



**SLOW FOOD
SONOMA
COUNTY
:: NORTH ::**

JUNE 2024 NEWSLETTER



Click on the links below to go directly to a topic.

- [The "Miracle" of Grain into Bread](#)
- [Sonoma County North Events](#)
- [Spotlight on Mike \[The Bejkr\] Zakowski](#)
- [Snail of Approval](#)
- [Recipe of the Month: Ribollita with Root Vegetables and Crusty Bread](#)
- [Membership](#)

The "Miracle" of Grain into Bread

The transformation of three basic ingredients into bread is indeed miraculous in its own right. These simple components, which individually may lack sufficient nutrition on their own, undergo a fascinating metamorphosis through the process of fermentation and baking, resulting in a staple food that has sustained civilizations for millennia.



Consider the Journey

Combine 3 simple ingredients:

- **Flour**, typically derived from grains such as wheat, rye, or barley - all rich sources of carbohydrates that provide energy. Other nutrients such as proteins, vitamins, and minerals are in varying amounts depending on the kind of grain, and how it is grown and processed. For instance, stone milling is a traditional method that preserves the germ and bran, which are the nutrient-rich parts of the grain.
- **Yeast** (or a sourdough starter), a microorganism added that plays a crucial role in bread-making. When activated by water and provided with sugars from the flour, yeast undergoes fermentation.
- **Water** is added to hydrate the flour, facilitating the formation of gluten, which gives bread its structure and texture. Water also activates the yeast, initiating the fermentation process.

Observe the Transformation

- **Fermentation** not only causes the dough to rise, thanks to the production of carbon dioxide gas, but it also imparts flavor and aroma to the bread. The longer the

fermentation, the more complex and nuanced the flavors become, thanks to the production of organic acids and other flavor compounds by the yeast.

- **Baking** the dough creates a series of complex transformations. Certain components in the flour, such as phytic acid, which can inhibit the absorption of minerals, are broken down during fermentation. This enhances the bioavailability of nutrients in the bread, making it more nutritious and easier to digest.

Savor the Final Product

Ultimately, bread emerges from the oven as a versatile and nourishing foodstuff, capable of sustaining life thanks to its combination of carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, minerals, and other bioactive compounds. From the humblest of ingredients, bread embodies the alchemy of culinary science, providing sustenance and satisfaction to countless people throughout history. Truly, it's a testament to the ingenuity of human civilization.

Visit Bakery Awardees

These Snail of Approval awardees offer amazing, hand-crafted breads, performing this 'miracle' each day. They are [\[The Bejkr\]](#), [Gouquette Bread](#), [Nightingale Bakery](#), [Quail and Condor Bakery](#), and [Sarmentine](#).

For more information about the importance of grains, see what Slow Food USA's Director of Programs, [Mara Welton, says.](#)

Sonoma County North Events

Mark your calendars, and look for an invitation with details about a month before each event.

June

15 Mendocino Grain Project Tour, Ukiah, 10 am. [Tickets available here.](#)

24 Slow Books: *How to Cook a Wolf*, by M.F.K. Fisher

July

27 Annual Summer Picnic at the Gradek Ranch, Healdsburg, 4 pm

August

5 Slow Books: *The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen*, by Sean Sherman

21 Hog Island Oyster Tour, Marshall, 10:30 am

September

7 100-Mile Dinner, Santa Rosa

Slow Books

Slow Books is an ongoing activity of our chapter. The group meets every 6 weeks to discuss a food-related book and enjoy a potluck dinner based on the book. We meet in people's homes which can usually only accommodate up to 8 people. For this reason, we are usually unable to invite others than our core group of participants.

But we're learning a lot from the books we've read, and thought you might want to enjoy the books as well. We will therefore let you know what we're reading each meeting through the newsletter and our [website](#).

MFK Fisher



HOW TO COOK
A WOLF

June Selection

How to Cook A Wolf, by M.F.K. Fisher

Written to inspire courage in those daunted by wartime shortages, *How to Cook a Wolf* continues to rally cooks during times of plenty, reminding them that providing sustenance requires more than putting food on the table.

