

## **INNOVATIVE GROWTH IN A FAMILY BUSINESS: CASE STUDY ON TARCZYŃSKI'S PLANT-BASED MEAT ALTERNATIVES**

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**Abstract:** The high consumption of animal products has a significant negative impact on the environment and human health. Switching to plant-based meat (PBM) is a potential solution. Large retail chains offer a significant share of alternatives under their brands, but there are also major players in the Polish meat market that have included plant-based meat alternatives (PBMA) to their range. Among these, the Tarczyński family company has the largest market share, with 41%. This article presents a case study that focuses on the Tarczyński company, which has adopted a dual approach, producing both traditional meat products and plant-based meat alternatives. The aim of the article is to highlight the key role that family businesses, with their unique combination of tradition and innovation, can play in transforming the food industry towards a more sustainable future. The Tarczyński case also illustrates the importance of the family business in the market: the company's heritage and ability to innovate are key factors contributing to its resilience and success in a rapidly changing market. The involvement of younger family members, the next generation, in driving innovation underlines the dynamic nature of this company and its ability to adapt to new trends.

**Keywords:** case study, family owned company, firm strategy plant-based meat alternative foods, Poland

**JEL Classification:** D22, D9, M14, M3

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## Introduction

The global food system is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, accounting for 21-37% of global GHG emissions and around 10.3% of EU emissions, with a significant share coming from the livestock sector. To achieve climate neutrality by 2050, meat consumption in the EU would have to be reduced by up to 80%, leading to discussions on the introduction of a meat tax (Kluczkowski et al., 2020; Shukla et al., 2019). In Poland, despite high meat consumption, the market for plant-based meat alternatives is growing, driven by younger consumers and increased retail availability, with sales of plant-based products reaching record highs in recent years.

The aim of this article is to highlight the key role that family businesses, with their unique combination of tradition and innovation, can play in the transformation of the food industry towards sustainability. It analyzes and illustrates the strategic approach of Tarczyński, a Polish family-owned company that produces both traditional meat products and plant-based meat alternatives (PBMAs). Through the study of the Tarczyński case, the article seeks to demonstrate how traditional meat producers can successfully diversify into plant-based alternatives to meet the growing demand for sustainable and health-conscious food options. In addition, the article sheds light on the pivotal role family businesses can have in the food industry's move toward sustainability. Readers will gain insight into how established meat producers can successfully diversify into plant-based alternatives to meet the growing consumer demand for environmentally friendly and health-conscious options.

This topic is particularly compelling because it addresses a critical question: How can traditional meat producers transition to sustainable practices without sacrificing their heritage or market position? This article answers this question by presenting Tarczyński's strategies, which demonstrate that it is possible to innovate without losing sight of tradition. By analyzing Tarczyński's approach, this article shows how to embrace sustainable practices while meeting evolving consumer expectations. In addition, the article highlights the need to reduce the environmental and health impacts of high meat consumption and underscores the importance of innovative business practices in achieving these goals.

## Literature review

The global food system has a significant impact on greenhouse gas emissions. Studies have shown that food systems contribute between 19% and 37% of the global greenhouse effect (Vermeulen et al., 2012; Kluczkowski et al., 2020) and that the industry is responsible for approximately 21-37% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Shukla et al., 2019). This widespread impact underscores the fact that our current global food systems and consumption patterns are unsustainable for both human and planetary health (Willett et al., 2019).

Agriculture alone accounts for around 70% of global freshwater use (Food and Agriculture Organisation AQUASTAT data, 2017) and is a significant driver of other environmental pressures. In the European Union alone, agriculture is responsible for 10.3% of greenhouse gas emissions, with almost 70% coming from the livestock sector.

For the European Union, which has pledged to reach zero net emissions by 2050, this makes meat as problematic as energy or transport. Greenpeace has calculated that meat consumption in the Union would have to fall by as much as 80% by 2050 to achieve climate neutrality. For this reason, NGOs associated with the TAPP (True Animal Protein Price) initiative have raised the idea of a special tax on meat in the European Parliament. However, as a result of the meat industry lobby, the “From farm to fork” strategy announced by the European Commission in May 2020 does not yet include a place for taxing meat production. Nevertheless, this seems to be the future if we want to reduce our carbon footprint. Confirmation of the introduction of taxes on meat production comes from the fact that some investment analysts, such as those at Goldman Sachs, have included meat production in the list of risky industries (Krukowska, 2020).

