

# DUCKS, GEESE

## *and Foie Gras*



A story of men, ducks, geese and "terroirs"

*Foie Gras:  
Over 4,500 delicious  
years of history*

Thousands of years ago when people first began to settle into communities, they turned away from their traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyles, looking instead to domesticating, and then breeding, livestock for food. And since those ancient times, men have been breeding palmipeds – web-footed birds such as ducks and geese – for food.



The concept of Foie Gras was first discovered many centuries ago. Production is based on the natural behaviours observed in certain animals, notably palmipeds: these birds can, at certain times of year, overfeed, eating copiously to prepare themselves for the cold of winter or for long migrations.

# *All you ever wanted to*

## *What is Foie Gras?*

Foie Gras is the liver of a strong, healthy duck or goose, reared according to traditional methods while adhering to French and European specifications.

## *Strict EU Production Regulations*

European regulations stipulate that Foie Gras must come from ducks or geese specially fattened by a process known as “gavage”. The minimum weight for a goose Foie Gras is 400g – duck foie gras can be slightly smaller, at 300g.

## *Part of France’s Protected Cultural and Gastronomic Heritage*



Article 654-27-1 of the French Rural Code recognises Foie Gras as “part of France’s protected Cultural and Gastronomic Heritage.” It is defined as the liver of a duck or goose specially fattened by “gavage”. Foie Gras is one of France’s foremost culinary specialities, a true product of its terroir. Over the centuries, it has become a symbol of, and ambassador for, French gastronomy throughout the world. The French lead the world in terms of production: 75% of all Foie Gras is produced in France.

## *Rearing Foie Gras Birds: Day-to-day Care is a Top Priority*

From the moment the goslings and ducklings arrive on the farm (only from Ministry of Agriculture approved hatcheries), to the moment when, as adult birds, they begin their specially developed feeding regime, they are tended with the utmost care and attention. The birds are kept in safe, sanitary conditions at all times, with measures in place to prevent disease. Their comfort and well-being is paramount.

# *know about Foie Gras...*

## *Critical Rearing Period*

The young birds are brought to the farm as soon as they are hatched. They are housed in warm buildings, with food and water constantly available. As soon as the first protective plumage emerges, they have access to a grassy outside environment. By around the 9th week, the birds are ready to start a new feeding regime designed to prepare them for “gavage”, which is introduced when they reach full maturity at around 3 months. The birds remain in their outdoor environment with a constant supply of water to drink. The profession recommends that the number of birds on one farm should not exceed a level at which the producer can comfortably deliver a high degree of care.



## *Getting to Grips with Foie Gras Terminology...*

The decree of 9th August 1993 defines the three official classifications for Foie Gras:

- **Le Foie Gras entier (whole Foie Gras):**  
One or more whole lobes of Foie Gras, with seasoning.
- **Le Foie Gras (with no other qualifier):**  
Pieces of Foie Gras lobes moulded together, with seasoning.
- **Le bloc de Foie Gras:**  
Finely chopped Foie Gras, seasoned and reformed. May contain pieces of whole Foie Gras.

## *A Mainstay of Many Rural Economies*

The Foie Gras industry is a main source of livelihood for 30,000 families and indirectly provides some 100,000 jobs in France, mainly in the south west, west and east of the country. It has actively slowed down the exodus of families from rural regions. By keeping alive the traditional spirit of the terroir, these families have an important role to play in the rise of eco and gastro-tourism in France, offering activities such as farm stays, Foie Gras markets, gourmet regional specialities, wine tasting, visits, cookery courses etc.



## What is “Gavage”?

Once the adult birds have undergone a period of preparation, they are housed in special enclosures for fattening. Gavage is a process of feeding the birds in a particular way, performed with skill and dexterity by qualified professionals.

Palmipeds have big appetites, and at certain times of year they can display bulimic tendencies.

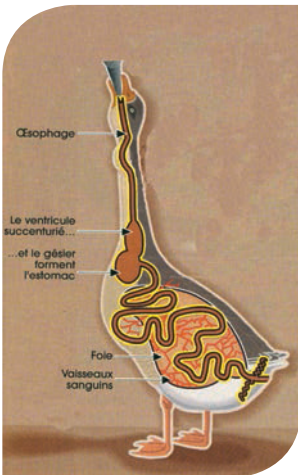
Like many birds, they have a beak, a gizzard and an oesophagus, allowing them to swallow a variety of prey of all shapes and sizes in the wild.

When a healthy adult duck or goose reaches maturity at 10-15 weeks and has spent some time free to feed ad libitum, it begins on a regime of two feeds a day, which grow progressively larger – enough to fill the bird’s crop. This continues for twelve days in ducks and 16 in geese.

