

"The defense of traditional knowledge is a practice that supplies us with tools that are indispensable for our lives. Abandoning traditional knowledge impoverishes us, makes us weaker."

- Carlo Petrini

After a week of reflection, one theme of Terra Madre 2010 that lingers with me is the call for "*Mille Orte in Africa*", or, "A Thousand Gardens in Africa". The gardens will be created in schools and on community land in both urban and rural settings by working with the local Slow Food network and partner organizations, with projects beginning in countries where Slow Food is already very active - including Kenya, Uganda, Ivory Coast, Mali, Morocco, Ethiopia, Senegal and Tanzania.

This new project reflects the increasingly political thrust of Slow Food's work as the movement grows internationally. This direction is not, however, mutually exclusive of the taste education and refined gastronomy that historically defined Slow Food. What we see, conversely, is that indeed the solutions to global hunger and sustainable development depend upon the revitalization of place-based foodstuffs, upon the reintroduction of environmentally appropriate crops, and upon the preservation of traditional diets and land-based knowledge.

Serena Milano, Secretary General of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity, explains this connection. "Some time back we asked ourselves if our discourse on the quality of food and on products with strong links to the territory made sense in a continent ravaged by famine. But as through meeting and working with African farmers, speaking with them and listening to their concerns, we realized that small-scale family agriculture, based on the principles of sustainability, diversification and the promotion of local products and their consumption is maybe the only solution to continued famine, land degradation, land grabbing and the loss of community rights."

Right here on the Williams College campus, the social and environmental benefits of school gardens are apparent. But building a garden is not enough. Gardens need to be tended. We must, therefore, also build food cultures, especially in the places where food system sovereignty has been exported. Part of food system sustainability is the promotion of food culture by community-based leaders. Endogenous commitment to the principles of "Slow Food" is what carries the movement in each community it arises. For long term localized, sustainable growth, it must be those same communities that carry these principles, once catalyzed, forward. Towards this, school gardens are the correct place to begin such commitment; it is the youth that connects our past to our future. Gastronomic and agricultural knowledge must be documented and taught as part of a global worldview, passed on to the next generations. We must encourage an engagement with food heritage that serves not only the contemporary needs of our communities but also the needs of generations to come. The work ahead for the youth of Africa, or any continent, is to value the wisdom of their ancestors and to deepen their relationship with the land, their true inheritance. In doing so, they dedicate themselves to a type of nourishment that extends far beyond our mouths.

REINDEER: NOT JUST FOR SANTA

"I just ate a lot of reindeer" is not a sentence I say everyday. But on Day 2 of Terra Madre, the sentence came out of my mouth. After the reindeer went in.

Guided tastings are a highlight of Terra Madre, and I attended one featuring the foods of the Sami people and the Sapmi, the land of the Sami, which stretches across the northern caps of four countries - Finland, Russia, Sweden, and Norway, where the majority of the approximate 80,000 Sami live. Reindeer herding is a significant part of Sami culture. The nomadic Sami have historically formed their rhythm of life according to the reindeer migration; a mobile rhythm that is reflected in lightweight dwellings and tools. The Sami year has thirteen months and eight seasons, based on weather conditions and the reindeer's natural wandering between grazing grounds. The Sami language contains words that are only relevant for the ones that follow the path of the reindeer. There is a deep respect for the animal and during slaughter no part of the animal is wasted, which was reflected in the foods offered at the tasting: a smoked, dried *souvas* (jerky), blood pancakes and hoof broth. The meat was strong tasting, but not gamey and quite enjoyable. The smokiness of the jerky was subtle yet complex, a flavor balance achieved through the traditional conservation method of dry salting and cold smoking. Its good taste also comes from the fact that the reindeers breed on natural pastures. We ate the *souvas* with cloudberry jam and chanterelles, two other delicacies of this foraging, forest-based culture. The hoof broth was rich with musky, umani undertones, and fortifying.

Unfortunately, as with the ways of so many indigenous cultures, the Sami traditional relationship with their sacred reindeer is shifting - towards industrial herding and standardized calendars. Due to the modern meat industry and current EU regulations, reindeer slaughter has changed and today much of the resources get wasted when overbooked slaughterhouses have to prioritize.



SICILIAN SAP: SALIVA OF THE STARS

Another more unusual taste I experienced at Terra Madre was "Manna", a sap that is collected from the drippings of ash trees. When exposed to the hot Sicilian summer sun, this Italian variety of maple syrup solidifies into white stalactites of spongy sugar. The texture is like eating dried out cotton candy, but hardly with the same chemical saccharine cloy. Rather, Manna is the mouth is ethereal and light, just as if it indeed was "perspiration from the sky", as the Slow Food Presidia producer explained. Records from the Middle Ages cite Italian merchants importing manna from Damascus and other cities in the East. By the 16th century, Manna was already being produced in the far south of Italy, and by the 18th century Sicily had become the leading producer of manna in the Mediterranean. Thousands of acres were devoted to the growing of ash trees, the harvesting of manna and the extraction of mannitol, a natural laxative.

Today in Castelbuono and Pollina there are only 250 or so acres of ash groves left and about 50 producers, and most of them quite elderly: only 10 are under the age of 80. This statistic points to the urgent need to preserve this piece of site-specific food heritage. Terra Madre 2010 echoed with the resounding challenge to assure that the younger generations are taught the food ways of their elders.

It takes years of experience to know exactly the right moment to sink the sickle-shaped *mannarolu* knife into the trunk of the tree. If you've timed it right, light blue syrup will start to trickle out and run down the trunk. If the tree is on an angle it solidifies in the heat and forms a stalactite to the ground.

