

Spotlight on...

The Real Boar Co

A Wiltshire farmer is helping bring back to popularity a once staple part of the British diet - and competing on the world stage with his wild boar charcuterie

If the eating of wild boar is currently the preserve of epicurean living, this was not always the case. Circa 1300, wild boar roamed free and constituted more a staple than a luxury of the middle-ages diet. But by dint of over-hunting, the indigenous British pig was purged from its native woodlands into extinction.

With today's consumers beginning to favour lean, home-reared and sustainable meat, could the one-time stalwart of British food be undergoing a renaissance? "There's big interest and a big resurgence," explains The Real Boar Co's founder, Simon Gaskell. "It's because wild boar meat is full-flavoured, but low in fat and cholesterol."

And indeed, the health benefits do make intriguing reading. Lined up against the big four of pork, chicken, beef and lamb, wild boar contains the least cholesterol, and, bar chicken, the least saturated fat.

Since its formation in 2005, The Real Boar Co has rapidly garnered a loyal clientele. Among the restaurants it has supplied are The Fat Duck, The Waterside Inn, Jamie's Italians and The Cinq Restaurant in Paris. With such a stellar client list to service, a company to market and 200 wild boar to rear, it is surprising

that team-Gaskell comprises only two members, Simon and his wife, Louisa.

But after a stint as a pig farmer, Gaskell knew exactly how his 20-acres of wood and grassland should be used. However with British wild boar extinct, he went for the nearest thing, German and Polish breeds.

Rearing wild boar is not straightforward. Under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976, it requires a licence. Spot checks are then conducted to ensure that signs are in place, electric fences are operational and a back-up generator is on hand.

For Gaskell, taming-his-beasts is a seven-day-a-week job, and even then nigh-on futile. "You can't take the wild out of wild boar - you really have to show them respect. I have to keep them relaxed and friendly," he says.

But it is dangerous. "My legs are battle scarred," Gaskell says. And more often than not the culprit is his stud boar Julian, who - despite landing the top job - is relentlessly hostile. "Ever since I've had him he's wanted to take a pop at me. He's left two couple-inch scars on my calf where his three-inch tusks pierced through my welly."

Squabbles aside, Gaskell does all he can to ensure his wild boar are healthy and

**Words
Hamish Smith**


happy. The site has been free from pesticides, herbicides and fertiliser since 1990 and the animals are rotated around the land to enable seasonal foraging of acorns, fungi and cherries.

Yet the abundance of creature comforts does not always mitigate mischief. "One managed to clear a six-foot internal gate," Gaskell recalls. "I was quite pleased when that one turned up as salami!"

And salami is where most will finish their days, that is, after 18 months maturing in their herd. Gaskell doesn't slaughter his boar himself; instead he takes them to a dangerous-animal licensed abattoir. "They are smart animals, I wouldn't want to start shooting them in the paddocks - that would make handling them even harder."

All Gaskell's boars hang for 10 days after slaughter, but meat intended for salami is treated in a high-humidity environment to start the culture process before being air-dried for four to five weeks at his butchers. The prime cut of wild boar is the loin and while haunch is also sold, the majority of meat is made into salami. It is here that Gaskell has achieved most notoriety.

Gaskell's charcuterie may be British-made but the basis for his award-winning recipes comes from Argentina, where Italian immigration has brought with it culinary influence. "We are producing world-class produce and it's going from strength to strength," says Gaskell.

And if you get around to tasting some, spare a thought for Simon Gaskell, who at any given time on any given day, could be found fleeing his Cotswold paddocks with an 18-stone boar in hot pursuit. 

Happy and healthy: the wild boar are rotated around their Cotswold paddocks to forage acorns, fungi and cherries



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The Real Boar Co.

Established: 2005

Clients: The Fat Duck, The Waterside Inn and many other top restaurants.

Products available: Wild boar loin, and a range of salamis and chorizos

Delivery: £10 minimum delivery charge for trade orders (next day delivery).

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