
REPORT ON SLOW FOOD NATION BY FIVE EMISSARIES FROM OJAI

(Slow Food Nation 2008 occurred in San Francisco, August 29–September 1.)

SLOW FOOD IN SCHOOLS BY JIM CHURCHILL

Slow Food USA has not been the first nor the largest supporter of those working to change the school food system to emphasize fresh fruits and generate less trash. But they've been an invaluable support to Food for Thought Ojai, supporting our work with school gardens and providing lovely Oxo utensils for the kitchens and for cooking projects using school garden food.

About 40 Slow Food project leaders convened from around the country during Slow Food Nation. We came from as far away as Hawaii, North Carolina, New York and New Jersey, as well as the usual clutch of West Coasters, to share projects and pick up tips from others working in the field.

My favorite ideas:

- **Cooks Like a Chef Cooking Camp:** Penn State Department of Nutritional Sciences offers five-day camps focusing on culinary skills, nutrition and outdoor activities for young people. Campers learn cooking skills, experience a variety of fruits and vegetables, and learn to increase physical activity in fun ways; counselors learn teaching and culinary skills. Seems like a fabulous idea.

- **“There’s no such thing as *away*”:** Gary Giberson, a lifetime food service guy, has started an environmentally responsible food service company to do school lunches. His analysis of waste is terrific: Anything he throws out is not only trash but also staff time and energy and money wasted, so he builds his program to minimize pre- and post-production waste. At Lawrenceville, a private school where he is food service director, he purchased two machines to turn food waste into soil amendment to minimize hauling and tipping fees. He works to engage not only with his staff but also students: It was a student who said, “Hey, when you throw something away, there’s no such thing as *away*.”

- **Portland Farm-to-School and School Garden Coalition:** In the Portland Unified School District, 46,000 students in 87 schools eat a daily school lunch based on fresh, locally grown produce. I couldn’t write fast enough to capture all the partners they have assembled over the past decade, but they include OSU Extension, Oregon Department of



Agriculture, several farms, Ecotrust, Learning Gardens Institute, and the Abernethy Gardens of Wonder. The program leverages the district’s Wellness Policy by integrating garden- and cafeteria-based activities into district core curriculum and academic benchmarks. The school food service director came on board, she said, when she “finally heard that the partners want me to represent my community’s other values” in addition to adequate nutrition. They get state grants to do school gardens as well as 15 cents per meal to purchase Oregon-grown products (but then they’re in a state where they get to have a state budget, unlike California.)

- **Big Ideas:** This curriculum book from the Center for Ecoliteracy offers “a foundation for teaching students about food and food production, and for using this knowledge to understand the ecology of the natural world and humans’ connections to it.” Based on Key Concepts from the AAAS Atlas of Science Literacy, the book offers examples of Essential Questions to engage students and stimulate their interest in food, culture, health and the environment, and Sample Activities to help students explore each Big Idea. It’s such a beautiful book it made me want to stop farming and learn to be a teacher, and that’s not a lie.

The conference was too brief and the programs too many for me to remember everything. Many of the people envied us for coming from three-crop-a-year land; I was humbled not only by what some projects are accomplishing, but especially by the White Earth Land Recovery Project in Callaway, Minnesota (about one-third of the way between Fargo and Hibbing). The White Earth project is devoted to recovering native ways, including native foods, and they had the community come in to husk 1,500 ears of corn to dry for use throughout the year. Now there’s dedication.

Jim Churchill grows organic tangerines and avocados in Ojai with his wife, Lisa Brenneis. He is currently president of Food for Thought Ojai, a group working on food issues in the Ojai public schools. More information on Jim and Lisa’s farm: tangerineman.com and more information on Food for Thought: foodforthought.org.

TASTING THE AFTERNOON AWAY

BY LORI HAMOR

The Slow Food Nation Taste Pavilions at Fort Mason on Sunday afternoon were my final stop on a great San Francisco weekend. For me it was truly one of those “Wish you were here!” moments. The 15 pavilions were designed pro bono by area architects, who used as much reclaimed and recycled goods in their creation as possible. Thousands of Mason jar lids were suspended to create the “roof” of the pickle and chutney pavilion, milk crates were lashed together to form the walls of the cheese pavilion, wooden shipping pallets formed the maze of walls that led us to the chocolate samples. The stunning visual aesthetic truly added to the experience as a whole. To find some of these images online visit slowfoodnation.org and click on the photo link. Words do not do this undertaking justice.

