

Consider boar on the dinner plate... or to balance the books

Dangerous, yet delightfully tasty, **Iona Walton** gets up close and personal with wild boar

USP usually stands for unique selling point, but in the case of The Real Boar Company, it's more a case of unique selling product. Simon Gaskell seems to have hit the mark with his wild boar salami. While The Real Boar Company has been in existence for a mere three years, Simon has already won a coveted Gold Three Star Award from the Great Taste Awards 2008 for his wild boar salami with red wine.

Around 200 boar of Polish and German origin thrive in 11 hectares of woodland on his farm in the Cotswolds. Simon initially focussed on wholesale boar meat, but realising he wasn't going to make ends meet, he soon hit on salami, and hasn't looked back.

"Our business doubled last year and salami sales alone were 380% up on the previous year," he says. "Salami is very user friendly as it is easy, can be incorporated into a whole range of dishes and lasts for six months. And producing it means we can still sell the loins and haunches independently."

The salamis come in smart 375g tubes or 200g presliced and vac packed.

"We wanted something that looked classical and



REFERENCE www.snapdragongallery.co.uk



oozed quality to help us sell the salami whole as a gift," Simon says.

"We were selling most to be sliced up and this again gave us access to a larger target

audience, particularly with their long shelf life."

New products are always in

the offing, and Simon and his butcher bounce ideas and styles around between them.

Three exciting new salami varieties are going into trial production shortly, one of which will be a limited edition, and an additional range of cured products might include bacon and biltong.

Not content with meat alone, chopping boards and handmade salami knives could soon be added to the list.

Simon is always open to suggestions from chefs of

hotels and restaurants that he supplies. Stockists include nearly 100 hotels restaurants and pubs and a similar number of delis, butchers, cafés and farm shops. Although his boar meat and salamis are becoming household names among Michelin-starred restaurants – including The Cinq Restaurant at George V in Paris – Simon has only recently got his marketing into gear.

"To begin with I had to get a grip on the business and perfect my product as I wanted to sell something I truly believed in," he explains.

"Last year I courted publicity for the first time and I'm now spending more time in the office finding ways to get my product out there."

SUPPLY AND DEMAND

While pigs take only six months to grow, it's a different story for wild boar, which take more like 18 months and are slaughtered at 60kg deadweight before being hung for at least 10 days. Boar is a red meat containing 70% red fibres and 30% white fibres compared with domestic pigs which are 80% white fibres and 20% red fibre.

"I don't always have a constant supply of boar myself,

so when I need to, I buy from other UK wild boar producers," Simon explains.

"I'm always interested in hearing from other people in the game and potentially will need additional suppliers in the future."

But be warned, it's a very different game to keeping pigs. A dangerous wild animal licence needs to be obtained through the local council, and then it's a small matter of electric fencing with a generator in case of power failures, in addition to a six-foot high fence. Other requirements include correct drainage, temperature, lighting, hygiene, ventilation and insurance.

"Boar are difficult animals and have a reputation as being aggressive and dangerous," Simon says.

"As with any wild animal, they are impossible to harness with conventional farming techniques. But they are interesting and charismatic and while I do pretty much all of the work myself – be it looking after the boar, packing and labelling the product, marketing and generating business – it's a tremendously exciting time."

For more information visit www.therealboar.co.uk

Have you got a bright idea?

The Meat Training Council (MTC) has a fund of £250,000 set aside for individuals, companies or training providers who can come up with a scheme or idea that will help create a better-trained workforce in the meat sector. This could for example be through bursaries, capital grants and

production of relevant training materials.

"The meat industry is always competing with other sectors to recruit staff and retain them," said MTC CEO Bill Jermey.

"Training is definitely one way to help motivate staff and encourage them to take pride in their work, as

well as being an essential tool in reducing costs, so we would like to hear from individuals or organisations that have got some innovative ideas on how we could achieve this.

"This is a new scheme and we hope it lasts for many years. Our aim is to add to the fund on an

annual basis to help keep the momentum going and secure a successful workforce in the industry."

Initial submissions should be sent to:

The Meat Training Council Fund Trustees, PO Box 141, Winterhill House,

Snowdon Drive, Milton Keynes, MK6 1YY.

The trustees will consider all applications on their merits and to ensure best use of funds in line with charity law.

The trustees' decision will be final.