

**Business case ID Card*****PICTURE***

**Name of the company:** The Western snail farm

**Country:** Ukraine

**Size of the business:** Family business

**Background**

The Western Snail is a family-owned farm run by Iryna and Ivan Yuskevychs, who have been actively engaged in the growing and breeding of edible snails since 2017. The idea of breeding snails arose in a rather unusual way. During a trip to Greece, the family went to a French restaurant where they dared to taste snails for the first time. “My husband started clumsily pulling it out of the shell - and one of them “flew” straight to my evening dress” says Iryna. The idea came to them: “why don’t we learn to produce and breed such a delicacy on our own farm?”. Prior to that, the couple had never been involved in agricultural production - Ivan had a construction company, and Irina was employed as a landscape designer. They had to face a couple of challenges throughout the years, but nothing managed to stop them on their route to success. They even continued inspiring snail farming in their region, supporting other farmers through trainings and advisory services. The Yuskevych couple is constantly diversifying the farm's products and services, and they take an active part in festivals, social projects in their local community.

**Main activities**

Since 2017, the Yuskevychs in the Lviv region have been actively growing and breeding edible snails of the HELICIDAE family, genus *Helix* (*Pomatia*, *Aspersa Maxima*, *Aspersa Muller*) for consumers in Ukraine and abroad. They also offer trainings for beginners and start-ups. The Western Snail farm constantly develops its business and tries to make their offers more competitive. It produces a wide range of products: snail meat and caviar as a finished food product, breeding herds for new start-up farms and slime for pharmaceuticals and cosmetology products. Ten types of finished products are certified according to food safety standards. In addition, the Western Snail farm provides various services like gastronomic tours, excursions and workshops.

Today, the Western Snail farm breeds snails on a field of one hectare and has a properly equipped complex of production facilities for storage and processing. There are simple and portable enclosures on site, as well as a miniature farm for demonstrations, excursions and trainings. Snail breeding is a seasonal activity and in the spring, up to 8 people can be found working on the farm, with 2-3 people during the summer. During the autumn there can be anywhere from 5 to 15 people involved in collecting snails.



The latest addition to the farm was the breeding of ducklings to diversify the offer for gastrotourists, but they still have many interesting plans and ideas to explore further.

There is a clear division of tasks in the family: Ivan takes care of the technological part of the business, while Iryna is responsible for marketing, including product certification, processing snails and even snail tasting demos for visitors.

### **Market**

The Western Snail works with a wide range of customers, such as families, business, schools, and tourists, which represent different markets. The snails are mostly sold to restaurants in Ukraine and Eastern Europe, but the Western Snail also supplies raw materials for restaurants, processed food for visitors, and reproductive material to other farmers. In addition, snails and their by-products are also bought for cosmetic products.

Edible snails are becoming increasingly popular with both foreign and Ukrainian cuisines, as their meat is extremely healthy and rich in trace elements. The business is increasingly diversified, and the family is constantly working to expand the range of products and services that may be of interest to consumers. Irina and Ivan offer to their consumers a wide range of products, including boiled/frozen snail fillet (vacuum packaging), stuffed snails with different types of sauces, snails in oil, snail meat pate, snail caviar and live snails. The quality of their products is at the core of the farm's business strategy, and it contributes to the establishment of close and stable relations with their customers.

The Western Snail is located near Lviv city (five minutes by public transport). It has a favorable location for the supply of the products to restaurants and customers, as well as for receiving visitors directly on site. Thanks to this perfect location, the “Western Snail” is also able to organise events such as birthday parties and corporate parties. In normal times, the Western Snail can offer excursions for around 100 people a day during the period from mid-March to mid-November on weekdays. However, during the 2020 pandemic, the farm could of course only host a very limited number of visitors.

### **Challenges and solutions**

One significant challenge was that food standards for snail meat were not developed and approved in Ukraine when the Yurkevichs started their business. Therefore, Iryna and Ivan worked with scientists and the state laboratory of veterinary medicine to develop food safety frameworks for snail-based foodstuff based on experts' conclusions. Now, all products of the “Western Snail” farm are certified by governmental certification bodies. Each batch is tested in a veterinary laboratory and receives an expert conclusion, to make sure that the customer receives a high-quality product.

The next challenge was the lack of necessary knowledge and access to it for the Yurkevichs. At the beginning, the couple had no best practice cases to study and learn from. Therefore, a dozen kilograms of snails were lost as the farm was



developing. There were no specialists in Ukraine who knew about snail breeding, so the Yuskevichs went to study in Europe. In practice, they learnt about the technology, farm varieties, necessary equipment, irrigation, feed, timing and more. Having learnt and gained experience in this field, they now use it as a resource and share the knowledge to help other farmers in Ukraine to develop their production.

The Western Snail always looks at new market opportunities to develop its business. Exporting to the European market requires large volume which one farm cannot supply on its own. Therefore, the Western Snail collaborates with other farmers in their region to reach these volumes.

The situation with the pandemic has become another challenge. Launched a year ago, the new project of the company focusing on snake breeding project had to be stopped because this species is likely to transfer the virus. However, farmers have replaced it with another alternative - growing ducklings.

### **Funding**

The business was created with the family's own capital, using only land owned by the family members.

### **What makes this case innovative?**

The Western Snail has complete control over the process, managing every step, from growing snails to supplying the finished product to the final consumer. This enables the family to respect high safety and culinary standards. For instance, the farm's products have been awarded by the ‘Taste of the Ukrainian Carpathians’ brand.

The Western Snail farm is diversified and open to share its knowledge with the public. For the last 3 years the farm has been conducting specialised trainings for snail farmers. About 1000 people have already been trained on the farm, of which about a third have started their own snail farms.

In addition, the farm is also part of the GorboGory agritourism cluster, through which the Yuskiewiczzs organise various events for children in difficult life circumstances.

The Western Snail farm is an essential actor in the development of a niche segment in the country. Its natural curiosity and collaborative approach have paved the way for a competitive and sustainable sector in Ukraine, capable of entering foreign markets.

### **Lessons learnt**

Quality, excellent work organization and constant development are the cornerstones the “Western Snail” farm. This has brought the Western Snail farm to a high level of business diversification and stability.



