

# AN APPETITE FOR THE SLOWEST OF SNACKS

FRANCE LOVES OUR SNAILS, ESPECIALLY THOSE FROM ECO-FARMS # THE “SNAIL KING” HAS SOME USEFUL ADVICE FOR INNOVATIVE FARMERS # 120 ORIGINAL RECIPES # A FASTING DISH # APHRODITE’S PEARLS

The traditional Old-Polish dish is making a bold comeback to our tables, for instance in the form of snails roasted with garlic – that’s just one of the ways in which Polish cuisine is manifesting its rebirth. The strong growth of exports has proven beneficial for the domestic market, and especially for its catering sector. Snail farming has started to gain momentum, as there was no guarantee of regular supplies of handpicked Roman snails, and also the scope of the protection of this wild-living species has been broadened.

**A**s a reminder, nearly 30 years ago, individual snail farms already existed, and even snail festivals were organised. But Poland can boast a much longer snail farming history dating back to the 17th century and monastery farms, as monks were known to cherish these gastropods and regarded them as a “fasting” meal. In his “Compendium Ferculorum” (Kraków, 1682), Stanisław Czernicki included six recipes for these tasty invertebrates, while mentioning pork in only two sentences.

The recent book “Ślimaka kulinarna podróż – o tym, co zapomniane, a przypomnienia warte” (The Snail’s Culinary Journey – on what’s forgotten, yet worth bringing back”, Studio Editorial, Krakow, 2016) features 120 original recipes crafted by 64 masters of culinary art. A movie and educational videos devoted to the slimy creature have been made as well. Competitions for escargot gourmets are held, and we can enjoy the rich programme of the World Snail Day (24 May 2019). The man behind many of these events is “Snail King” Grzegorz Skalmowski, co-owner of the “Eko Snails Garden” farm, which is part of the “Polska Ekologia” Association.

We asked this pioneer and visionary of the snail business how all this success came to be:

“My wife Mariola and I created quite a unique, multidisciplinary business which not only deals with production, education and tourism, but also provides consultancy. By making a 30-minute video and participating in the publication of a book passing on expertise on the topic, we have encouraged farmers to try out some innovations. After all, it only takes 500 sq. metres to set up a snail farm, and that’s all we had when starting out more than a decade ago. Today, our snail ranch is the source of products such as ready-made dishes, white caviar (that’s right!), and natural slime cosmetics. We also run a “snail bistro”, a shop, a cosmetics laboratory, and training workshops, sometimes in combination with corporate events at Dworek Sople where you will find fish, crayfish, and snails. It would also be reasonable for me to mention that we have received an award from the World Food Travel Association”.

The Snails Garden farm in Krasin near Pasłęk, situated just beside national road No. 7 between Ostróda and Elbląg, has become a major tourist attraction in the western part of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Province.

When it comes to cuisine, the farm will not only provide you with over ten snail recipes, but will also feature mixed flavours, e.g. with mushroom in hunter's dumplings, as well as desserts such as sweet-served tartlets and ginger bread with white caviar. And then there is an amazing mix containing 30 percent snail meat, used in the production of regular and kabanos sausage. A luxurious delicacy.

What's particularly interesting is that the farm has launched the production of snail-slime-based cosmetics. "Snails Garden on guard of your beauty" is a motto being successfully brought into life by Ms Mariola Pilat-Skalmowska, the winner of many diplomas and awards, including the title of "Woman of Character" from the Warmian-Masurian Women's Forum Association. As this go-getting businesswoman told us:

"Our mission is to create the best cosmetics using snail bio-slime. Snail creams, for example, are excellent for treating various skin problems or wrinkles. In our laboratory, we are developing our own formulas perfectly suited to women who care about the look of their skin. Snail slime is rich in natural ingredients: allantoin, collagen, elastin, glycolic acid, vitamins A, C, and E, and antibiotics.

Let me also add that ancient Greece knew about and enjoyed the benefits of snail farming, both in the kitchen and for beauty treatments. Aphrodite used them, so now we can present to you 'Aphrodite's Pearls'".

It's worth exploring the snail route, as it runs from the ancient Greeks, mediaeval monasteries and Old-Polish cuisine, up to the innovative farm in Krasin, where you can learn more about this historical background, e.g. by combining a visit to the Eco Snails Garden with a trip taken partly on grass, and partly on the Elbląg Canal. •



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