

# Draft animals in museum education at the National Museum of Agriculture and Agri-Food Industry in Szreniawa (Poland)

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## Abstract

The educational activity of the Museum is mainly for school children and adolescents. The Museum's live farm animals are very popular among visitors and we have 12 species of the most important livestock including several endangered native breeds of farm animals, with 4 oxen and 8 horses harnessed for fieldwork such as plowing, harrowing, as well as transport and the treadmill. Oxen have the main role in our educational activities, as well as in workshops, shows, events, and exhibitions (trade fairs).

Our educational activities with horses aim to show their historical significance with all the richness of material (e.g. various types of harnesses, vehicles, tools, etc.) and immaterial (gestures, vocabulary, customs, etc.) culture.

The use of horses in ecological farming, forestry, or agri-tourism is promoted during events organized by the Polish Association of Keepers and Friends of Workhorses hosted by the Museum in Szreniawa. The association is a member of the European Federation for the Promotion and Use of Workhorses (FECTU).

Our Museum has organized three international conferences (2013, 2016, and 2019) on issues that concern museum professionals related to animal breeding, and the educational and popularization work carried out here.

## Kurzfassung

Die pädagogische Tätigkeit des Museums richtet sich hauptsächlich an Schulkinder und Jugendliche. Die Nutztiere des Museums sind bei den Besucher:innen sehr beliebt. Wir halten 12 Arten der wichtigsten Nutztiere, darunter mehrere gefährdete einheimische Nutztierassen, sowie 4 Ochsen und 8 Pferde, die für Feldarbeiten wie Pflügen und Eggen sowie für den Transport und die Tretmühle angeschirrt werden. Ochsen spielen die Hauptrolle bei unseren pädagogischen Aktivitäten sowie bei Workshops, Vorführungen, Veranstaltungen und Ausstellungen (Messen).

Unsere pädagogischen Aktivitäten mit Pferden zielen darauf ab, ihre historische Bedeutung mit dem ganzen Reichtum der materiellen (z. B. verschiedene Arten von Geschirren, Fahrzeugen, Werkzeugen usw.) und immateriellen (Gesten, Wortschatz, Bräuche usw.) Kultur zu zeigen.

Der Einsatz von Pferden in der ökologischen Landwirtschaft, in der Forstwirtschaft oder im Agrotourismus wird im Rahmen von Veranstaltungen des Polnischen Verbands der Züchter:innen und Liebhaber:innen von Arbeitspferden gefördert, die vom Museum in Szreniawa ausgerichtet werden. Der Verband ist Mitglied der Europäischen Föderation für die Förderung und Nutzung von Arbeitspferden (FECTU).

Unser Museum hat drei internationale Konferenzen (2013, 2016 und 2019) zu Themen organisiert, die Museumsfachleute im Zusammenhang mit der Tierzucht und der hier geleisteten Bildungs- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit betreffen.

## Résumé

L'activité éducative du musée s'adresse principalement aux écoliers et aux adolescents. Les animaux de ferme vivants du musée sont très appréciés des visiteurs. Nous possédons 12 espèces d'animaux d'élevage parmi les plus importantes, dont plusieurs races indigènes d'animaux de ferme en voie de disparition, ainsi que 4 bœufs et 8 chevaux attelés pour les travaux des champs tels que le labourage, le hersage, ainsi que le transport et le tapis roulant. Les bœufs jouent le rôle principal dans nos activités éducatives, ainsi que dans les ateliers, les spectacles, les événements et les expositions (foires commerciales).

Nos activités pédagogiques avec les chevaux visent à montrer leur importance historique avec toute la richesse de la culture matérielle (par exemple, divers types de harnais, de véhicules, d'outils, etc.) et immatérielle (gestes, vocabulaire, coutumes, etc.).

L'utilisation des chevaux dans le cadre de l'agriculture écologique, de la sylviculture ou de l'agrotourisme est promue lors d'événements organisés avec l'Association polonaise des gardiens et amis des chevaux de trait accueillie par le musée de Szreniawa. L'association est membre de la Fédération européenne pour la promotion et l'utilisation des chevaux de trait (FECTU).

Notre musée a organisé trois conférences internationales (2013, 2016 et 2019) sur des questions qui concernent les professionnels des musées en lien avec l'élevage, et le travail d'éducation et de vulgarisation réalisé ici.

