

Update

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Beacon Commodities



Over the past year we have looked to increase our angelica root suppliers. Our search has taken us far and wide but we consistently received quality samples from Poland and felt it was time to investigate. Poland is a major grower of angelica root and supplies much of Europe. Our trip took us 3 hours south of Warsaw.

Polish agriculture

The area south of Warsaw is well known for its traditional family farms working on smaller acreages (up to 75 acres / 30 hectares) who are diversifying out of the traditional crops that are seen across the rest of Europe. These include crops from thyme, lemon balm and peppermint to dandelion and marshmallow root. The specific area we visited used to grow a large proportion of Poland's hops but the demise of local Polish beers has eradicated the demand.

In a previous trip to Belgium (December 2014) we experienced very different soil types with wet heavy clay that caused the Belgium farmers problems with access to their fields. In Poland it is very different. The soil is sandy and much lighter and well drained even though they can have torrential rain.



Angelica plant

Planting and harvesting

The difference in soil types means that the planting and harvesting circumstances are very different to that of Belgium and the rest of Europe. In Poland, angelica tends to be planted in the spring, but in Belgium with the wet heavy soil this is delayed to the summer months of June and July. The crop we saw was planted in March 2014 and was just starting to shoot new growth with the onset of spring. The angelica is planted in rows which are built up to about 10-15cms above ground level, making it easier to dig as the roots can stretch up to 20-30cms below the ground.



Angelica growing alongside dandelion root



Walking the rows



Dead growth from the previous year yet to be cleared away

During its first year in the ground, the angelica plant can grow up to approximately 1 metre high but as a 12-24 month crop this growth is left to die off before being cut and cleared away from the plant. On our trip we were met with some differing views over the optimum time to harvest and as with every farmer, 'their way is always right'! As we reported from our trip to Belgium, some farmers will harvest in the autumn after the plant's second growth but before the onset of the frost in winter. However, some Polish farmers believe the angelica puts too much energy and 'sugars' into the growth of the plant above ground, therefore deteriorating the size and quality of the root. Also, with a spring harvest, there is a much better chance of getting onto the field with favourable weather conditions and no need to cut away the summer's growth before harvesting the root, saving both time and money.



Getting up close and personal

This is an interesting difference of opinion between the two sets of farmers as Belgians believe that it is the winter frosts that harm the root as it consumes all its 'sugars' to survive, whereas the Polish believe angelica naturally switches off and goes into a form of semi-hibernation and does not need to use up its sugars to survive.



Angelica root

The farmer was slightly concerned we were going to dig up his whole crop by this stage



Only very small amounts of angelica seed are grown in Poland, and these are usually used for the replanting of the following year's crop. Polish farmers expect to yield around 2 tonnes of dried angelica root to the hectare (400-500 kilos per acre). Being on sandy soil, the washing of the root is much easier, as most of the soil can simply be shaken off straight after harvest using a potato harvester.

We hope this provides an interesting insight into differing agricultural methods/views between countries and in some cases region to region when dealing with angelica root. There is no doubt that Polish angelica root is of high quality with its major use throughout Europe and specifically in the pharmaceutical trade.