In response to these challenges, there has been a growing shift towards more sustainable practices and innovations within the food industry. One notable trend is the rise of plant-based meat alternatives (PBMAs), which offer a promising way to reduce the environmental footprint associated with traditional meat production. Studies have focused on assessing the environmental impact of PBMAs compared to conventional meat products with the aim of providing insights into sustainable food choices (Tang, 2024; Safdar et al., 2022). PBMAs are designed to mimic the sensory and nutritional characteristics of meat without the need for animal farming, which is in line with evolving consumer preferences and sustainability concerns (Lusk et al., 2022; Aleksandrowicz et al., 2016).

Globally, there has been a significant increase in meat consumption driven by specific factors such as population growth (Thavamani et al., 2020; Hwang et al., 2020). Nonetheless, there is a growing awareness of the environmental and health impacts of high meat consumption, leading to a shift towards alternative protein sources such as plant-based meat alternatives (Segovia et al., 2022).

Studies show that meat is highly preferred by Polish consumers due to various socio-cultural factors (Jeżewska-Zychowicz et al., 2021). Furthermore, Poland's status as the largest producer and exporter of poultry meat in the European Union since 2014 highlights the country's importance in the meat industry. Research conducted by PwC on the meat market in Poland in 2023 shows that the majority of Poles consume large amounts of meat and that the structure of meat consumption in Poland stands out compared to OECD and European Union countries, with an average of 73.2 kg of meat consumed per capita per year. Despite the growing popularity of plant-based meat substitutes, their share of expenditure on meat and meat substitutes remains below 2% in Poland. The main determinants of meat choice in Poland are price and ease of preparation, with 89% of Poles consuming meat more than once a week. The consumption of poultry is increasingly favored for its perceived health benefits over beef and pork (Badowski & Steinhoff-Traczewski, 2023).

The trend towards meat alternatives is gradually gaining ground in Poland, especially among young people. While the market for meat substitutes is expected to grow, it does not currently pose an immediate threat to the volume of meat consumption in the country. Meat substitutes are more of a culinary novelty than a direct

challenge to traditional meat consumption habits. The adoption of plant-based diets is still seen as a long-term trend rather than a temporary fad.

The availability and consumption of meat substitutes in Poland has increased significantly in recent years. In 2022, over 60% of Poles reported having access to meat substitutes, highlighting the increasing presence of these products in the market. In addition, almost 50% of the population have tried meat substitutes, mainly out of curiosity. Notably, more than 40% of Poles consume these alternatives on a regular basis. The availability of meat and sausage substitutes grew significantly from 2022 to 2023, with discounters leading the way with an increase of more than 30%. This growth was followed by a 7% rise in cash & carry stores and a 4% increment in hypermarkets, while supermarkets saw a decline in the number of these products. Among discounters, Lidl, Netto and Biedronka stand out for their extensive range of meat substitutes, offering an average of 26, 23 and 21 PBMA's respectively. Reflecting the rise in vegetarian/vegan diets, many retail chains are increasingly developing private labels for plant-based meat substitutes, expanding the range of products available to consumers. In 2022, private labels accounted for 46% of available products in the plant-based meat substitutes market. Other significant players included Tarczyński with 9%, Perla Polska with 8%, Kubara with 8% and Nestle with 6% (Badowski & Steinhoff-Traczewski, 2023, Dębek, 2019).

In 2022, sales of plant-based alternatives in Poland reached a record high, growing by 50% to €182 million. Of these alternatives, plant-based milk is the fastest growing. In 2022, sales of plant-based milk reached €90 million, and plant-based meat accounted for around 15% of the total packaged meat market, with sales of €41 million. These figures come from the latest NielsenIQ report and are part of GFI Europe's analysis, which covers 13 European countries. In these countries, the sales of plant-based alternatives will grow by an average of 22% to reach a total value of €5.7 billion by 2023. This means that progressively more Poles are making a conscious decision to cut down on meat and dairy, not only for their health but also for the health of the planet and animal welfare (Bolanowski, 2024; GFI/Europe, 2023).

More than 50% of Europeans reported eating less meat in 2023 compared to the previous year, a trend that is also gaining momentum in Poland. Despite its status as being the largest meat producer and exporter and having the highest meat consumption in the European Union, Poland is also experiencing a growing flexitarian trend (Badowski & Steinhoff-Traczewski, 2023; Dębek, 2019). Large retail chains offer a significant proportion of alternative meat or dairy products under their brands, but there are also major players in the Polish meat market that have expanded their range to include plant-based meat alternatives. The Tarczyński family business was the first. However, the trend has also been recognized by other major players in the food industry, such as Sokołów, Olewnik or Morliny, most of which are family companies.

