

The Slow Food Movement comes to Taos

(And acknowledges that it has been here all along)



Megan Bowers

RESOURCES

www.tcedc.org
www.slowfoodinternational.org
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In 1987 I was sitting in meditation with Allen Ginsberg, Japanese monks and other members of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship on the railroad tracks at Rocky Flats near Boulder, Colo., protesting the manufacturing of triggers for nuclear weapons. Later that summer, I rode through the *campo* in an open transport truck over mine fields on a fact-finding mission with Witness for Peace in Contra-infested Nicaragua.

At the same time, Carlo Petrini was eating white truffles and pasta pesto and drinking Barolo wine with his friends in Piedmont, northern Italy as a member of an activist group called Arci Gola.

Twenty years later, wars have come and gone and some still persist, but I have let go of my previously radical forms of political protest. In their place, I have joined Carlo and 80,000 others as a member of Slow Food International, a movement that he and his colleagues around the world have put together in order to advocate for regional foods that support local cultures and sustainable farming.

“I came to understand,” Petrini says, “that those who suffer for others do more damage to humanity than those who enjoy themselves. Pleasure is a way of being at one with yourself and others. Though it may be impossible to change the world, one should at least be able to change a menu.”

Slow Food, as a movement, began in earnest in 1986 when 20,000 Italians protested the building of a 1,200-square-meter McDonald’s in historic Rome. Slow Food cuisine and philosophy (the name is in English even in Italy) are the exact opposite of a Big

Mac or “fast-food nation” in every conceivable way.

Petrini, described as “a Don Quixote who always fought for the importance of acknowledging agricultural work and the working dignity of farmers” and as the first “eco-gastronome” has, while lobbying to preserve artisanal foods, also fought for limiting the spread of “non-places” such as suburbs, fast-food restaurants and malls.

There is an adjunct movement to Slow Food called Citta Slow or Slow Cities whose motto is “Slowness Before Speed,” and whose intention is to protect the quality of life through enhancing quality-oriented development.

Over the years, Slow Food has burgeoned as communities around the world have joined together in their struggle to maintain their indigenous foods and cultural identities. In response, Slow Food has put together projects such as the Ark of Taste, Presidia and Terra Madre, which sponsors the biennial Salone de Gusto in Turin, Italy, where literally thousands of traditional foods that are being rescued from the verge of extinction are showcased in a cornucopia of taste delights.

This past October, four Taoseños — who are working with native foods and food sovereignty — went to Turin as part of a North American Indigenous Delegation. Pati Martinson and Elena Arguello of the Taos County Economic Development Corporation, Shirley Trujillo of Taos Pueblo’s Red Willow Greenhouse Project and Miguel Santistevan of Semillas Sembradas participated in the event and were heartened to meet people from as far away as South America and Africa who share their concerns



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for land-based peoples' desires to stay on the land.

As Martinson says, "It is so important to decentralize and decorporatize food and for communities to be able to keep their small family farms and ranches. Slow Food is much more than gourmet food — it is all about promoting the environment and the fact that human beings and ecosystems are mutually beneficial in helping to maintain healthy, indigenous foods and healthy land.

"Preserving these foods preserve community, too. People get nourished in more ways than in the belly. If you remember helping your grandmother prepare a feast for Thanksgiving, recall that it took a whole day and the human interaction was as important as the food."

An important Slow Food project is the Ark of Taste which "aims to rediscover and catalogue forgotten flavors, documenting excellent gastronomic products that are in danger of disappearing." Some local candidates for the Ark of Taste include the enduring Three Sisters: blue corn, local squash and pumpkins and anasazi beans, as well as wild amaranth and Chimayó chilies.

Although introduced by Europeans, lamb has evolved to become a pivotal indigenous food and wild turkeys have long been a vital food source.

This past year I read two excellent books that furthered my awareness about the formidable issues we face today around food — "The Omnivore's Dilemma" by Michael Pollan and Gary Paul Nabhan's



"Coming Home to Eat," in which he describes his journey of eating only those foods obtainable within a 200-mile radius of his home for one year.

Both are excellent writers with a healthy sense of humor and both are Slow Food advocates.

Taos has long been home to locally grown food and because and it is vitally important to preserve Taos' open agrarian landscape, it is a natural place to have its own Slow Food group or "convivium." There are more than 850 convivia around the world whose purpose is to build relationships with producers, campaign to protect traditional foods, organize tastings and seminars, encourage chefs to use local foods, nominate producers to participate in international events and work to bring taste education into schools. But most importantly, they cultivate the appreciation of pleasure and quality in daily life.

Taos County Economic Development Corporation, Sustain Taos and Taos Pueblo's Red Willow

Greenhouse Project are in the process of planning four seasonal meals, which would highlight locally grown regional foods prepared by local chefs as part of a Slow Food demonstration and outreach endeavor. Already Karen Todd of the Dragonfly Café and Joseph Wrede of Joseph's Table have expressed an interest in participating, as have many local food producers. Nabhan has offered his support and guidance in forming a successful Slow Food convivium in Taos.

"Eating is an agricultural act," says author Wendell Berry. Eating is also a political act and as Michael Pollan says, "Vote with your fork!" meaning that what foods you choose to purchase have tremendous impact in a global economy that sometimes imports food from as far as 1,500 miles away. "Buy fresh, buy local" is a Slow Food axiom.

In forming a Slow Food convivium in Taos we hope to encourage people to explore local foods from the Farmer's Market or to join a CSA, a Community-Supported Agriculture group that shares in the farmer's risk and bumper crops. Perhaps people could even grow some of their own food, if even just some herbs and a tomato plant. And perhaps the best way to participate in the ideology of Slow Food is to eat well and slowly with friends while enjoying "honesty and authenticity at the table."

This "vision of life that is at once ethical and hedonistic" is a form of activism I have unknowingly long sought and I raise my glass (of locally produced wine, of course) in a toast to you, Carlo Petrini; this is politics I can really (no pun intended) at last sink my teeth into.

Please join us in forming a Taos Slow Food convivium. Call Sustain Taos at (505) 751-0555 or go on the Web site at www.sustaintaos.org or fill out an application at www.slowfoodusa.org.

Brigid Meier is President of Sustain Taos, belongs to a CSA, shops at the Farmer's Market and grows her own strawberries, raspberries, herbs and tomatoes.