

Polish Food Exports to Muslim Countries on the Rise

Poland exported more food and agricultural products to non-European countries last year than in previous years. Exports to North Africa and the Middle East grew particularly rapidly.

Iran was the fastest growing market for Polish food in the Muslim world. Exports to that country rose 2.6-fold. Poland also sharply increased its exports to Egypt (84 percent), Iraq (77 percent), Libya (67 percent), Tunisia (52 percent), the United Arab Emirates (48 percent), and Saudi Arabia (42 percent). However, in the case of some other Muslim countries the upward trend reversed. Exports to Turkey dropped 66 percent last year compared with 2012, after Turkey canceled preferential duties for EU member states and the EU stopped offering refunds to exporters. Exports to Algeria decreased 24 percent due to dwindling sales of powdered milk.

Saudi Arabia was the largest importer of Polish food among Muslim countries last year. Exports to that country were worth 153 million euros. In terms of value, Poland's top food and agricultural exports to Saudi Arabia were wheat, cheese, cottage cheese, confectionery and chocolate. The United Arab Emirates

imported 85 million euros worth of Polish food, the main products being chocolate and cheese as well as cigars, cigarettes and cigarillos, which are classified as food in statistics. Algeria was the third-largest importer, buying 77.4 million euros' worth of wheat and meslin as well as milk, cheese, malt extract and flour-based foods. Malt extract, flour-based foods and chocolate were the top Polish food exports to Turkey, which bought a total of 65.8 million euros worth of Polish food last year. Poland's other major export markets in the region are Egypt, at 48.2 million euros, Iraq at 33.2 million euros, Kuwait at 16.3 million euros, and Iran at 16.1 million euros.

In total, Polish food and agricultural exports to Muslim countries were worth 500 million euros last year. Poland's total food exports were worth 20 billion euros last year. After a meeting with ambassadors and diplomats from Algeria, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran and Lebanon in May, Poland's minister of agriculture and rural development, Marek Sawicki, said this "still not enough."

"Arab countries are developing rapidly and their growing import potential presents increased export opportunities," said Sawicki. "We want Poland to have a presence on these markets," he added.

Meeting participants discussed the terms on which Polish food could be exported to Muslim countries and what investment opportunities Poland's food and agricultural sector presented to businesses from these countries. One recent problem with Polish food sales on markets in Muslim countries are the declining exports of Polish meat, beef in particular. According to Sawicki, the controversy over ritual slaughter is not the main reason. "Poland does not prohibit ritual slaughter, only slaughter where the animals are not stunned first," Sawicki said.

During a press conference after the meeting, embassy officials said their countries were interested in increasing food trade with Poland. Rostam Adabina, first secretary of the embassy of Iran, said Iran and Poland have complementary agricultural products. "Iran buys a lot of food, for a total of \$20 billion a year, which makes it sufficiently attractive as a market for Poland," Adabina said.

Polish exports to Muslim countries could be stimulated through more extensive promotional campaigns. Projects to promote Polish food on international markets that started in 2009 are about to be intensified now that the European Commission has increased funding for promotion on markets outside the EU. As of this year, the annual EU budget for the promotion of food abroad increased from 50 million to 200 million euros, Sawicki said. In April, the European Commission decided to award some of the funds to a project undertaken jointly by the Fruit Union, an organization that brings together Polish fruit and vegetable distributors, and the Association of Polish Fruit Farmers. Tentatively scheduled for launch this autumn, the project will promote Polish apples in China and the United Arab Emirates. The volume of apples to be shipped to China has not been determined yet, but according to the Fruit Union, China is a promising market. As for the United Arab Emirates, the Fruit Union says the country will become a transportation and distribution hub from which Polish apples could be forwarded to North Africa, including Algeria, Egypt, Libya and Morocco.



Promoting Fruit and Vegetables

A number of public awareness campaigns are under way to promote the consumption of fruit and vegetables and help shape healthy eating habits in Poland.

