



A picture shows furniture and tableware made from "Merdacotta" on March 28, 2017 at the Shit Museum (Museum of Poop) in the Castelbosco castle of Gragnano Trebbiense. — AFP photos



A picture shows potteries and tiles made from "Merdacotta".

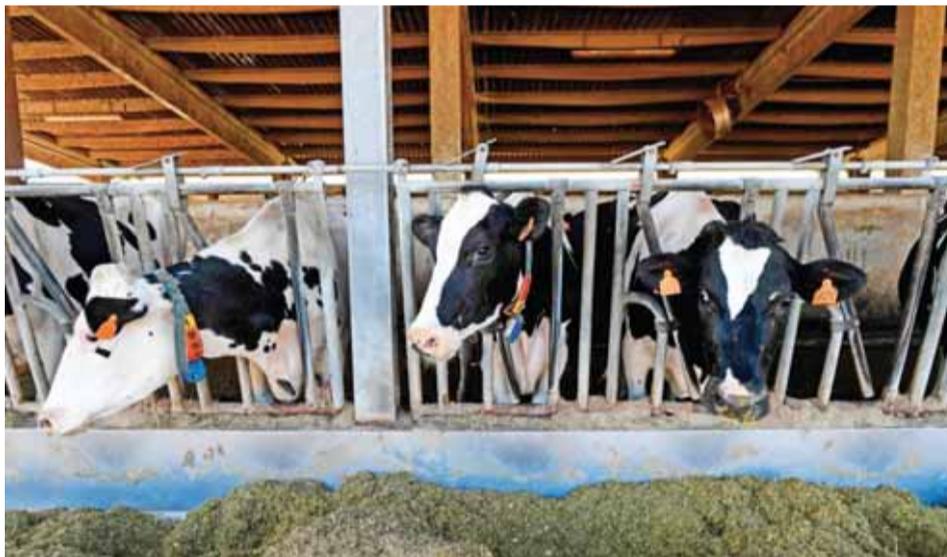
New museum reveals power of poo in Italy

It may pong, but Italy's "Shit Museum" has the whiff of success about it: Here in Castelbosco, farmers are transforming sloppy cowpats into plates you can eat off. Once upon a time there was a large farm about a hundred kilometers south of Milan. The farmer had not only hundreds of cows, but veritable mountains of excrement-stinking slops he thought he could do something with. "The idea came from the need to take advantage of animal dung in an ecological way. We managed to transform it into something useful," farmer Gianantonio Locatelli, 61, told AFP.

Over his various farms, 3,500 cattle produce 550 quintals (55 tons) of milk a day to make Grana Padano, a hard cheese comparable to Parmigiano Reggiano. They also generate 1,500 quintals of waste. Rather than wallow in it, Locatelli came up with an ingenious way to make use of the pungent matter. The excrement is collected into so-called stool digesters, immense vats where bacteria transform everything organic into methane. The methane is then burned to produce electricity, which is sold by the farm. The daily feces output produces three Megawatts an hour, enough to turn on the lights of a village of 3,000 to 4,000 inhabitants.

'Baked shit'

The water used to cool the engines heats to 100 degrees celsius, which is then used to warm



A picture shows cows in the farm of the Shit Museum.

the farm, stables and digesters, which must be kept at a constant 40 degrees. Part of the dung left over after the bacteria have had their fill is then used as fertilizer, with the "Merdame" brand set to hit supermarket shelves soon, says Locatelli. But the most sophisticated stool success is the line of tableware and everyday

objects created out of the left-over faeces, dubbed "merdacotta"—literally "baked shit", a play on the clay-based earthenware Terracotta.

The recipe? Pungent poo mixed with Tuscan clay and rounded off with "a little secret touch"—a formula Locatelli fiercely protects—to make bricks, hexagonal and rectangular tiles, flower-

pots, plates or jars. Coming perhaps to a dining table near you soon, the clean-lined, simple Merdacotta creations are "a revolutionary product... halfway between plastic and Terracotta", Locatelli says. The objects take pride of place in the museum, which was founded on one of the farms in 2005 and has as its logo a dung beetle, that six-legged creature that uses dung balls as both a food source and a breeding chamber.

'Graceful excrement'

The museum also boasts artworks, from paintings in liquid excrement, to an extract from



Gianantonio Locatelli, founder of the Shit Museum (Museum of Poop).

Luis Bunuel's film "The Phantom of Liberty". Designed with the architect Luca Cipelletti, it aims to capture the philosophy of an art-loving farmer who studied agriculture in Canada and rubbed shoulders with Andy Warhol in New York before becoming an amateur collector of conceptual works.

"Excrement is seen as something vulgar, nauseating, as the most ignoble matter," says Locatelli, who intends to "rehabilitate the word and transform opinions of it across the board". The Merdacotta collection won a prize at Milan's design fair last year, justifying his bet to "turn shit into something graceful," he says. And while the farms have been hit in recent years by a sharp drop in the price of milk, Locatelli says he can rely on his unusual sideline to keep his business buoyant. For that, "I can only thank shit," he said with a chuckle. — AFP



A picture shows cows excrements recycled by the Shit Museum (Museum of Poop) to produce methane and energy or "Merdacotta" (baked shit).