

TRADITIONS

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF SLOW FOOD SONOMA COUNTY CONVIVIAM

THE LOCAL FOODSHED: Support Network of Slow Food Producers

Article prepared by Lisa Hunter based on interviews conducted by Stephanie Chiacos, Ann Hines, and Lisa Hunter

THERE IS A QUIET AND EFFECTIVE network operating in our convivium that few of us see or know about. Over time our producers have developed a creative and informal system of sharing that encompasses products, animals, manure, and information. These exchanges are based on the simple notion that “you have something I need and I have something you want.”

We interviewed some of the producers to learn about how they network with their peers. The most basic level of exchanges occur at the Farmers Market, where Pugs Leap cheese is traded for Bernier greens or Preston bread, Gayle’s peaches for Black Sheep meat, Elissa’s mushrooms for Preston’s pickles and olives. Although the center of activity is the Market, sharing is not always seasonally or geographically limited.

The logical extension of this informal bartering is a larger system of finding uses for a product that is overabundant to one but needed by another. “When I had too much green garlic once and no market for it, I gave it to Wayne [James] for Tierra

Vegetables’ CSA program,” reported grower Yael Bernier. “And both Wayne and my husband, Paul, share farm equipment so together they have what they need.” Yael also receives manure for composting from Pugs Leap Farm, in exchange for her chickens’ plentiful eggs.



Eric Smith and Pascal Destandau of Pugs Leap Farm give the whey from their cheese-making to Lou Preston for an organic mildew suppressant in his vineyard. Lou also has some Pugs Leap goats to feed his personal raw-milk passion. Pugs Leap goats also go to Brock Fulmer and Deanna Spann’s Black Sheep Farm to supply milk for the newborn animals.



One well-socialized buck went to Black Sheep for breeding. When Eric told Brock that this buck “knows what a wine glass is,” Brock replied “Yes, I already know.” In exchange for their goats, Eric and Pascal receive meat from Brock and Deanna. Artisan preserve maker Elissa Rubin-Mahon acquires many of the special fruits she uses from convivium members. For example, she uses damson plums and tomatoes from Judy Christensen and Gene Broderick, figs from Bill Hawn, and strawberries from Lou Preston. And she teaches her techniques at Relish Culinary School run by Donna del Rey.

Information-sharing and referrals have also been highly useful for these producers. When Paul and Yael Bernier’s son, Zureal, was starting his farming practice he asked Ed Miller for advice. Yael said, “Ed handed over his calendars from his years of farming with all the notes he’d made; this was invaluable information and inspiration for a young farmer just starting out. For all the hard work and dedication it

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takes to make a profitable farm, the support and encouragement of like-minded people in similar situations is invaluable.”

Eric and Pascal found the intern who is now working at their farm through an on-line program discovered by Yael. (Willing Workers on Organic Farms pairs people looking for practical experience on organic farms with farmers who need help.)

Lou publicizes Cindy Daniel’s contemporary food public affairs programs through the Dry Creek Valley Association’s blog, and he teamed up with Yael to teach a sauerkraut making class for convivium members.

These are only some of the many ways in which Slow Food connections have created strong relationships of mutual support. “I am always so surprised by how generous people around me are,” says Eric Smith. “And I love sitting down to a meal knowing exactly where everything came from.”

IN MARCH, six very lucky friends enjoyed a dinner won at the *Slow Food Ark Dinner Auction*.

Far more than a meal, it was an elegant evening hosted by Bill Hawn, Wine Country Chefs, and the Slow Food Sonoma County Events Committee.

At Bill’s home outside of Cloverdale, we were greeted with glasses of Wattle Creek Methode Champenoise and Wattle Creek Sauvignon Blanc, which we enjoyed in the garden overlooking vineyards of Wattle Creek Winery. The wine was accompanied by flat bread—baked in Bill’s outdoor wood oven—with Cypress Grove truffle tremor, and oysters two ways—on the shell and broiled with leek cream.

