

SLOW FOOD: GOOD, CLEAN, AND FAIR

BY JOSIE PADRO



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A small red snail is the symbol that represents Slow Food, a movement making big changes in the way people think about food. It all started in 1989, as fast food restaurants made their way onto the Italian landscape. In reaction, Italian journalist Carlo Petrini began the Slow Food movement which now has approximately 100,000 members in more than 100 countries.

The Slow Food philosophy is simple: food should taste good, it should be produced in a clean environmentally friendly manner, and producers should be paid fairly. Based on these beliefs, Slow Food has initiated international efforts to conserve endangered edible plants and animals, to preserve cultural traditions and practices around food, and to advocate for small scale food producers.

Recognizing education as an important part of advancing its goals, Slow Food has established the University of Gastronomic Science. With campuses in Pollenzo and Colorno, Italy, the university marries gastronomic with agricultural science.

In 2004, Slow Food held its first Terra Madre conference in Torino, Italy. The aim was to bring together small scale food producers with students, academics and food-related organizations to create a strategy for sustainable farming prac-

tices. That year 5,000 delegates from all over the world gathered to exchange ideas. In 2006, 1,000 international chefs were invited in recognition of the vital partnership they have with producers.

One of those was chef Michael Howell of Tempest Restaurant in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. He says he didn't realize it at the time, but he was already practicing some of the principles of Slow Food. While he was already using fresh, local ingredients on his menu, his experience at Terra Madre caused a further shift in his thinking.

"I actually decided that what I would do is focus on the local and sustainable because Slow Food had brought it to my attention. I try and create an indigenous Atlantic cuisine that embraces the best of both the sea and the land," he says.

One of the aspects of Terra Madre that chef Howell most appreciated was the chance to meet other chefs and producers from around the world — to learn not only about global food issues, but also to sit down over a bowl of pasta and speak to small-scale producers.

Chef Howell has come away with a healthy respect for the local farmer. "One of the things that I personally, and I think Slow Food, has tried to cultivate is respect for the producers and almost to make the producers our food heroes — be-

cause ultimately the cooking can only be as good as the ingredients that you cook with."

In B.C., chefs have made important contributions to Vancouver Slow Food events. "For the Love of Fish" took place in May 2009, jointly presented by Slow Food Vancouver and Seachoice. The 100 guests enjoyed a tasting menu of sustainable B.C. seafood featuring local sardines, sablefish, clams, and scallops.

Also successful was the first Terra Madre Day celebration in December 2009, co-sponsored with FarmFolk/CityFolk. More than 20 local producers (wine, beer and sake makers; mushroom growers; produce farmers; honey producers; fishers; cheese makers) provided samples and met with event participants. Local chefs Donna Wadsworth from Savoury City Catering, Andrea Carlson of Bishop's and Clement Chan from the Hyatt Regency prepared sample dishes using local ingredients provided by producers who attended the event.

Public interest in these events shows, despite its snail mascot, Slow Food is quickly catching on. More and more, consumers are turning to environmentally sustainable food and chefs have become an important part of the movement. CQ

To learn more or to join Slow Food Vancouver visit slowfoodvancouver.com.