Upon entry, each of the 2,000 participants was presented with a “Slow Dough” ticket worth 20 punches, and a biodegradable fork. Samples varied in value and size, for example, the plate with ham, prosciutto and spicy salami tastes at the Charcuterie pavilion was worth two punch marks while a petite honey cupcake with rose-infused icing topped with a pistachio was worth one punch mark at the Honey and Preserves pavilion. The outside pavilions for Beer, Native foods and Bread (incredible bread ovens) had long lines while inside the Coffee, Cheese and Chocolate lines were lengthy but fast moving thanks to friendly apron-clad Slow Food Nation volunteers who assisted with traffic control. Beautiful graphics and staging areas within each pavilion provided a window into the process of food production in action.

Artisans were on hand to answer questions and explain their part in the “slow” creation of the fabulous fare. Plenty of eating areas and strategically placed water stations were on hand and more volunteer guidance at the zero-waste stations.

As I needed to drive home to Ojai directly from Fort Mason I was unable to visit the lively



Wine, Spirits and Beer pavilions. I noted that tasters were given real glass stemware to use during their “explorations.” We heard that for two punches on the Slow Dough ticket at the Spirits pavilion you received “like, 10 shots!” exclaimed one happy taster. The Beer pavilion was an even better bargain as one punch got you a small Pilsner glass to refill again and again.

Within the exhibit hall the “Green Kitchen” was constructed for well-known chefs to create specialties. Regrettably I didn’t take notes about each artisan as we were enjoying their craft, but there was a feeling of urgency created by knowing that the lines would close at 3 pm and there were more still tastes to be had. For me, the bison stew, cheese, butter and ice cream all stood out as stellar nibbles.

The cost of entry was \$65, not cheap by any stretch, but it certainly seemed to cover *all* you could and eat and drink. No one in our party of six ran out of “Slow Dough” (although if you did, you could purchase more). The Taste Pavilions were organized into two sessions each on Saturday and Sunday (with a press preview Friday night) and the funds were used to support the costs of the free activities at the Civic Center.



After we had our fill and sat outside in the late afternoon sunshine listening to the “Slow Food Rocks” concert waft in from the Great Meadow I ran into an old acquaintance. “They could have really packed us in here, but they chose to limit it,” he observed. “I appreciate that.” I couldn’t agree more. It was a bustling, sensory experience but not at all uncomfortable. A marvelous event—all in the name of Slow Food.

As program coordinator for Food for Thought Ojai, Lori Hamor helps the Ojai-based farm-to-school organization grow and expand.



Becky Courchesne of Frog Hollow Farm

BOOK REVIEW BY JIM CHURCHILL

Come to the Table: The Slow Food Way of Living
Foreword by Alice Waters, edited by Katrina Heron

This book of farmer profiles, food tips and recipes, made its debut at Slow Food Nation. Published by Rodale Press, it was put together in enormous haste—this we know because we were interviewed in June, and the book emerged complete just three months later. The writers, editors, and photographers did a good job.

Thirteen California farms or operations (I say “operations” because they include the Ojai Pixie Growers as a single unit) are profiled including Oxnard’s Tamai Farms, some comparatively well-known farms such as Capay Valley’s Full Belly Farm, the Buxman Family’s Sweet Home Ranch near Dinuba, Tierra Miguel Farm near San Diego, and the Masumoto Family Farm near Fresno; as well as farms that I hadn’t heard of—Vang and Moua Family Farm in Fresno, J & P Organics in Salinas, and others.

The best word to describe the profiles is *sweet*: people farming on the scale of those profiled in this book generally have interesting stories, and indeed the backstories of how some farms came into being are inspiring. The photographs are wonderfully evocative. My favorite story is about Windborne Farm in Siskiyou County, where Jennifer Greene horse-farms 30 acres of winter grains near Mt. Shasta. Surrounded by thousands of acres of irrigated alfalfa, she rotates the grain fields with spring legumes and a fallow season. She isn’t certified organic or biodynamic, because she doesn’t believe in or trust external certifying agencies—she relies on her customers knowing the farmer. Greene survives economically through a community-supported agriculture (CSA) subscription service of bakers who purchase grain shares, and by direct marketing her grains, bread and produce. Her story is a delight to read.

Part of the thought behind the book was that farmers growing food and surviving on such a small scale would have a closer relationship to their produce as food than, say, a farmer monocropping a huge soy or swine operation. So each farmer interview involved a meal, and each meal generated recipes—there are 41 recipes from the profiled farmers in the back of the book. The two that I’m most eager to try are the two Hmong recipes, one for sweet pumpkin leaf soup and the other for chicken and chile leaves. A final note: Anyone buying the book will get to enjoy a wonderful portrait of young Oliver Ayala sitting in a Friends Ranches field box, clutching a tangerine and staring wide-eyed into the camera.