Family businesses in Poland, as in many other countries, are important contributors to the national economy, facilitating wealth creation, economic stability and sustainability (Oudah et al., 2018). Their significant presence in various sectors underscores their role in driving economic growth and supporting the overall business landscape. These firms have unique characteristics that distinguish them from non-family firms. Family businesses often involve multiple generations, have a long-term

strategic perspective, exhibit a strong collective identity and show an exceptional commitment to the survival of the business (Palacios et al., 2013). The participation of family members in decision-making and governance is a defining aspect of family businesses, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose within the organization (Setiawan et al., 2023). By emphasizing values such as integrity, honesty and social responsibility, family businesses in Poland are aligned with sustainable development goals and contribute to the well-being of society (Santos et al., 2023).

Family businesses are often characterized by a strong sense of tradition, continuity and family values (Muslim & Setiawan, 2024). These businesses are usually passed down through generations, with family members holding key positions in the business (Putri & Nurfauziah, 2022). The emotional bond between family members involved in running the business is a unique aspect of family businesses, contributing to a sense of unity and shared purpose (Schons & Colle, 2022). Family members often play an important role on the company's board and in executive positions, contributing to a close-knit and cohesive organizational culture (Viet, 2015). The family's deep emotional investment in the business can lead to a strong commitment to the success and longevity of the business (Amran, 2012).

## Research methodology

The article analyzes and illustrates the innovative approach of Tarczyński, a Polish family-owned company with a rich heritage in the meat industry. As a family-owned business, Tarczyński has leveraged its deep-rooted values, years of industry experience, and close-knit organizational structure to navigate the complexities of modern food production. The method that will be used for the purpose of this article is a case study.

Case study research is a valuable methodological approach that allows in-depth exploration of a particular phenomenon in its real-world context. According to (Dul & Hak, 2007), case study methodology is a well-established approach in business research that allows researchers to delve deeply into complex issues, making it particularly suitable for investigating intricate business strategies such as those related to plant-based meat alternatives in family-owned businesses. Symonds (2021) further emphasizes the importance of case studies as a research method, highlighting its flexibility and ability to accommodate different theoretical orientations and research questions. In addition, Massis and Kotlar (2014) emphasize the importance of qualitative data in producing high quality research in family business studies, which is consistent with the aim of examining the strategies of a Polish family business in the plant-based meat industry.

By examining the Tarczyński case, the article is able to provide a rich and detailed analysis of the company's approach to plant-based meat alternatives. The paper aims to highlight the key role that family businesses, with their unique blend of tradition and innovation, can play in transforming the food industry towards sustainability. It will show how traditional meat producers, especially those with a strong family heritage, can successfully diversify into plant-based alternatives to meet the growing

demand for sustainable and health-conscious food options. The Tarczyński case study provides valuable insights for both academia and industry.

### **The Tarczyński case on plant-based meat alternatives**

The Tarczyński company is an innovative producer of high-quality sausages, kabanos, sausage and protein snacks. It is the leader in the pre-packed kabanos category in Poland in the premium segment. When Jacek Tarczyński told his employees 10 years ago, “I want to be the king of kabanos”, some thought it was an impossible fantasy. Today he has a 70% share of the market, with annual sales of almost two billion. The company's current goal is to become the leader in high-protein snacks and the leader in PBMA.

The Tarczyński company, known for its production of cured meats, sausages and kabanos (thin dried sausages sold as a snack), has an interesting history. The main chronological events are as follows:

- 1989: The company was established by Elżbieta and Jacek Tarczyński. In the beginning, the company was located in the backyard of the family home. Elżbieta convinced Jacek to sell their car and invest in meat processing machinery.
- 1996: Tarczyński bought the meat processing plant in Trzebnica (near Wrocław), which he had previously rented. During this time, the company began to promote its products through tastings in hypermarkets, and specialized in the production of kabanos.
- 1998: The company was transformed from a limited liability company into a joint stock company.
- 2007: Tarczyński built a modern factory in Ujeździec Mały.
- 2013: The company was listed on the Main Market of the Warsaw Stock Exchange.
- 2018: The company entered the US market.
- 2019: The existing plant was expanded, and new plants were constructed.