## Resumen

Las actividades educativas en el Museo „” están dirigidas principalmente a escolares y adolescentes. Algunas de estas actividades son talleres, espectáculos, eventos y ferias con nuestros animales de granja - un total de 12 razas, en las que se incluyen algunas autoctonas y en peligro de extinción. Estas actividades y la visita a nuestros animales son muy populares y queridas entre nuestros visitantes

Nuestras actividades educativas con caballos pretenden mostrar tanto el papel histórico tan importante que jugaron estas criaturas, así como la cultura material (objetos de equitación, vehículos, herramientas...) e inmaterial (cambios en las convenciones y dinámicas sociales, estrategias en el campo de la equitación y doma de caballos...)

El uso de los caballos en la agricultura ecológica, la silvicultura o el agroturismo es promovido y organizado durante estos eventos por la Asociación Polaca de Guardianes y Amigos de los Caballos de Trabajo que acoge el Museo de Szreniawa, la cual es miembro de la Federación Europea para la Promoción y el Uso de los Caballos de Trabajo (FECTU).

Nuestro Museo ha organizado tres conferencias internacionales (2013, 2016 y 2019) para discutir diferentes temas que preocupan a los profesionales de los museos relacionados con la cría de animales y la labor educativa y de divulgación que aquí se realiza.