The large dining room windows brought in the sunset light as we began our leisurely and scrumptious dinner created by Todd Muir and John Littlewood of Wine Country Chefs, assisted in the kitchen by Elissa Rubin-Mahon, and served by Lisa Hunter and Marisha Zeffner. Each course was accompanied by splendid wines Bill selected from his cellar. Todd talked with us about the food before each course.

HERE IS THE DINNER MENU:

GULF PRAWNS

Marinated with saffron and grilled with Hutterite beans, miners lettuce and lardons
2004 Merry Edwards Pinot Noir, Sonoma Coast

A VERY SPECIAL EVENING

Submitted by Barbara Epstein with input from Sue Campbell, Lynda Guthrie, Barbara Lannin, Lynne Murphy, and John McKinney



VILLA D’ASTI

The beautiful home of Bill Hawn

COLORADO BISON

Grilled and served with coastal huckleberry reduction, roasted green-striped squash, and wild rice spoon bread

1989 Chateau Prieure-Lichine, Margaux

*1996 Chateau St. Jean Cinq Cepages,
Cabernet Sauvignon*

PERSIMMON PUDDING

With brûléed Meyer lemon crème patisseries
2006 Wattle Creek Muscat Canelli

ESPRESSO SERVICE

When we left, stars filled the sky as we drove carefully down the lane away from the lighted house. We thank everyone whose most generous contributions made this a memorable evening, one we continue to talk about.



◀ Last autumn's Ark Dinner preparations
The new Slow Food Sonoma County Website landing page ▼

LOOKING BACK...

Looking back only as far as April, approximately 45 people attended our Annual Meeting at Tayman Park Golf Course. Bill Hawn opened the meeting with an introduction of five members of the brand-new Slow Food convivium at Sonoma State University—the first student convivium in Northern California (and perhaps in the entire state).

Highlights of the meeting included:

- Lisa Hunter was re-elected to another 2-year term on the Core Committee. There is one vacancy on the Committee that will be filled within the next 3 months.
- The Core Committee thanked Brock Fulmer, co-owner of Black Sheep Farm, for his service and valuable insights on the Core Committee for the last two years. He has decided not to continue on the Committee as his business is consuming all of his time.
- Lynda Chenoweth and Barbara Bowman were also recognized for creating our newsletter, Traditions, and producing it quarterly since its inception. Each was given a personalized market bag made by Stephanie Chiacos and embroidered by Eric Smith in thanks for their creativity and class.



- Participants viewed a draft of the new Slow Food Sonoma County website; thanks were extended to Medlock-Ames Winery for assisting with the initial concept of the



website and for arranging for Inertia Beverage to design the website. The site will be launched in July.

- The convivium is sponsoring three current projects, which will be updated in future newsletters. They are the Sonoma County Grow-Out, a school garden project at Fitch Mountain School in Healdsburg, and the Pachay-Sonoma Food Culture Exchange.
- Munchies at the meeting included popcorn made fresh in a large popper, cheese from The Cheese Store and Pugs Leap Farm, bread from Carol Brownson, and wine donated by convivium member Susan Daniel.

LOOKING FORWARD...

Our calendar is a flexible and shifting document, so here is a heads-up about convivium events coming in July.

To register for events, please e-mail Lisa Hunter: lkhunter@aol.com

July 9, Healdsburg:

PIE CRUST FOR THE PIE CRUST PHOBIC

July 23, Healdsburg, GUMBO DINNER

July ??, Healdsburg,

SLOW FOOD NIGHT AT THE MOVIES

In addition, **SAVE THE DATE** for our newly-formatted Ark Dinner: **October 11** at Medlock-Ames Winery, Healdsburg. This year the dinner will be a POTLUCK. Stay tuned for details, products, and menus.

Earth Day 2008

by Eric Smith

AMINI-EARTH DAY EVENT was scheduled to take place at Fitch Mountain School in Healdsburg, my alma mater, and I was invited to represent local farmers who are raising animals. I parked the red Toyota pickup in front of the administration building, then opened the camper shell and tailgate. Out jumped Winaretta, chosen for this occasion because of her calm temperament and sleek, white Sherman-tank build. A quick tug of the leash sent her in the right direction.