According to the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics, the average Pole consumes just over 40 kg of fruit and fruit products annually and less than 60 kg of vegetables and vegetable products, not including potatoes. And this means that fruit and vegetable consumption in Poland is falling. In 2002, the figures were 48.8 kg and 64.5 kg respectively.

Among different varieties of fruit, tree fruit is the most popular in Poland, especially apples, with consumption at 15 kg per person a year. But 10 years ago consumption was almost 10 kg more.

When it comes to vegetables, Poles are keenest on tomatoes and cucumbers (9.8 kg and 7.1 kg eaten per person per year respectively). Carrots and cabbage come next, each with 6.3 kg per person, followed by onions, at 5.7 kg per person.

Statistics show that fruit and vegetable consumption in Poland is still insufficient. This applies to both fresh and processed fruit and vegetables. As a result, the Polish diet is not sufficiently rich in vitamins coming from fruit, vegetables and juices. But this may change because awareness of healthy eating habits is growing in Polish society. This is due to factors including various programs and campaigns to promote the consumption of fruit and vegetables.

In order to encourage consumers, especially children and young people, to eat fruit and vegetables and drink fruit and vegetable juices, the government-backed "Five Servings of Vegetables, Fruit or Juice" educational campaign has been in progress for several years. According to experts, five servings provide an optimal dose of vitamins, minerals and nutrients needed for the human body to function properly.

The campaign began in September 2011 and will run until the end of September this year. It is financed by the Polish government using European Union funds as well as cash available from the Fund for the Promotion of Fruit and Vegetables administered by Poland's Agricultural Market Agency.

The campaign is targeted at both adults and children. According to the organizers, the campaign is yielding tangible results and is raising the public's awareness about good nutrition habits. Surveys point to an increased number of consumers who are aware that they should have at least five servings of fruit and vegetables a day, the campaign organizers say. Almost 33 percent of mothers surveyed said they are aware that fruit and vegetables should be consumed five times a day, and a similar percentage say that they and their families follow these guidelines. To compare, when the campaign was getting under way in 2008, only about 21 percent of mothers surveyed declared the same. Today in Poland seven in every 10 mothers give their children fruit to school on an everyday basis.

Consequently, the organizers say, the campaign has significantly increased awareness in the target group—mothers and children—about a proper and balanced diet. Another positive outcome is that a large number of people say they have increased regular consumption of fruit and vegetables.

Similar objectives are at the center of the European Commission's School Fruit Scheme, which has been hugely suc-

cessful in Poland since it was launched in the 2009/2010 school year. In Poland, the program is targeted at students in grades one to three of elementary school. In the 2013/2014 school year, the program covered nearly 1 million children, or almost 84 percent of the target group. The program is 75-percent financed from the EU budget and 25 percent with funds from the national budget. The total budget of the program this school year is 18.2 million euros.

Children covered by the program are provided with fresh fruit (apples, pears and strawberries) and vegetables (carrots, sweet peppers and radishes) as well as fruit and vegetable juices several times a week.

The "Time for tomato, or how can you not love Polish fruit and vegetables" nationwide socio-educational campaign is another interesting project that promotes healthy eating. This year the organizers want to focus on preventing obesity among children and target their efforts at both children and adults who play a key role in shaping their eating habits.

Another example of efforts to promote the consumption of fruit is the "Extraordinary properties of ordinary fruit" information and promotion campaign being carried out by the Association of Polish Fruit Growers with the support of the Fund for the Promotion of Fruit and Vegetables administered by Poland's Agricultural Market Agency, and in conjunction with associations bringing together blueberry, currant and strawberry growers. The aim of the campaign is to increase consumption of berries, especially among children and young people, and to shape healthy eating habits and increase exports of berries and berry fruit products. Promotional activities are being carried out simultaneously on five markets: Poland, Austria, Sweden, Finland and the Czech Republic.