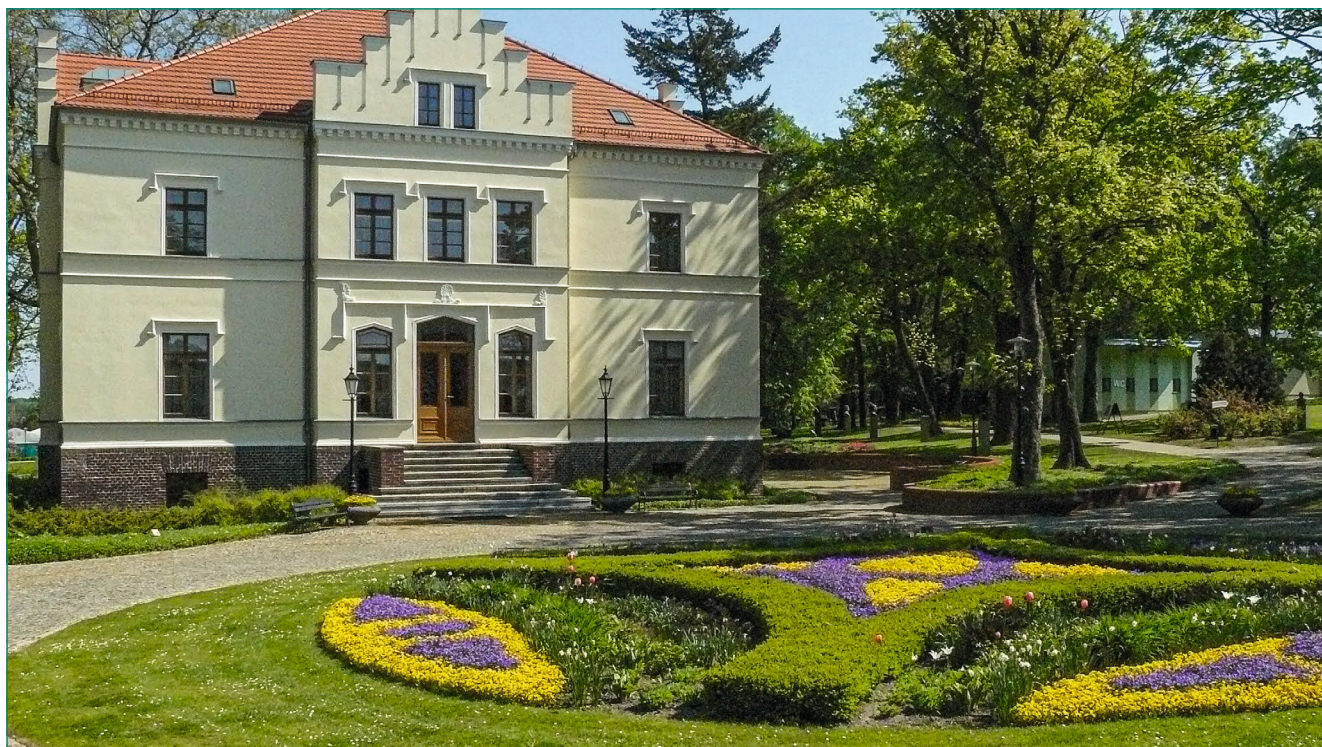


Figure 1 – Palace from the mid-19th century

The Museum of Agriculture and Agri-Food Industry in Szreniawa was established in 1964. In 1975 it was granted the status of a national institution. It is located on the premises of a 19th-century manor house, approximately 10 km from Poznań. The institution houses numerous exhibition pavilions, a palace with a park, a former manor yard which includes barns connected to a granary, a livestock building, and a historic distillery where the Szreniawa Brewery operates. About 11 of over 24 hectares of the Szreniawa Museum is devoted to an orchard of old varieties of fruit trees, an herb garden and a field where traditional garden and field crops are grown for demonstration purposes. For many years, the Museum has bred conservation livestock breeds. Animals and historic agricultural machines are displayed during numerous events, workshops and demonstrations held in the tourist season. The Museum borders on the Wielkopolski National Park. This unquestionable asset makes a visit to our institution a feast for technology and nature lovers alike.

Aquatic Devices of Rural Industry in Jaracz, Museum of Wickerwork and Hop-Making in Nowy Tomyśl, Museum of Nature and Hunting in Uzarzewo, Professor Ryszard Kostecki Open Air Museum and Museum of Apiculture in Swarzędz, and Museum of Meat Economy in Sielinko.



Figure 2 – Branch in Jaracz

Apart from its main site, the Museum has 5 field branches within a 50 km radius: Museum of Milling and



Figure 3 – Branch in Nowy Tomyśl



Figure 4 – Branch in Uzarzewo



Figure 5 – Branch in Swarzędz



Figure 6 – Branch in Sielinko

The Department of Animal Husbandry and Plant Cultivation, one of the Museum’s units, employs four staff members, including two specialists. The Department’s personnel tend the livestock, cultivate the fields and hold demonstrations of animal use during museum shows and educational events: in the field, in the demonstration yard of the park, in a demonstration rural homestead, and in the livestock building. The last building houses an education hall with multimedia equipment which can seat around 40 viewers.



Figure 7 – Educational room in the livestock building

The Museum keeps 12 species of livestock, including a few conservation breeds of selected species. It has an open-air demonstration site of agricultural plants species and their variations. This “live museum” is a valuable addition to the extensive educational program of livestock husbandry and breeding and plant cultivation, on display at the following exhibits: “Livestock Husbandry and Breeding”, “Veterinary Medicine”, “Apiculture”, “Rural Transport”, “Salvaged Glamour of Carriages”, “Plant Cultivation”, “Horticulture”, “Technical Progress in Agriculture – 19th and 20th century”.



Figure 8 – Veterinary Medicine



Figure 9 – Rural Transport



Appreciating the prominent role of the farm animals kept at the Museum in educational activities, in 2013 the Museum organised an international conference Live Animals in Museum Activities, an event that garnered widespread response among museum professionals. The substantial interest in the conference inspired the organisation of further events of this kind. The conferences held in 2016 and 2019 confirmed the relevance of keeping livestock in museums and reinforced the Museum specialists' conviction of the great importance of educational and promotional work involving farm animals.

The main issues discussed at the conference sessions included the presentation of animals to a museum audience in a way ensuring that the animals are not stressed and safe for the visitors. Ensuring animal welfare and compliance with legislation on work with traditional methods and tools using animals was an important issue in the discussions. Economic aspects of animal husbandry in museums and above all the use of live animals for education purposes were another important topic.



Figure 10-11 – The 2013 conference

The Museum's animals, especially cattle and horses, are one of the highlights of numerous events. All educational activities, such as demonstrations and workshops involving animals, are very popular with audiences of all ages. Direct contact with animals is an extremely valuable experience and is one of the main reasons for revisiting Szreniawa. The smell, movement, sound and sometimes the touch of the animal under the supervision of a carer enriches the cognitive process with a poly-sensory experience. This is an especially important aspect, as the educational activities of our institution consider the needs of persons with physical and intellectual disabilities and our events often have a therapeutic function.

