinese market are bringing tangible results.

With this in mind, I would like to highlight the importance of Poland's new Rural Development Plan for 2014-2020. We have assigned the bulk of the funds to increasing the efficiency of farms and to environmental protection. Out of the total of 13.5 billion euros at our disposal, we have earmarked 7.1 billion euros for measures designed to help as many small and medium-sized farms as possible to become economically independent. We are planning to achieve that by, for example, channeling funds so as to enable the modernization of farms and the restructuring of small farms, as well as for bonuses for young farmers and payments to small farm owners transferring their farms to successors. This should help farms restructure and become more efficient. Ideas such as those should make sure that the EU's new 2014-2020 budget creates solid foundations for the development of Polish agriculture.

We have vast funds to spend and we should spend them as effectively as possible. But the major challenge that awaits us is to cut red tape and radically simplify the EU's Common Agricultural Policy—something that we were unable to accomplish while working on the 2014-2020 budget. I am convinced, however, that we will have enough time to persuade others that this is the right approach and that, after 2020, the Common Agricultural Policy will be made simpler and thus more efficient and capable of more swiftly responding to rapid global changes.