In the following years, the company continued to grow, investing in product diversity, including plant-based alternatives. The company has been increasing its market share year on year, as well as its revenues, and it was estimated that it would have net revenues of almost PLN 2 billion in 2023 from the sale of its products.

From the very beginning, Mr. and Mrs. Tarczyński's company was a family business, as the name itself suggests. Their sons joined the company; first, in 2008, their eldest son, Dawid, who is responsible for technology, production and lean management. Then, in 2010, their other son Tomasz took over the company's sales and marketing. The family business is also reflected in the ownership and supervisory structure. The Tarczyńskis hold 75% of the shares and 80% of the voting rights in Tarczyński. Additionally, family members make up 3/4 of the management board and 1/6 of the supervisory board (Tarczyński, 2024).

Since the mid-1990s, the company has had a strong brand, clearly associated with the family. Jacek Tarczyński was the first in the meat industry to build a brand and use it for identification, including wrapping cars with the company logo. The second major step was product tasting in hypermarkets, a popular promotional tool in the

late 1990s. At the time, the competition used the services of hired hostesses. In response, the Tarczyński brand built up a team of trained tasters who worked for over 20 years to help customers understand why its products had to cost more than those of its competitors.

The third element of the company's strategy in the late 1990s was specialization. The company decided to focus on kabanos. This type of meat, known in Poland since the communist era and associated with a luxury product, became widely available thanks to Tarczyński. At that time, most factories produced everything from sausages to brawn and black pudding. All these products later disappeared without a name among hundreds of others. This move allowed the company to move its brand and products from the niche of the meat counter to the snack aisle. By having a conveniently packaged product, they gained recognition and loyalty from customers (Karnaszewski, 2020b).

Since 2015, the company has changed another element of its strategy by building its identity around meat snacks and large, distinctive advertising campaigns. These activities bring the company profits in the order of 20 million PLN.

The most innovative strategy, however, is the development of meat alternatives. It is the sons who are at the forefront of the company's next revolution. After spending time in the US and trying meatless burgers, they convinced their father to develop a plant-based alternative to kabanos. In the spring of 2019, Tarczyński's sons started creating the meatless product, and as early as October 2020, they introduced Rośl-Inne Kabanos in stores, referencing their main product not only by name, but also by taste and appearance (Karnaszewski, 2020a).

The sons realized that the vegetarian trend would have a significant long-term impact on the meat market in which Tarczyński operated. The company could not wait passively for this to happen, thus the decision to change the company's product range was taken well in advance (Bolanowski, 2024).

Tarczyński decided to expand its range of plant-based products with flexitarians in mind, people who eat meat but are trying to reduce the amount of meat in their diet. According to the company's internal research, almost 40% of Polish adults consider themselves to be flexitarians (KB, 2020).

The Tarczyński family firm can be a good example of how concentrated ownership and active family involvement in management and board decisions play a central role in shaping strategic decisions. A number of studies have shown that family participation in board decisions can significantly influence the strategic choices made by family firms, reflecting the interplay between family dynamics and organizational strategy (Beuren et al., 2016; Setiawati et al., 2022). The strong relationship between family ownership and business decisions highlights the impact of the family system on the strategic planning and overall performance of family-owned firms (Setiawati et al., 2022).

Tarczyński is breaking the stereotypes of a typical meat company and is turning to plant-based substitutes. The new strategy is ambitious. Tarczyński wants to become the world's largest supplier of protein-rich products. The world's only non-meat kabanos, which resemble their classic counterparts in appearance and taste, appear to be bringing the company much closer to this goal (Bolanowski, 2024).

Plant-based alternatives to traditional foods have become firmly established in Poland. According to a report by GFI Europe, the sales of plant-based alternatives to zoonotic products amounted to €182 million. By 2022, plant-based meats had accounted for around 15% of the total pre-packed meat market in Poland, with sales worth €41 million. Unsurprisingly, this consumer trend has been recognized by the big players in the food industry, and the Tarczyński family business was the first to do so.

Other companies in the meat sector have started to produce plant-based alternatives, such as Sokołów and the Z Gruntu Good product line, or Olewnik, Pekpol, Silesia or Morliny, other well-known meat companies. Increasingly more Polish meat companies see the PBMA market as an opportunity to reach new groups of consumers and to retain their existing consumers who have started to reduce their meat consumption. In the long term, this is a good risk diversification strategy – building a solid second pillar of their business (based on plant-based products) may prove very helpful in the event of changing consumer expectations, additional regulations related to the environmental footprint or more frequent outbreaks of zoonotic diseases (Salomon, 2023).