The presence of cattle and horses is indispensable when recreating traditional farming; here the presence of human staff is of secondary importance. A live demonstration helps to quickly assimilate knowledge on the prominence of animal husbandry and breeding and the operation of basic farming tools and equipment. Direct



Figure 9 – Rural Transport

observation and sometimes personal participation in the demonstration is the best method of knowledge acquisition. Thanks to such activities, museums cease to be associated only with inaccessible objects and specialised, technical descriptions, and instead prove that they are for the public and respond to their needs.

The forms of educational activities carried out with the use of farm animals at the National Museum of Agriculture in Szreniawa are mainly museum classes, educational workshops, demonstrations, educational and recreational events, as well as exhibitions at trade fairs.

## Museum classes

This part of the educational agenda is of primary importance in the Museum. It seems that this type of activities gives children and young people the best contact with the museum and its collections. The Szreniawa Museum offers lessons in the history of agricultural technology and livestock breeding for both primary and secondary school students. During these lessons, the audience are taught how traditional animal products are obtained. The activities include e.g. milking, butter and cheese making, sheep shearing, wool processing, and weaving. There are practical activities in the apiary, the feeding of animals in the past and today and the traditional use of farm animals: the harnessing of horses and oxen for transport and agricultural work in the field and farmstead.

One of the lessons on offer is “Traditional use of farm animals in the field”. This activity aims to introduce traditional ways of employing animals. The highlight of the lesson is a demonstration of farm labour with draught animals. The participants also learn about the work of farm hands and grooms, professions which are closely related to the use of draught and working animals. Another lesson is entitled “On a wide road – the history of rural transport”. The lesson indicates manual and horse-drawn means of transport, including various types of vehicles. Cattle and horses are the subject of other lessons, too: “In the homestead”, “Farm animals”, “Kindergarten students feed animals”, and “Butter and cheese from a farm”.



Figure 13 – Lesson subject: “Farm animals”

## Education workshops and demonstrations

For several years now, the Museum has been running extensive one-day workshops taking place over a period of 3 or 4 weeks. The educational workshops are conducted for organised groups of school students, who are introduced to Polish Christmas customs and traditions involving animals. The knowledge offered at the stands

is tailored to the age of the participants, ranging from pre-school children to secondary school pupils. Three themed workshops are the principal offer: “Christmas shows”, “Easter shows” and the open-air show of autumn work “Autumn in the countryside”. To illustrate the scale of the above projects, the Easter shows in 2017 attracted as many as 4,685 children and in 2018 were attended by 4,180 children.

Interactive themed events for families with children or individual visitors are held on weekends. There are also demonstrations for groups that can be held at any time on request, e.g. a demonstration of the work of oxen (in a treadmill or in a field), hiring a horse-drawn wagonette or carriage, and hiring a saddled pony.



Figure 14 – Demonstration of oxen working a treadmill



Figure 15 – Renting a carriage

## Other forms of education

The Museum organizes one- or two-day weekend educational and recreational events for the general public and multi-generational families. There are around 10 such events per year.

The attractiveness of such events makes them very popular among visitors, and the turnout often exceeds several thousand people. They showcase the cyclical nature and rituals of fieldwork and festivals, such as the “Poznań potato”, i.e. potato-digging demonstration, or the very spectacular “Whitsun Festival”, recalling the festive decoration of oxen as a sign of the advent of spring. Horses and dogs are inseparable for disseminating knowledge on safety. This is especially prominent during the “Sunday at the Museum” event, held together with the Provincial Headquarters of the Police.





Figure 16 – Poznań potato



Figure 17 – Whitsun Festival



**Figure 18** – Sunday at the Museum

**During our events, animals become the main attraction in the following demonstrations:**

- traditional field work with the use of old and modern agricultural machinery and tools (ploughing with a ploughshare, sokha and plough) cooperating with a team of horses in different types of harnesses, or in a team of oxen - in a yoke or collar,
- ploughing and logging competitions,
- driving and show jumping competitions,
- demonstrations of horse and dog agility,
- horseback and carriage rides.