A group of Mexican-American preschoolers walked by. I heard a chorus of “chiva!,” the Mexican slang for goat. As we crossed the schoolyard, we gained both speed and attention. When we arrived at our spot in the little fair, Winnie turned to survey the yard, then squatted and peed on my shoe.

We had a lovely time, with the children petting Winnie and asking good questions.

“How old is she?”

“Three.”

“Is she big for her age?”

“Yes, very.”

“What does she eat?”

“Whatever she can find in the pasture, plus organic hay, and a little organic grain when we’re milking her.”

“Is she friends with the other goats?”

“She can be a little pushy, but yes.”

Winnie and I received a packet of wonderful thank-you notes. However, talking to young people on a day set aside for contemplating the state of the planet was difficult for me. What will the world be like when they are my age? And am I partially to blame? I have tried over the years to be environmentally careful. We bought the Prius the first year it was out, we have solar for home and dairy, gave up travel and bottled water. Most of our food is grown locally, and I like to think that my thin waist is more proper allocation of resources than planning for the swimsuit season. But it is never enough. I read an article that said that the most important

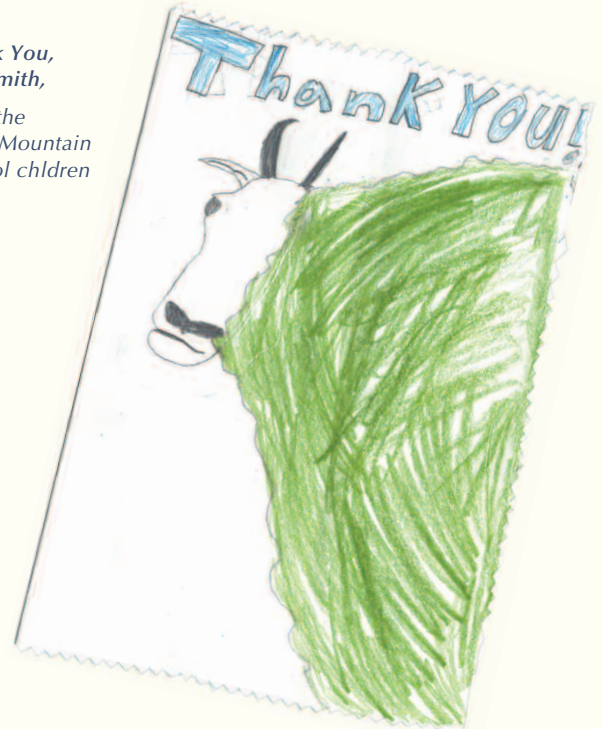
*Eric Smith
with some of
the “girls” from
his goat herd*



thing you can do for the environment is to become politically active.

The Thursday after the Fitch Mountain School fair, for a belated Earth Day celebration at Agilent, I helped set up a Slow Food Ark of Taste display of endangered foods, enlivening the jars dried beans and canned goods with a few rare Delaware pullets. The lively discussion with visitors covered rare foods, various cultures, past food preparation practices and the practicality of growing your own food. The other booths had information on electric cars, land preservation, alternative fuels, recycling and composting, among many other things. I certainly returned home with a little more hope for our children’s future.

*Thank You,
Mr. Smith,
from the
Fitch Mountain
School children*



LEARNING ABOUT KITCHEN GARDENS

by JeNé Thomas

MARCH 26TH was a beautiful spring morning in Dry Creek Valley. The sun was shining, the weather was brisk and 12 of us attending Nathan Boone's mini-event on Kitchen Gardens looked like adventurous bear cubs, emerging from our winter den. As each of us told a tale of our experience with gardens—a theme emerged: we all love to eat what we grow, and wanted to learn how we could eat from our gardens all year long. Nathan answered all of our questions and demonstrated his wisdom by planting seeds and seedlings in Lisa Hunter's garden.