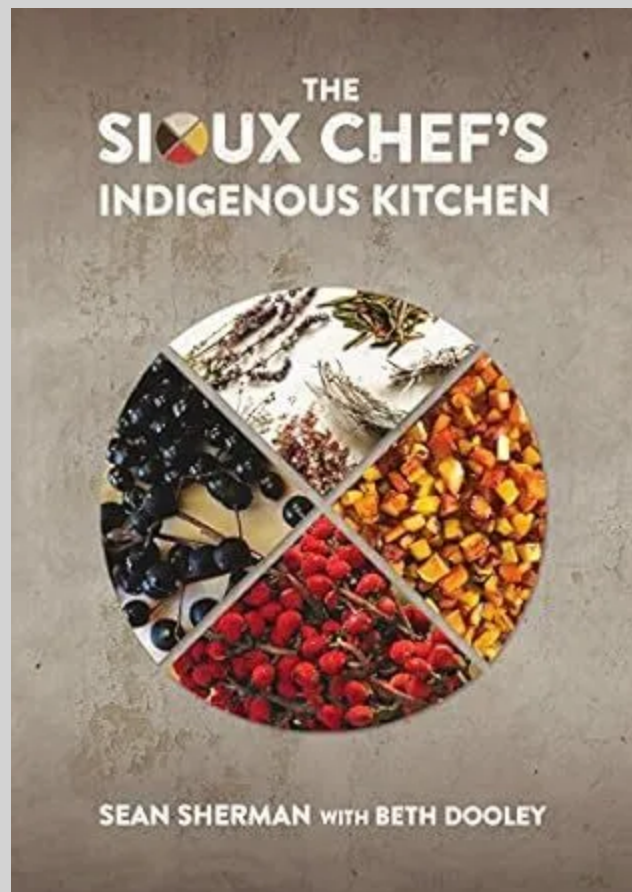
[Read more here.](#)

August Selection

The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen, by Sean Sherman

Here is real food—our indigenous American fruits and vegetables, the wild and foraged ingredients, game and fish. Locally sourced, seasonal, “clean” ingredients and nose-to-tail cooking are nothing new to Sean Sherman, the Oglala Lakota chef and founder of The Sioux Chef. In his breakout book, *The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen*, Sherman shares his approach to creating boldly seasoned foods that are vibrant, healthful, at once elegant and easy.

[Read more here.](#)



Spotlight on Mike [The Bejkr] Zakowski

Each newsletter highlights one of our chapter members who is a food producer, and/or a Snail of Approval business. This month we feature the Snail bakery [The Bejkr].



Mike Zakowski of Sonoma's popular [\[The Bejkr\]](#) is a baker; but more than that, he's a true artist. "Baking today... if we were painters, it's like we have more colors to work with than before," he shares, reflecting on how, when he started baking more than 30 years ago, bakers often only had access to white wheat flour and rye. "Now, we have everything, from rye to spelt, to emmer to khorasan. And so I use everything. Einkorn is my favorite because it's the oldest cultivated grain." As will become clear, this man knows his grain, from seed to starter.

Speaking of, his starters turn 16 years old this year. When I asked if he has anyone to babysit them when he heads out on his frequent travels to visit bakeries and teach baking all over the globe, he blithely shares that, no, his starters travel with him wherever he goes, always under his diligent care.

"My starters are a specific expression of my journey. That's what makes each baker different: how you feed it, when you feed it, what you feed it. It's what makes my breads *my* breads." If Mike were to give, for example, his [Einkorn Brot "formula"](#) to ten professional bakers, he theorizes, he'd get ten different breads as a result, based on the bakers' skills, manipulations, and ingredients. "That's what makes bread *alive*."

Despite a multiplicity of claims to the contrary, Mike feels that good bread can and should be nutritious. His three keys to choosing bread that's actually good for you begin with the starter. He points out that grain is hard to digest for any human body, yet every culture throughout history used whole grains as a protein staple. So, take Mike's advice and (1) "choose naturally-fermented sourdoughs, which will provide pre-digestion," (2) "choose organic to support healthy gut microflora," and

(3) “look for freshly-milled grain because it retains nutritional value before oxidation and to support local sourcing.”

Strengths and Challenges within Our Local Grainshed

Mike reports that Northern CA is a tough environment in which to grow grains “because of their high water needs and the sky-high cost of land.” Still, it’s possible to successfully grow, harvest, mill, and bake with grains sourced completely from within our Sonoma County foodshed. “Dry-farmed is best, so we just have to grow grains that make sense and taste good. You over-winter it, you get it in the ground at the right time, and you don’t need much water,” Mike shares. He is currently growing [seashore black rye](#), a heritage variety of particular interest to Slow Food USA, ten minutes from his shop in Sonoma. He’ll harvest and mill it later this year.