## Conclusions

The comprehensive analysis of the global food system's impact on greenhouse gas emissions and subsequent environmental pressures underlines the urgent need for transformative changes in food production and consumption patterns. The European Union's commitment to climate neutrality by 2050, which requires a significant reduction in meat consumption, highlights the scale of the challenge. On the other hand, it also presents an opportunity for innovation and the adoption of more sustainable practices within the food industry.

The emergence of plant-based meat alternatives is a key development in this context. PBMA offers a viable solution to reducing the environmental footprint of traditional meat production in line with consumer preferences for healthier and more sustainable food options. The growth of this market segment reflects a broader shift in societal values towards sustainability and health consciousness. The increasing availability and consumption of PBMA in Poland, driven by both curiosity and a growing awareness of their benefits, suggests a gradual but steady shift in eating habits.

Family-owned companies such as the Tarczyński company are playing a key role in this transition. The company's strategic shift towards plant-based products shows how traditional meat producers can adapt to changing market dynamics and consumer preferences. The success of Tarczyński's Rośl-Inne kabanos, a plant-based alternative, demonstrates the potential for innovation within established companies. This move not only caters to the growing flexitarian demographic, but also positions the company as a leader in the evolving market for protein-rich snacks.

The wider implications of this shift are significant. By diversifying their product lines to include PBMA, meat producers can reduce their environmental impact, meet regulatory requirements and mitigate risks associated with changing consumer



behavior and potential zoonotic disease outbreaks. This strategic diversification is also in line with sustainable development objectives and supports consumer health and well-being.

The Tarczyński case also illustrates the importance of family-owned businesses in promoting economic stability and sustainability. Their long-term strategic outlook, commitment to the company's heritage and ability to innovate are key factors contributing to their resilience and success in a rapidly changing market. The involvement of younger family members in driving innovation, as seen in the introduction of plant-based products, highlights the dynamic nature of these businesses and their ability to adapt to new trends.

In summary, the discussion highlights the critical role of innovation and strategic adaptation in addressing the environmental challenges posed by the global food system. The rise of PBMA is an important step towards a more sustainable future, with family businesses like Tarczyński leading the way. As consumer preferences continue to evolve, the food industry must embrace these changes to ensure both environmental sustainability and economic viability.

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## INNOWACYJNY ROZWÓJ W FIRMIE RODZINNEJ: STUDIUM PRZYPADKU FIRMY TARCZYŃSKI

**Streszczenie:** Wysokie spożycie produktów pochodzenia zwierzęcego ma znaczący negatywny wpływ na środowisko i zdrowie ludzi. Koniecznością zatem wydaje się ograniczenie konsumpcji mięsa, a wersje roślinne mogą być potencjalnym rozwiązaniem tego problemu. Duże sieci handlowe oferują znaczny wybór produktów alternatywnych pod swoimi markami. Również producenci mięsa włączają do swojej oferty alternatywne produkty mięsne pochodzenia roślinnego (PBMA). Wśród nich pierwszym była firma Tarczyński, z obecnie największym udziałem w polskim rynku alternatyw mięsa (41%). W niniejszym artykule przedstawiono studium przypadku firmy Tarczyński. To przykład polskiej firmy rodzinnej, która produkuje zarówno tradycyjne produkty mięsne, jak i ich roślinne warianty. Celem artykułu jest podkreślenie kluczowej roli, jaką firmy rodzinne z ich unikalnym połączeniem tradycji i innowacji mogą odegrać w transformacji przemysłu spożywczego w kierunku bardziej zrównoważonego. Przypadek przedsiębiorstwa Tarczyński ilustruje również znaczenie firmy rodzinnej w gospodarce: dziedzictwo, reputacja firmy i jej zdolność do innowacji to kluczowe czynniki sukcesu na szybko zmieniającym się rynku. Zaangażowanie młodszych członków rodziny, następnego pokolenia, w kreowaniu innowacji podkreśla dynamiczny charakter firmy i jej zdolność do dostosowywania się do nowych trendów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** studium przypadku, firma rodzinna, strategia firmy, alternatywne produkty mięsne na bazie roślin, Polska

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