Here are some things I learned from this event:

- *Plant your garden based on what you like to eat.* Review your shopping lists and farmers market shopping habits to determine the quantity and variety of what you should plant.
- *You don't need a landscape design to plant a garden.* Simple is best—straight rows make planting, watering and harvesting easy. Remember what your plants will grow into, and plant taller plants at the back of your space, those needing shade next to a wall or under a tree.
- *Biodynamics works for a home garden too.* Plant those greens or root vegetables close together. You want to create a little plant community so that the plants can get energy and nutrients from each other. Closeness creates an efficient use of space, nutrients and water, as well as increased productivity.

- *Plant seeds at the new moon and transplant starts at the full moon.*
I've always heard of planting on the full moon, but never knew exactly why.

From the farmer's mouth, here is the secret science. Seeds need to be touched



and caressed by dirt. This connection to the soil allows them to sprout. If you put seeds in the ground at the new moon, the pressure from the moon pushes the dirt all around the seed in a secure caress, which encourages it to sprout. For transplanting, it's a different story. Those seeds have already sprouted and the plant is young and growing. What better help than the pull of the moon? The draw of the full moon literally helps the plant grow taller and stronger.

- *You can have a productive garden year round with only two plantings a year.* This works for most plant varieties. Remember to harvest, harvest, and harvest—especially lettuce mixes and greens. If you harvest the leaves as they come up, the plant continues to produce. Keep plants trimmed and in their respective areas, especially herbs. When you keep the plants small, they stay tender and do not bolt as quickly. Once a plant bolts (develops flowers which produce seeds for reproduction), it will become tough and taste bitter.
- *Beware of the night shades.* Tomatoes and potatoes are in the nightshade family and produce a mild poison that will build up in your soil. Advice from the farmer—move your tomato and potato plants around, even the volunteers that come up from last year's bumper crop!

- *Watering is one of the most variable and interactive elements to your garden.* How dry is the soil? How much sun do you get? How hot is it where you are? Decide how

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much and how often to water by what you see and feel on the plant and in the dirt. Nathan recommended using a simple header tube with soaker hose extending down each row of your garden. This system can be used for many different plant types and successive plantings and doesn't require a reconfiguration each time you plant, if you plant in rows.

- *Have fun! Play in the dirt.* Breathe the fresh air and consider the bounty of your garden, whether it be several large raised beds or a pot or two on a patio. Gardening is one of the finest simple pleasures in life that instantly connects us to our food and the cycles of life.



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Chris Means, Santa Rosa
Sonoma Wine Library, Santa Rosa
Dan & Cecilia O'Brien, Rohnert Park
Jennifer McMurry, Santa Rosa
Linda Allen & C. Sunlight, Kenwood
Dawn & Paul Dolcini, Petaluma
Jennifer Crane, Santa Rosa
Mark Friedman, Kenwood
Devin Kellogg & Natalie Horner,
Upper Lake
Lisa Renton, Santa Rosa
Darbie Tarantino, Petaluma
Floyd Thompson, Petaluma
Carolyn & Michael Ellis, Santa Rosa

▶
*Laughing it up when it's all over,
the hard working chefs with their desserts at last fall's Ark Dinner.*

— EDITOR'S NOTE —

Calling all Would-be
Wendell Berrys and M.F.K. Fishers

AS YOU HAVE undoubtedly noticed, the newsletter has a new format and a new look. (Many thanks to Patti Buttitta of Buttitta Design in Healdsburg for her stylish, donated work.) As the new editor of this newsletter, I have been thinking of what I wanted it to be. I think the most apt term would be "a portrait in food." By this I am not referring to a gold spray-painted portrait in beans and dried macaroni, but rather a description of how we, in this particular place and time, relate to food. How is it produced or obtained, how is it prepared, with whom is it shared? Observations can range from political to sentimental.

In this, I will not be exclusionist. Our study of the food of other times and places, and our observations thereof, say as much about us as they do about the subject of study.

Deciding on subject matter is the easy part. Writing takes work. And for that, I am relying on you. Let this newsletter be the kitchen table over which we can discuss anything. If you think you are not a writer, remember: this newsletter has even published the writings of a goatherd!

Please e-mail your submissions to me at ironrite35@yahoo.com. We may also call upon you to write about a specific event or issue.

Eric Smith, *Editor*