YUMMY, TASTY, GREAT! BY ABILENE L. RUNYAN

At Slow Food Nation in San Francisco I tasted many different kinds of food, including seafood, Vietnamese, Indian, Native American and our family favorite, Zachary’s Pizza. I also tried a lot of ice cream and I pretty much liked them all. My very favorites scoops were pumpkin and strawberry balsamic. I’d never heard of that kind of ice cream before!

We stayed with Laurie, our close friend. She took care of my sister and me while my mom was at a conference. We went to the Victory Garden and Marketplace on Saturday morning. The Victory Garden was in front of City Hall—which kind of looks like the White House—and there were many different kinds of plants such as squash, tomatoes, lettuce, broccoli, cucumbers, zucchinis and beans. At the Marketplace there was all the food you could ever imagine. We sampled juicy melon, salty cheese, crispy bread and sweet raspberry jam.



The Taste Pavilions were wonderful. There were many different kinds of chocolate, honey, cheese and jams—all very yummy. Standing in line at the chocolate booth we learned how chocolate is made from cacao beans. We also tried the world’s best butter!

All of the food was great but my favorites would have to be the salmon on a baguette and chicken biryani. Pretty much my trip was one of the best trips in my whole entire life. What I’m trying to say is it was yummy, tasty and great!

Abilene Runyan, 7, likes playing piano and dancing. Her favorite animals are penguins and her dog, Jasper. She wants to help stop global warming by riding her bike to school.

VICTORY GARDEN BY DAVID WHITE



For me, the highlight of Slow Food Nation was the Victory Garden, an ornamental edible garden installed in front of City Hall, at the heart of San Francisco's Civic Center.

It was a treat to see crowds of folks circulating around the many beds, examining the burgeoning food crops. The designer, John Bela, did a great job in creating a garden bed layout that forces people to meander through the garden. All the beds were circles of varying diameters. Some were "keyhole" beds, a Permaculture design that maximizes bed space while minimizing path. Often these beds had concentric circles of plantings, all irrigated, and occasionally fertigated (a process of adding liquid fertilizer to the irrigation system) with compost tea by drip hose.

The site used to be lawn. This had been relocated and replaced with beds edged with burlap sacks stuffed with rice straw, an agricultural waste product that is often burned. Some beds had two layers of sacks to make the bed high enough for people in wheelchairs. A wide variety of vegetables, herbs, native and insectary plants, which provide food and habitat to beneficial insects, were grown from seed at City Slickers Farms and Ploughshares Nursery. These starts were planted out in the beginning of July by Alice Waters, with the help of over 200 volunteers and nearly a dozen Bay Area gardening organizations, to create the first edible garden in front of San Francisco's City Hall since 1943. Companion plantings were used throughout; the "three sisters" bed of corn, beans and squash was as successful as I have seen with this Native American planting strategy. Basil sheltered in the understory of tomatoes; marigolds kept the broccoli pest free.

In this urban food desert, at first only the occasional bee was seen. Now there are six species of bees visiting as well as butterflies and birds, all in the short time that this project has been in place. The day before I visited, 200 pounds of produce had been harvested and transported to a kitchen that feeds the city's homeless.

The garden was planned for removal in September, but Mayor Gavin Newsom's office has received so much positive feedback on this project that discussions are under way to keep it, perhaps enhancing it with plantings of perennial fruit trees.

The Slow Food Nation Victory Garden is demonstrating the potential of truly local agriculture, bringing together and promoting Bay Area gardening organizations and producing high-quality food for those in need, creating a healthier, more sustainable food system for all.

The Victory Garden is open to the public every day from 9 am to 4 pm through September. Learn more about it at sfvictorygarden.org.

David White is the garden coordinator for Food for Thought Ojai; he visits five elementary schools in the Ojai Unified School District in order to help with their garden programs. In 2002, he formed the nonprofit Center for Regenerative Agriculture, which funds school-to-farm visits and tree planting with school kid. (ojaicra.org). He is also the environmental coordinator and life skills teacher at Ojai Valley School's lower campus.

HAIKU By Odessa Runyan

Slow food favorites
Honey lavender ice cream
Pluot popsicle

Odessa Runyan is 10 and is in the fifth grade at Meiners Oaks Elementary School.