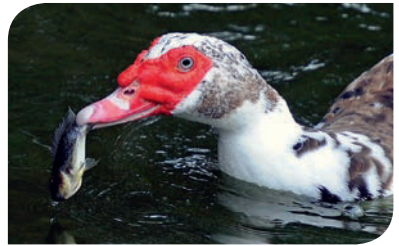
The “gavage”, as this process is known, causes the animal no stress; the bird becomes accustomed to the amount of feed, which induces a feeling of satiety.\* This phase lasts for approximately 10% of the bird’s total rearing period.

\* Various studies by INRA, Ferme de l’Oie, research by Prof. Labie etc.

## Built for Fattening



Ducks and geese have a unique anatomy: their heads and necks are fully aligned; there is no epiglottis, and the oesophagus is flexible, all of which means that a feeding tube causes no discomfort at all. The feed is rich in starch (corn), and the carbohydrates are converted to fatty acids which are naturally stored in the liver.



## The fattening is a reversible phenomenon

After fattening, when a duck or goose is returned to the field, its liver returns to its initial weight in a few days, with no change to liver function.

This reversibility of fattening\* occurs identically in the wild when a bird (duck or goose) has depleted its reserves after a long migratory journey.

\*Study of reversibility – Professors P. Bernard, T. Bengone, D. Prehn, J. Tanguy, R. Babilé, F. Grimm – ENSA, Env – Toulouse 1994

## *Specially Selected Ducks and Geese*

Foie Gras can only be produced from selected breeds of bird. Originally, geese were favoured in the making of this very special delicacy; however, in the 20th century it was discovered that the Muscovy duck was also capable of producing an excellent Foie Gras. Most of today's Foie Gras comes from the Mulard duck, a hybrid of the Muscovy and Pekin species

## *Good Nutrition and Foie Gras: an "entente cordiale"*

Researchers have recently been able to reveal that Foie Gras contains a high level of mono- and polyunsaturated fats, which are known to be beneficial to health; there are 30g of mono- and polyunsaturated fat per 100g of product, and only 12g of saturated fatty acids.



## *Foie Gras for Martinmas:*



## *a Feast to Start the Festive Season!*

Foie Gras returns to our tables in November, just in time for end-of-year celebrations!

**Martinmas (mid-November):**  
The first of the new Foie Gras arrives on the market.

In geese, the laying season starts in spring. The young birds are ready for feeding just as the first corn is harvested – so the first Foie Gras is ready for market just in time for Martinmas in mid-November.

## **The Martinmas Tradition – Rooted in History**

In this part of the world, the feast of St Martin (Martinmas) has come to be celebrated as a continuation of the historic rites and festivals influenced by the changing of seasons. In the olden days, this was the time when land and farm rents were paid, and when owners were traditionally given "fatted geese" as gifts.





## *Gourmet Corner*

**A few simple tips for preparing and enjoying Foie Gras:**

- If your Foie Gras is semi-cooked, remove the product from its container and/or the refrigerator around 10-20 minutes before serving. Extend this time to 20-30 minutes if the Foie Gras is preserved.
- To remove easily from its packaging, plunge the Foie Gras container briskly into hot water.
- To achieve the perfect slice, run your knife under hot water before slicing into the Foie Gras.
- Do not discard all the fat from the packaging. It is delicious!
- Look after your taste buds and savour your Foie Gras! If you are serving an aperitif, don't serve strong alcohol, olives or peanuts. The wine you have chosen to pair with your main-course Foie Gras is a perfect drink to serve at this time.
- Do not spread Foie Gras. Place it on a piece of bread – or simply pick up with a fork.

## *List of Producer' Associations. Discover how Foie Gras varies region by region.*

- Association des producteurs de Foie Gras du Périgord ([www.foiegras-perigord.com](http://www.foiegras-perigord.com))
- Association Gersoise pour la promotion du Foie Gras ([www.foie-gras-gers.com](http://www.foie-gras-gers.com))
- Association des producteurs à la ferme des Landes ([www.qualitelandes.com/canard-landais.html](http://www.qualitelandes.com/canard-landais.html))
- Association des producteurs de Foie Gras Normand à Caen ([www.fermiers-des-beccs.com](http://www.fermiers-des-beccs.com))
- Association des producteurs de Foie Gras d'Alsace ([www.alsacefoiegras.fr](http://www.alsacefoiegras.fr))
- IGP Sud-Ouest ([www.foiegrasusudouest.fr](http://www.foiegrasusudouest.fr))

*Our Foie Gras producers and their partners have picked out a range of recipes for you to try. Find them on the Foie Gras websites:*

[www.lefoiegras.fr](http://www.lefoiegras.fr)  
[www.leblogdufoiegras.com](http://www.leblogdufoiegras.com)  
[www.lefoiegrasdelasaintmartin.fr](http://www.lefoiegrasdelasaintmartin.fr)



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