The Museum gathers the main livestock species from our climate zone, i.e. cattle, sheep, goats, horses, poultry, and rabbits. Unfortunately, for sanitary reasons for the past 2 years we have not kept pigs. This is a measure to ensure the epizootic conditions of ASF (swine fever). Nevertheless, cattle and horses are of prime importance, both because of their leading role in meeting human needs (meat, milk, hides, work, safety) and because of the related rich tangible and intangible heritage. In particular, the use of the strength of these animals for agricultural work and transport, whether in peacetime or in wartime, has accounted for their prominent role in human history. The choice of animals for draught purposes largely depended on natural and geographical conditions and their domestication. Thus, on Polish soil mainly cattle and horses have been used for these purposes, for transport, tillage, and propelling various devices, especially agricultural ones.

## Cattle

Since their domestication on Polish soil, i.e. around 5000 years B.C., cattle have played a prominent role among livestock, supplying humans with a variety of goods such as meat, milk, hides, fertiliser as well as being used in field work and for transport. Therefore, cattle also play a leading role during museum lessons and demonstrations.

Currently, the Museum owns a Polish Red x Jersey crossbred cow and a year-and-a-half old heifer, as well as two six-year-old oxen of the native Polish Red breed and two fifteen-year-old oxen, one of the White Back (also native) breed and the other of the Simmental breed. In the twenty-year history of the presentation of oxen in the Museum there have been mainly White Back and Simmental animals.



**Figure 19** – Oxen in the paddock







**Figure 20** – A team of oxen in a double neck yoke

During the interactive classes, viewers are introduced to manual milking, and the collected milk is used to make butter and cottage cheese by traditional methods. The activity ends with a tasting of the products made.

From the domestication of cattle until the third quarter of the 19th century, oxen were the common and principal means of locomotion and propulsion of agriculture. Although gradually replaced by horses, at the turn of the 20th century oxen still played a significant role on farmsteads. Until the Second World War, draught cattle continued to play a significant role in Eastern Poland, i.e. Polesie and Volhynia, on farms in Wielkopolska and in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. After the war, cattle harnessing persisted until the 1950s, mainly due to the lack of horses and tractors.

The neck yoke for a couple of animals was a common type of cattle harness in the Polish lands. The Museum collection houses 14 specimens of neck yokes of the throat type. A yoke for a single ox is half of the neck yoke for a pair of oxen. Such yokes were used only in the western part of the Carpathian foothills in poor households. The Museum owns 19 copies of single yokes. On the other hand, a horn yoke was put on the forehead of a cattle and tied to the horns. In the Polish lands this harness was used mainly in the territories of the Prussian partition, to a lesser extent than the neck yoke. In the second half of the 19th century, collars began to be used to harness oxen, modelled on horse collar harnesses. The Museum owns 12 specimens of bovine collars.

The harnesses we use on our oxen are faithful replicas of the originals. For about 10 years now, during our demonstrations we have put collar harnesses on the oxen, which is convenient for both the animals and the staff. When the Museum began its use of ox-drawn carts at the beginning of this century, the main difficulty was that there were no longer any working cattle in Poland and the farm hand profession was a thing of the past; only some place names related to this profession remained. Therefore, looking for someone capable of working oxen on a farm, we invited a specialist from Romania, thanks to whom in 2005 our Museum's team won first place in the First Brandenburg Ploughing Competition in Altranft in the cattle ploughing category.

## Horses

The use of working horses in Poland, common until the 1970s, is rare today. After the ancient throat-girth harness, it was not until the Middle Ages that the primitive breast collar harness became popular, which at the turn of the 19th century was displaced by the collar harness. In all regions of the country, for heavy labour and in travelling harnesses, the collar or the breast-collar harnesses are used, the latter being more frequent. At present, the Museum keeps 8 horses and 1 donkey. These are 2 mares of the Polish horse breed and a gelding and a mare of the Polish cold-blooded horse breed, as well as 4 ponies. Many events are also held with horse-drawn carriages of members of the Working Horse Association.



**Figure 21** – Horses in a paddock

The Museum in Szreniawa is the headquarters of the Prof. Ewald Sasimowski Polish Association of Draught Horse Users and Friends and Equine Organic Food Producers. Established in 2003, it is a member organisation of the European Draught Horse Federation (FECTU).

The live farm animals kept at the Museum make our educational agenda unique and distinguishable. Although over the course of nearly 60 years the Museum and its branches have collected over 31 000 artefacts, it is the animals that are our most treasured trademark, making us instantly recognisable throughout Poland.

## Related Literature

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## List of Figures

- Title** (Potato-digging demonstration) – Museum of Agriculture Archives.  
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