



SNAIL FARMING IN NEW ENGLAND

An introductory guide
to starting an escargot
farm in New England

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Laws and Regulations

Snails are considered agricultural pests by the United States Department of Agriculture because of their status as an invasive species and their ability to cause a significant amount of damage to crops. Because of this, while it is legal to farm snails, certain legal precautions must be taken when starting a snail farm,

1. Living snails and snail eggs cannot be moved across state borders without a PPQ 526 permit.
2. Snail enclosures must be made of a water-resistant material to keep the snails healthy and maintain a quality product.
3. Snails must not be able to escape from their enclosures. A solid bottom and some sort of cover that the snails cannot pass through are necessary for farming enclosures.
4. Escargots that are canned prior to sale must be registered with the FDA, and must be inspected for possible botulinum infections.

Want to learn more?

“Feasibility of Snail Farming as a Model for Small Urban Farms to Expand into Niche Markets for Increased Profitability”, a report by the creators of this pamphlet

Snail Breeding by Giovanni Avagnina

“Raising Snails” by Rebecca Thompson for the Alternative Farming Systems Information Center



Snails in the Winter

The cold, snowy New England winter poses a unique problem to prospective snail ranchers. However, with careful planning and the right setup, a successful escargot farm can still be maintained in the winter.

Snails naturally hibernate in response to colder temperatures in order to survive the winter. During this time, they burrow up to a foot underground and seal their shells to limit moisture loss. While snails can still be harvested at this time, they will typically be of a lesser quality than active snails, as they burn off much of their fat and water while hibernating.

Some farmers may choose to allow their snails to hibernate. Not much is required to provide for them during hibernation, but deep soil must be available for them to bury themselves in. Additionally, farmers must take care in ensuring that the bottom of the enclosure is not too cold for the snails in case they come into contact with it while burrowing.

Other farmers may choose to prevent their snails from hibernating. This can be accomplished by keeping the snails in a climate-controlled area, away from cold outdoor temperatures or snow. Though the snails' life cycle may be slightly disrupted, keeping the snails warm during the winter instead could allow for more successful winter harvesting and may even yield additional breedings.

What kind of market is there for escargot in New England?

This is big question among prospective snail farmers. While escargot is very popular overseas, its market is traditionally less established in the United States. Regardless, there are many restaurants that already serve escargot, with over 20 existing in Boston alone. Beyond this, there is also great potential in implementing escargot into eco-friendly diets as a source of sustainable protein, especially when locally produced. Research conducted by WPI in 2016 reports a positive reception of locally-farmed snails, from restaurants that do and do not already serve escargot. While snails are typically produced for escargot, other markets, such as those as food sources for pet reptiles or zoo animals, also exist. Though they may take some discovering, pursuing unique markets like these will allow for further profitability of the niche snail farm.



Snail Farming 101

Species

While there are many edible species of snail, the most commonly farmed species are *Helix aspersa* and *Helix pomatia*. *Helix aspersa* is a medium-sized snail that is popular for its quick growth and adaptability. Farming them is less risky than farming other species because they can live comfortably in a wide range of habitats. *Helix pomatia* is a slightly larger snail that is regarded by some to have a better flavor than *Helix aspersa*. For both of these reasons, some farmers may choose to cultivate *Helix pomatia* over *Helix aspersa*, though they are typically more finicky than their cousins.

Feeding

Snails are herbivorous, and will eat nearly any fruit or vegetable that humans can eat. Some favorites of snails include apples, carrots, cucumbers, and lettuce. Some farmers choose to feed their snails chicken feed. Mash for egg-laying hens is particularly good for snails because of its high calcium content. Though they can consume calcium from the soil they live in, most snails require a calcium supplement to maintain their shells.

Preparation and Sale

Before snails can be cooked and sold or eaten, they must be purged. To accomplish this, snails must be kept in an environment with no dirt or food for 48 hours. After this time has passed, the snails can be cooked and packaged. One benefit of locally-farmed snails is that chefs can choose to purchase snails that are still living and complete the purging process themselves, providing less effort on the farmers half and a fresher product in the restaurant.



Where do I keep my snails?

When it comes to containing them, snails are relatively low maintenance. They can be housed in a variety of simple structures ranging from plastic tubs to devoted garden beds. Legally, these enclosures are required to be moisture resistant to prevent the spread of mold and parasites. They must have a solid bottom through which the snails cannot escape, and the roof of the enclosure must be escape-proof, as well. This can be achieved by covering the top of the enclosure with chicken wire, or lining the upper edges with copper plating, over which snails will not crawl. Though snails do not require soil in their enclosure to live, it is recommended that at least three inches of soil is provided, as the soil will aid in keeping much-needed water readily available to the snails. Snails will also only breed when there is enough loose soil for them to lay their eggs in. Preparing a separate enclosure in which snails can be moved to and subsequently removed for breeding purposes is a common practice, as this allows the eggs to develop undisturbed and the baby snails, once hatched, to have a safe place to grow.

