

How Slow Can You Go?

Written by Laura Von Harten

Slow Food is kind of like the opposite of fast food. With an emphasis on “kind of.”



Fast food is a term used to describe certain types of restaurants. Slow Food, on the other hand, is a social movement that has morphed into an influential, membership-based international organization that advocates for fair, sustainable food systems.

For Slow Food folks, it's not just about changing our eating venues – or advocating for changes on our preferred venues' menus. It's about being conscientious food consumers in our day-to-day purchasing decisions. And just as important, it's about shoring up our local food systems by providing livelihoods for food producers and their families.

It's easy to misunderstand the Slow Food movement at first. That's because it's easier to say what it not than to say what it is. So here are a few more items from the It's Not category.

It's not about expensive restaurants. It's not about sophisticated food preparation techniques. It's not about foreign cuisine. It's not about eating snails, either. Although that part is a little confusing.

You see, the Slow Food logo features a snail, which leads some people to think that the movement has to do with fancy French food. Actually, that snail represents the concept of slowing down. As an animal symbol, it's a reminder that there is an alternative to the frenetic pace of our lives.

So what is the mission of Slow Food, and what do people in the Slow Food movement actually do?

These things vary somewhat from place to place.

Here's the US group's mission: “Slow Food USA seeks to create dramatic and lasting change in the food system. We reconnect Americans with the people, traditions, plants, animals, fertile

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soils and waters that produce our food. We seek to inspire a transformation in food policy, production practices and market forces so that they ensure equity, sustainability and pleasure in the food we eat.”

Within that mission statement, pay special attention to the mention of these terms: USA, Americans, market forces, pleasure.

It’s important to highlight those concepts because, given the fact that Slow Food International churns out manifestos like Krispy Kreme fries donuts, they tend to come across as being prone to anarchy or something. It truly is a problem because not only do they write manifestos, they actually CALL THEM MANIFESTOS, which is the kiss of death for publications that aspire to influence U.S. popular culture.

On a positive note, there is quite a selection of manifestos from which to choose. In addition to the original Slow Food Manifesto, they offer the Manifesto on the Future of Food, the Manifesto on the Future of Seeds, the Slow Food Manifesto for Quality, the Manifesto on Climate Change and the Future of Food Security, and last and certainly the strangest-sounding, the Manifesto in Defense of Raw-Milk Cheese.

As for what they actually do, that varies from chapter to chapter. The goal is to balance the boring stuff with the fun stuff.

Most chapters have projects they work on, like helping develop better school lunches. Here in the Lowcountry we could help with fundraising for a machine that will detect metal particles in local produce before it is distributed to schools. Cost: about \$20,000. Benefit: Kids and their teachers get to eat some really fine collards, and we support local farmers.

There are also taste education events that help people learn how to appreciate the qualities of different foods. Something we could do here in the Lowcountry is have a tasting that reveals the contrast between imported, pond-raised shrimp and the local wild-caught shrimp.

And most of all there is the simple joy of gathering together and eating good food with a group

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of people.

Often all of these facets of Slow Food are combined. For example, the Slow Food Columbia chapter journeyed to a farm in Brunson recently for a Labor Day picnic. Our hosts were Kurt and Cassie Larsen at Little Creek Plantation.

There was the serious stuff, of course: talk about food policy; plant and animal breed preservation; fostering and training of draft animals for eventual relocation to farms in war-ravaged countries. Not your typical Labor Day picnic conversations.

But it was also fun. Music, hayrides, farm tours and an awesome potluck. There were about twenty kids there, plus assorted parents, and the kids were having such a good time they didn't even know they were getting educated. Same for the grownups.

One of these days I'd like to go to Little Creek Plantation again – this time with a big group from Slow Food Lowcountry.

There is not such an entity yet, but I'm working with several others – Andrea Malloy, Bill Pendergraft, Kim Gundler, Amber Von Harten and Paul Nurnberg – to form a local chapter. We'd like to invite you to join us. If you're interested, look for the group on Facebook or write SlowFoodLowcountry@gmail.com

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