

# Salami that's a cut above

A Wiltshire farmer is producing a 100 per cent British dry-cured sausage to rival any found on the Continent

## THE NEW ENGLISH COOK



By **Rose Prince**

Julian is slowly walking towards me, one step at a time. His eyes are dark and stern, his hair is middle-aged pepper and salt. At about 18 stone he possesses the swagger of a man who has fathered far too many children, or boarlets. Julian is a "wild" boar, one of a herd of 250 living on a Wiltshire farm.

I am glad that there is a six-foot fence and live-wire barrier between Julian and I, because you don't want to catch him in the wrong mood. To prove this point, his owner, farmer Simon Gaskell, rolls up his trousers to reveal a jagged red scar near his knee. "He is rather cantankerous. I have thought of putting corks on his tusks," he mutters, more rueful than serious.

Those tusks are effective weapons. "The upper ones are called honours, the lower ones rippers. They sharpen every time the boar opens and shuts its mouth," says Gaskell, evoking a home counties Hammer Horror. Julian's family are visible behind him, a shy group of sows and pretty, stripy boarlets, poised to dash away at

the slightest noise.

So why farm an animal that is so difficult to handle and must be housed like a dangerous zoo beast when you can easily farm its sleepy, domesticated descendant, the pig? Gaskell has two reasons. One is his land, which is mostly wooded and the ideal habitat for boar. The other is his ambition, now realised, to make a 100 per cent British dry-cured sausage, for which boar is the perfect ingredient. The Real Boar Company now produces five different salamis that could hold their own with ease in competition with fine Italian, French or Spanish counterparts.

Britain may be the home of the banger, the best and juiciest sausages worldwide, but successful attempts to make salami here can be counted on one hand. I once asked a butcher, who was moaning to me about waste and a lack of profit, why he did not dry-cure unsellable cheap cuts in sausage skins for longer shelf-life, like any sensible continental charcutier?

"Because I would be tying up

my money in something that hangs from the ceiling for months," he answered.

There you have it. British butchery is mostly about instant gratification; Continentals play the long game. Could that be why an average French market town still sports four, five or six butchers while the UK equivalent has one? Gaskell says, to be fair to British butchers, the weather is also a factor. "Our colder weather traditionally meant that we could keep meat fresher for longer, with the addition of a little salt," he says. "In Continental Europe it was important to cure it so it could be stored for months at an ambient temperature."

Then there is the pork itself, which is where the suitability of wild boar come in. Slow-grown pigs tend to shrink less in the curing process and Gaskell's boar do not mature (ready for slaughter) until they are 18 months-old – a good year older



than a conventionally reared domestic pig. Gaskell talks me through the process at the Real Boar Company.

"The boar live all their lives in woodland pens, among cherry, ash, lime, oak and apple trees, rearing their young outdoors," he says. "They root for seeds, tubers, nuts, fungus and worms under the trees – 8 to 9 per cent of their food is scavenged meat, like dead birds." He gives them a supplement feed, saying this

is also necessary in order to tame them.

"We hang the meat for 10 days, then make the salami at a local butcher's, adding seasonings and red wine. We then cure it for two days in high humidity to grow the yeasts that give the flavour. After that the salamis are air dried for up to seven weeks before they are ready to eat, depending on the weather."

Gaskell does have a small herd of Oxford sandy and black pigs as well, a traditional breed that he uses in plain pork salami. He also sells fresh cuts of meat from the boar and pigs to restaurants and via mail order. It is a young business with ancient roots.

In Southern Europe Gaskell would be just another

charcutier, one of dozens in every region. Here, he is unique. And he is full of new ideas. Next month he launches a new and delicious salami made with boar and pheasant meat, and he is contemplating making a "boar dripping", gently rendered from the relatively small amount of fat found on wild pigs. I can hardly wait. It would be the rarest treat to eat on hot toast with cress and it would make a very special, savagely good roast potato.

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## RECIPE OF THE WEEK

### Wild boar ragu

Serve this Tuscan meat sauce with wide ribbons of egg pasta (pappardelle) which you can find in any Italian food shop. Do not add cheese, it utterly spoils the meat.

#### Serves 4-6

- ✦ Peel and chop 2 onions, 2 garlic cloves and slice 4 celery sticks (all finely). Cut 1 3/4lb (800g) of wild boar meat into 1-2 cm pieces. (You could substitute free-range, rare breed pork.)
- ✦ Heat 3 tbsp olive oil in a large pan and add the vegetables. Soften in the hot oil, stirring all the time, then add the meat.
- ✦ Brown the meat then add 2 glasses of red wine. Scrape at the juices stuck to the bottom of the pan with a wooden spatula to "deglaze".
- ✦ Add 2 bay leaves and 4 juniper berries to the pan with 1 heaped tbsp tomato purée. Cover with meat stock and bring to the boil.
- ✦ Simmer, partially covered, for about 1-1 1/2 hours until the meat is tender. Add more stock if the ragu becomes dry. Season with salt and freshly ground black pepper.
- ✦ Serve over cooked egg pasta, with plenty of chopped fresh parsley. Refresh with a little extra virgin olive oil dotted over the top.

## SHOPPING BASKET

**The Real Boar Company** (01249 782861; [www.therealboar.co.uk](http://www.therealboar.co.uk)) produces a variety of beautifully seasoned dry-cured sausages. These have all the ripe and rich flavours of our favourite Italian salami and a little extra Wiltshire genius that is

due to the use of the finest meat from animals reared to the highest standard – a truly great achievement. Fresh meat cuts are also available. Wild Boar Salami with Red Wine 375g (whole) £18.50; 200g (sliced) £12. Mail order available or see website for stockists.

**The Real Food Festival**, May 8-10, 2009, Earl's Court, London. Buy tickets online from [www.realfoodfestival.co.uk](http://www.realfoodfestival.co.uk) or telephone 0844 412 4642. Tickets £8 in advance, £12 on the door, under 15s go free. You can meet Simon Gaskell at the

Real Boar Company stand at this show dedicated to the celebration of artisan food. Five hundred other producers will be there, too, including many of my favourites. Workshops, demos, live debate and ready-to-stroke livestock, also on show.



CHRISTOPHER JONES

**Piggy in the middle:  
wild boar roam freely  
at Simon Gaskell's  
west country farm,  
which produces high-  
quality salami, left**