Meanwhile, the "Apple a Day" promotional and information campaign is targeted at consumers in Russia and Ukraine. The program, being carried out by the Association of Polish Fruit Growers with the support of the Agricultural Market Agency, seeks to build and strengthen a positive image of European apples in Russia and Ukraine and to increase sales of European apples in these countries.

A.R.



Rural Tourism

Pomerania Province



Sandy beaches on the Baltic Sea coast

Pomerania province in northern Poland is one of the most attractive regions in the country and has a developing rural tourism sector that supplements other forms of local tourism.

Stretching along the Baltic Sea and south towards central Poland, Pomerania province is a top tourist destination, with some of Poland's finest seaside resorts and a wealth of vast sandy beaches and bathing sites. The province's most popular coastal towns include Ustka, Łeba, Rowy, Jastrzębia Góra, Władysławowo, Jastarnia, Jurata, Hel and Krynica Morska. The town of Sopot, wedged between the cities of Gdańsk and Gdynia, is an internationally famous resort whose chief attraction is a 512-meter long pier—the longest in the country and one of the longest wooden piers in Europe.

One of the province's standout geographical features is the Hel Peninsula, a 34-kilometer-long sandbar deposited by waves and sea currents over thousands of years. The Hel Peninsula is less than 200 meters wide at its narrowest point but expands to 2.9 kilometers at its tip in the town of Hel.

One of the most remarkable natural sites in Pomerania province is the Slowiński National Park, famous for Europe's largest shifting dunes that move 6-10 meters a year. The national park was established in 1967 and 10 years later UNESCO designated it as a biosphere reserve. More than half of the park's surface area is covered by Lakes Łebsko, Gardno, Smołdzińskie, Dołgie Wielkie and Dołgie Małe. Łebsko and Gardno are shallow lakes that are separated from the sea by sandbars and are a distinctive feature of the Polish Baltic coast. The lakes and their neighborhood provide nesting and feeding grounds for many bird species, including ruffs, calidrids, ducks, seagulls and terns, in addition to various birds of prey.

The central part of Pomerania province is called Kashubia (Kaszuby in Polish) and includes the Kashubia Lake District. This comprises a section of highly varied landscape nicknamed "Kashubian Switzerland." A large part of this picturesque hilly area is covered by woods. The local tourist highlights include Lakes Raduńskie and Ostrzyckie and the Wieżyca peak in the hills near Szymbark.

Shifting dunes in the Slowiński National Park



Somewhat eclipsed by the Baltic coast but no less appealing are the Tuchola Forest and the Kociewie region in the south of the province, in the drainage basin of the Wierzyca and Czarna Woda rivers. One of the largest woodland areas in Poland, the Tuchola Forest was designated as a national park in 1996. The forest is a sanctuary with over 300 natural monuments, including 400-year-old oaks and 300-year-old pine trees that stand as relics of the area's primeval landscape. The Tuchola Forest National Park is also home to Poland's largest concentration of inland dunes and its geological features also include tunnel valleys stretching from the north to the south. The most well-known lakes in the Tuchola Forest are Wdzydze and Charzykowskie with well-developed sailing and ice-boating facilities.

Areas known as Żuławy and Powiśle along the Vistula River make up a flat region crisscrossed by manmade ditches and canals. The local sites of interest include a range of hydraulic engineering structures, such as drawbridges, locks and pumps.

Apart from its beautiful and lush nature, Pomerania boasts many places of historical interest, especially in the province's principal city of Gdańsk. The historic highlights of Gdańsk include the Basilica of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which is the largest medieval church in Poland and the largest Gothic brick church in Europe. The church can accommodate up to 25,000 people at a time. Gdańsk is part of a metropolitan area known as the Tricity, which also comprises the seaside resort of Sopot and the city of Gdynia, separated from Sopot by a strip of forest.

