

On guard against snails

To some people, snails are an epicurean delight. To Al Schmidt, an entomologist with Agriculture Canada involved in keeping harmful foreign snails out of Canada, they're a cause for concern.

Canadian snails are usually too small to eat, so bigger ones are imported. However, the imports have larger appetites than their tiny Canadian counterparts and can become serious pests for gardeners and small-fruit farmers if they become established here.

"Fortunately, most of the snails eaten in Canada come out of cans or have been frozen," Mr. Schmidt says. "But some live snails are imported — legally and otherwise — and that's where Agriculture Canada gets involved."

The only live snails for which permits are currently issued come from Tunisia and Algeria. This species is adapted to a hot climate and would not survive long in Canada even if the snails managed to get loose into a backyard or field. These snails are airshipped in covered bushels or baskets and are inspected before release to buyers.

"The big problem, though, isn't with those who legally import snails in bulk," Mr. Schmidt explains. "It's people who transport a few snails in

their airline baggage that present the greatest risk to Canadian agriculture.

"In the last three months, we have confiscated more than 330 pounds of live snails at the Montreal airports alone.

The snails in Montreal are *Helix pomatia*, a European species which



can survive the Canadian climate. Mr. Schmidt says they could be controlled with chemicals, but poisonous snail baits may be dangerous to pets and children as well as birds and squirrels that feed on snails.

"Unfortunately, people who bring live snails into Canada don't usually

realize the damage they can cause. They can be a terrible nuisance to backyard gardeners if they spread in a city and can cause economic damage to crops like strawberries if they get into the countryside."

Agriculture Canada has received many requests from individuals wanting to set up snail farms in Canada. These have all been turned down because of inadequate proposals to ensure the snails don't escape and spread outside the farms.

"La Sagouine" tours Europe

Antonine Maillet's *La Sagouine* opened in Paris on September 21, at the beginning of a two-and-a-half month tour in Europe. The tour includes 27 cities in France, Belgium and Switzerland for a total of nearly 40 performances. *La Sagouine*, a production from Le Théâtre du Rideau Vert, Montreal, is sponsored by the Department of External Affairs under its program of cultural relations with foreign countries.

The play, consisting of a series of monologues, was written as a one-woman show by Acadian novelist and playwright, Antonine Maillet. Actress, Viola Léger, who is *La Sagouine*, has performed this role since November 1971. The stories she tells "in rough, crude French dating from the sixteenth century" (A. Maillet) are of the price paid for a life truly lived and of her love for her native Acadia. As *La Sagouine*, Madame Léger has "talked her way" all over Canada and Europe, where she performed four shows in Paris, and appeared at the world festival of theatre in Monaco in 1974. Some 500 presentations have been given since 1971, in theatres and on Radio-Canada television, with a constantly changing series of monologues.

In Europe, *La Sagouine* will talk of *Le Métier* (work), *Les bancs d'église* (church pews), *Le Recensement* (the census), *Le Printemps* (spring), and *La Mort* (death).

The tour opened at the Théâtre Petit Orsay of Jean-Louis Barrault-Madeleine Renaud in Paris, where the Canadian show played for two-and-a-half weeks. *La Sagouine* continues in major centres in France, Belgium and Switzerland, including Bordeaux, Lyon, Marseilles, Brussels and Geneva.

Snail studies may start new industry

The recent birth of 70 snails at one of the laboratories at the Centre de recherches des sciences appliquées de l'alimentation (CRESALA), University of Quebec at Montreal, marks the success of a project that began two years ago. The aim of the research team is to establish at the university a centre of studies which would be unique in Canada — a centre of expertise on snails.

Last spring, after a year of preliminary work, CRESALA was refused funding for research on the grounds that the cultivation of snails in laboratories was not a priority. However, the creatures themselves justified the request when, last July, foreign snails were discovered eating the vegetation of gardens in Montreal.

The Plant Protection Division of the federal Department of Agriculture, which investigated the complaints, issued warnings of the first invasion of snails in Canada, although it had generally been believed that they could not survive the Canadian winter.

The research team at CRESALA will submit a more elaborate project to the Federal Government which might prove significant to the food industry. On the strength of their breeding success and the danger of snail infestation into agriculture, CRESALA hopes to receive funds to set up a study centre at the university.

Canadians eat more than 2.5 million imported snails a year. The development of a technique to raise them domestically may be the beginning of a new industry.