Places of historical interest in Pomerania province also include several castles built by the Teutonic order of knights, whose state once occupied a part of present-day Poland. The most impressive of the castles stands in Malbork, the former seat of Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen. This is the largest Gothic castle in the world, while smaller Teutonic castles are also located in Sztum, Kwidzyn, Człuchów, Bytów and Gniew.

Folk customs and culture

Pomerania province can be divided into several distinctive regions, with Kashubia being home to one of the largest ethnic groups in Poland. The locals, known as Kashubs, have preserved a distinctive culture with their own language, literature and folk traditions and outfits. Kashubs observe a range of traditional everyday customs, in addition to folk arts and crafts that they practice at small studios in their homes. Many Poles are familiar with Kashubian embroidery, a handicraft dating back to the 18th century. Just like centuries ago, local housewives continue to embroider elaborate patterns on linen tablecloths that they later put on festive tables. Other local crafts include glass painting and items made of plaited pine roots.

The culture of Kashubia thrives in the towns of Kartuzy, Kościerzyna and Bytów, where museums have large collections of Kashubia-related items on show while folk ensembles keep Kashubian music and dances alive. A good way to explore this heritage is to visit the Kashubia Ethnographic

Teutonic castle in Malbork



Park in Wdzydze Kiszewskie, the oldest open-air museum in Poland. Buildings displayed in the park include cottages furnished with vintage furniture such as kitchen cupboards hand-decorated by woodcarvers. An open-air museum with historic cottages is also located in the village of Kluki.

In the drainage basin of the Wierzyca and Wda rivers south of Kashubia lies the region of Kociewie, where a local dialect of Polish survives to this day. The locals are referred to as Kociewiaczy and form a mixed group that has lived here for centuries. The region stands out with its distinctive traditional culture that is cultivated by folk ensembles.

Rural highlights

An 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, describes Pomerania province as one of Poland's top regions in terms of tourist appeal, mainly owing to its location on the Baltic coast. The appeal is further enhanced by the cultural diversity of Pomerania's regions, Kashubia and Kociewie in particular.

Kashubian embroidery



Hundreds of thousands of tourists come to the province every year and some of them also choose to spend vacations in a rural setting. However, this form of tourism is not very popular in Pomerania and, according to experts, rural tourism in Pomerania province is only supplementary to other forms of tourism that focus on culture and active recreation.

Rural tourism in Pomerania has potential to develop in the Vistula Valley, the Tuchola Forest, and the Słowiński National Park. These locations offer beautiful lakes, rivers and woodlands. Rural Pomerania could also draw visitors with its cultural and ethnic diversity.

Farms that offer accommodation and services to tourists in Pomerania are supported by the Pomerania Regional Tourist Organization, local tourist organizations, and a number of organizations that specifically deal with rural tourism.

Greatest hits

Pomerania 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 *Agroturystyka u Chłopa* rural tourism farm in Chmielno in the picturesque neighborhood of the Radunia River that cuts through the “Kashubian Switzerland.” Run by a traditional Kashub family, the farm presents guests with many opportunities to explore the local folk culture and try local delicacies served by the hosts. The farm also offers a Kashubian steam bath as a special treat.



The other top “hit” is the *Pasieka Wędrowna Barć* (Traveling Beehives) farm combined with a mobile apiary in Krzemienica. The farm owners started the apiary in 1996. In spring and summer, they take their bees in a truck to fields within a 50-kilometer radius from the farm in order to obtain different varieties of honey.

The farm is a typical homestead from the first half of the 19th century with wattle-and-daub buildings. The farm produces many kinds of honey, including canola, linden, buckwheat, heather and wildflower honey. The hosts also provide educational activities using a special Beekeeping Hall that they opened in 2004. This facility houses an exhibition of vintage beekeeping equipment and two beehives made of



glass—the farm’s main attraction. The house specialty is *Onisiówka*, a strong liqueur made of a blend of honey and elderberry syrup. In 2006, *Onisiówka* was put on the Agriculture Ministry’s list of Regional and Traditional Products.

Not on the “greatest hits” list but also worth a visit is the Ola rural tourism farm outside the village of Słajszewo, Choczewo district, just 3.5 kilometers from the Baltic Sea. The farm specializes in traditional Polish dishes made from meat, cold cuts, dairy products, fruit and vegetables all grown and produced on the site. Many of the dishes are made by the lady of the house, who also treats guests to cakes and pies she makes herself. Nearby attractions include a historic lighthouse, a palace in the village of Sasino, and a yew tree reserve. The forests in the neighborhood abound in forest fruit and game.

Those who like active forms of recreation can come to the small village of Hejtus on the edge of the Kashubia Scenic Park, where a farm named after the village encourages visitors to stay active while vacationing. The area offers many Nordic walking routes and bicycle trails that take bikers on tours around the forests, lakes and meadows of Kashubia. Tourists who prefer to relax in peace and quiet can check in at the *Kaszëbskô Checz* (Kashubian for “Kashub Cottage”) rural tourism farm in the village of Maks by Lake Raduńskie Dolne in the middle of the Kashubia Lake District. Sitting



amid meadows and forests, this traditional farm offers room and full board to visitors. The house specialties include staple dishes of Polish cuisine, such as the *bigos* sauerkraut stew with sausage, mushrooms and spices, and bread with lard. This tidy farm and house are surrounded by a large, lush green garden. Guests are welcome to use the farm's private fish pond, and if they like they can take the opportunity to give the hosts a hand with farm chores.

The *Pod Lipą* (Under the Linden Tree) farm in Koźczkowo in the Kashubia Scenic Park is another working farm with accommodation for tourists. Local attractions include a fish pond and horse rides for visitors. On request, the hosts can arrange a party with music performed live by a folk Kashub band, in addition to rides in a hayrack wagon, bonfires and sledge rides in winter.

Regional cuisine and dishes

The cuisine of the Pomerania region offers a diversified range of specialties many of which are available at local rural tourism farms. Indigenous Kashubs used to eat a lot of fish and dishes made from potatoes that were never in shortage in rural areas. Meat was usually served during family celebrations and on church holidays. The most popular everyday dish was mashed potatoes with pork scratchings and butter-milk. Traditional Kashubia dishes also include a *grucholec* potato pie served hot with an onion and pickled cucumber salad. Visitors to the area should also try the *kiszka kaszubska* sausage-like product made from potatoes, buckwheat groats, eggs and smoked fatback.

In Kociewie, the locals like to eat a mushroom casserole which, when ready, looks a lot like bread with a crunchy crust. The staple dishes of the northwestern part of Pomerania province, in turn, include the Polish *żur* sour soup, rutabaga soup and *Klitundplumen*, which is German for plum soup with dumplings.

Some of the tastiest regional dishes in Pomerania province come from the Powiśle region along the Vistula River's lower section. The area is well known for its local plum varieties that are processed into a range of specialties, including marinated Powiśle plums, Nebrowo plum jam, and *Nebrowianka* plum liqueur, all of which are listed as regional products.

The Agriculture Ministry's list of traditional products features a total of 144 products from Pomerania province. Only Podkarpackie province has more. The most well-known product from Pomerania is *truskawka kaszubska*, Kashubian strawberry, which contains more sugar than strawberries grown in other parts of Poland. This is a result of the microclimate in the Kashubia Lake District where temperatures change dramatically between day and night. People in Pomerania also make different kinds of fruit preserves and dishes from cranberries. This dwarf shrub grows mainly in northern Poland, especially in the boggy areas and swamps of Kashubia. Cranberries are eaten raw with sugar and processed into jellies, jams and sauces. Raw cranberries from Kashubia are known to be very tasty and contain a lot of vitamin C. Folk medicine has long used the fruit to treat



Smoked herring

inflammations, scurvy, whooping cough, rheumatism and the common cold.

Fish used to be a key part of the cuisine of Kashubia and were served cooked, roasted, smoked and dried and eaten both as the main course and as a side dish. Villagers who lived near lakes and the sea caught fish for a living. Herring was the most popular sea fish in the area and in autumn almost every household had a barrel full of salted herring. Fish in Kashubia is prepared in a variety of styles, including marinated, fried, roasted over an open fire, salted and smoked, served with sour cream, oil and mayonnaise. It is also used as an ingredient of salads, mushroom dishes and pea soup. Several herring dishes are listed as traditional products and include *śledź bałtycki po rybacku* (fisherman-style Baltic herring), *salatka śledziowa po kaszubsku* (Kashubia herring salad) and *śledzie marynowane w oleju* (marinated herring in oil). Fish specialties from Kashubia also include fried roe and *kotlety kaszubskie* fish fillets with various flavors. A.R.



Kiszka kaszubska



Kashubia herring salad



Kashubian strawberry

Regional and Traditional Products

Kociewie Pickles

Pickled gherkins known as *pikle kociewskie*—Kociewie pickles—are a popular side dish in Poland's northern Pomerania area that is delicious with both hot and cold meals.

Pickles from Kociewie, a region of Pomerania, are made from cucumbers, though many recipes mention other products that can be pickled the same way: shallots, green tomatoes, nasturtium, peas and mushrooms. Kociewie pickles are made from a special cucumber variety from the Śrem area in central Poland, very prolific but infrequently grown. The fruit of this cucumber variety is shapely, cylin-

dric, with a small seed sack. The skin is green with streaks running halfway along the fruit's length and numerous thick papillae.

According to a prewar recipe from the book *Kucharka litewska* (The Lithuanian Cook), to make tasty pickles you have to "wipe the little new cucumbers with a dry cloth, salt them for 24 hours, then wipe dry again. Take some powerful vinegar, boil it with peppercorns, all spice, bay leaves and a pinch of saltpeter, and once it cools, pour over the cucumbers, packed into a very dry jar. The next day pour out the vinegar, boil it again and pour over the cucumbers once it cools; repeat on the third day. Four weeks later take some fresh powerful vinegar, boil with the same spices, and once it has cooled completely, pour over the cucumbers, but first wipe them properly dry, and the jar as well, and then repeat for the next two days but without the wiping. If mold should appear in winter, remove the vinegar at once and pour over fresh vinegar, boiled first with the spices as usual, for three consecutive days, always wiping the cucumbers and the jar dry on the first day."

A modern-day recipe recommends the following ingredients for the pickling mixture: 4 cups of water, 1 cup of vinegar, 1 tablespoon of vegetable oil, 1 tablespoon of salt, half a cup of sugar, a bay leaf, some mustard seed, all spice, peppercorns and additions such as carrot, dill, bell pepper. Mushrooms and vegetables can be added to the pickles.

Cucumber preserves, like those made from cabbage, are popular across Poland. Traditionally, the most popular preserve made in large amounts is cucumbers pickled in brine.

A dish that is popular in many regions – including Kociewie, is called *mizeria* (thinly sliced cucumbers served with cream diluted with water and vinegar). *Mizeria* is a popular traditional side dish in summer, particularly to accompany new potatoes.

Pickles containing gherkins and other vegetables were traditionally made from August as a dish that would last throughout the winter months, all the way to the following May. Gherkins were stored in oak barrels or stoneware pots. Apart from pickling in brine, gherkins were pickled in a sweet and sour mixture with many spices. Pickles from Kociewie are a special type of these pickles, made by local cooks from traditional recipes used by their mothers and grandmothers.

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The *Polska... tastes good!* special section is published by WV Marketing sp. z o. o.
in association with Warsaw Voice SA in a project co-financed by
the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. Address: 30 Wspólna St., 00-930 Warsaw
www.minrol.gov.pl





Years of Rapid Change

By **Marek Sawicki, PhD**
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May marked 10 years since Poland joined the EU. That momentous event was preceded by a string of crucial decisions made possible by the landmark parliamentary elections of June 4, 1989. Although the elections were only partially free, they were enough to allow Polish people to make their aspirations perfectly clear. Poland showed that a transition from communism could be a civilized process without bloodshed. The elections 25 years ago were the result of the agreement reached at the Round Table talks between the communist authorities and the pro-democracy opposition. Together, these events sparked changes across the former Eastern bloc, making the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany possible.

Today, we are living in totally different country than a quarter of a century ago. Poland has taken a giant leap forward and much has changed in Polish rural areas. Admittedly, the changes have taken sacrifices and tremendous effort, and certainly not everything has been done in the best possible way. Some processes have been very painful, but at the end of the day the advantages clearly outweigh the disadvantages.

Poland was the only country among the 10 that joined the EU 10 years ago whose agricultural sector was fragmented into small, private farms. That had made membership negotiations particularly difficult when it came to agriculture. Still, we managed to negotiate the best conditions possible at the time, even if those conditions failed to ensure equal opportunities for Polish farmers on the EU market. Nevertheless, Poland made the most of all the funds awarded to it in the run-up to accession as well as those that were already available as part of the EU Common Agricultural Policy.

A huge amount of work was done to adjust Polish regulations to EU law and establish institutions needed by the agricultural sector. A lot changed in sectors with close ties to agriculture. Food processing plants, meat plants and dairies in particular, changed beyond recognition. Modernization at such facilities went full steam ahead and now they rank among the most modern in Europe.

As Polish agriculture changed, so did farms in Poland. It was a natural, evolutionary process that led to the closing down of 700,000 of the smallest farms. The structure of what remained improved and specialty farms started to emerge. That is how, despite a smaller overall number of cattle, Poland has been able to produce more milk at more efficient dairy farms. Many farmers upgraded their equipment, buying

state-of-the-art tractors, farming machines and other hardware for agricultural production. These changes were backed by new technology that found its way to specialty farms.

All these far-reaching changes gave a boost to agricultural production and enabled Polish food and agricultural exports to grow rapidly. These exports are now worth almost 20 billion euros, with a trade surplus of around 5.7 billion euros. Most of the exports go to the EU market, but Poland continues searching for new markets and ways to access them. We have been very active in this department in Asia, the Far East and the Middle East. Promotional campaigns are making the public abroad more aware of Polish food and, in addition to the EU, Polish products have proved popular with consumers in China, Vietnam, South Korea, Japan and Arab countries. This best exemplifies the changes that have been taking place in Polish agriculture.

I have no doubt that in the next phase of this process, Polish cuisine will become an international success. The rich culinary tradition of Poland, influenced by different cultures and cuisines, is yet to be discovered by connoisseurs of fine food, not least because of the growing interest in organic food and a backlash against fast food. Growing numbers of consumers enjoy traditional festive meals and want their food to be cooked slowly, so that all nutritional values are preserved. Polish cuisine has always been known for rich flavors enhanced by a generous use of herbs and painstaking preparation methods. We have preserved the tradition of making soups, which are highly popular in Poland. Soups are often underestimated as a meal, but their popularity has been on the rise for several years.

Summer is a good time for traveling. Every trip is an opportunity to try new, local dishes prepared on the spot and originating from that region. Poland boasts exquisite *pierogi*, in addition to delicious soups made from seasonal products, light in summer and heavier in winter. We also have tasty meat dishes, including fried, stewed and grilled meats, often served with a variety of groats and fresh salads.

I would like to strongly encourage everybody to explore the flavors of Poland and try traditional dishes. Look around for those and other traditional products, treat your palates to the delightful taste of Poland and discover Poland's culinary heritage for yourself. Make sure to also enjoy picturesque landscapes by visiting Poland's extensive network of rural tourism farms where delicious food is accompanied by traditional Polish hospitality.