He mills most of his flours himself using either his [Jansen Grist Mill](#), which was produced by a local family business just outside of Chico, or his [Mockmill](#), made by grain-zealous colleagues of his in Germany. When we spoke for this interview on a Wednesday, his mill was churning out the flour he would go on to use for that Friday’s Sonoma farmers’ market bakes. It’s hard to imagine a fresher loaf. Mike also bakes with other locally-sourced flours from the [Mendocino Grain Project](#), and from [Central Milling](#) and [Keith Giusto Bakery Supply](#).

[Note that there will be a tour of the Mendocino Grain Project in Ukiah on June 15; see Sonoma County North Events above.]

Mike's natural bent toward sustainable use of materials, combined with his being situated within a rich network of beer and wine producers in the Sonoma County grainshed, has resulted in some truly awesome upcycling projects. He makes "super flours" from breweries' spent grain, sprouts grape seeds (a byproduct of local winemakers) for his Super Sprout loaves, and he even incorporates disused wine barrel staves to help direct his oven's flame during flatbread firings. To pay it forward, one of his own byproducts, the charcoal left in his wood-fired oven, is recycled as biochar that he donates to his produce guy's fields. Barter, reuse, savor: these are some sustainability actions that Slow Food members can surely get behind.

Keep This Bejkr Thriving

Support Mike's visionary craft by visiting him at two weekly farmers' markets in Sonoma: the [Tuesday Night Market](#), 5:00pm-8:00pm, May-Sept. or the [Sonoma Valley Certified Farmers Market](#) on Fridays from 9:00am-12:30pm, year-round. Mike describes his stall as "live theater," "that engaging thing where it's fire and you're seeing it all right in front of you as I put it in the oven to bake."

If that's not an option for you, place an online order with [\[The Bejkr\]](#). You can even book Mike and his mobile wood-fired oven for a [private event!](#)

Mike urges us to support localism and shop at our farmers markets. He says the success of

local food producers like him “depends on market shoppers and word of mouth—if you have something good and customers get the word out, people will come.” Spread the word about amazing local vendors like Mike by bringing a friend to the market or buying a loaf as a gift. We all have the power to help local producers succeed so our communities can keep enjoying their beautiful creations.

Snail of Approval

Congratulations to Our Newest Snails!

[Goodness Gracious Private Chef and Catering](#), located in Glen Ellen, offers a unique culinary experience that extends beyond the kitchen and into the heart of the Wine Country. They collaborate with clients to craft menus that showcase the richness of local produce while supporting farmers, bakers, and artisans. Their dinners are not only delicious, but also weave stories about the origins of the food and the importance of sustainable sourcing. From homemade delicacies to handpicked goods from local artisans, every detail reflects a commitment to excellence and community. Plus, they practice "leaf to stem" and "nose to tail" consumption to avoid waste and skillfully preserve the bounty of summer to savor during the winter months.





[Showa Farm](#) in Cloverdale is honored for their organic, award-winning, extra virgin olive oil. Their olives are grown on a biodiverse farm without harmful chemicals. They believe in quality over quantity, which results in a delicious oil with a high polyphenol count, which contributes to positive health. The owners of Showa Farm are great community partners and work tirelessly on [Northern Sonoma County CERT](#).

You can purchase the oil online at the [Showa Farm shop](#) and at a few local establishments.

Spot the Snail

Let's "Spot the Snail"! When you visit one of our Snail of Approval food businesses (restaurants, bakeries, artisan producers, farms or ranches), take a "selfie" with the Snail decal, or just the decal if you don't want to be in the picture! Then, post it to your social media accounts and tag the @business and @snailofapprovalsonomacounty.

If you don't use social media or prefer not to post, then please send us your photo and we will post it to our social media accounts with your permission: snailofapprovalsc@gmail.com

Help show appreciation for our Snail of Approval businesses by showcasing them online. Join us in Spotting the Snail!

For a full listing of our Snail-approved businesses, visit our [webpage](#).



Recipe of the Month: Ribollita with Root Vegetables and Crusty Bread

In keeping with this year's theme of Roots and Grains, we have added potatoes and turnips to this traditional, hearty Tuscan soup. And remember, save that stale bread to sop up the delicious broth!



Ribollita with Root Vegetables and Crusty Bread (Vegan)

Kate Hendricks

Ingredients

1 onion, diced
2 carrots, diced
2 celery stalks, diced
3 cloves garlic, minced 2 potatoes, peeled and diced
2 turnips, peeled and diced
1 can (14 oz) cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
1 can (14 oz) diced tomatoes
4 cups vegetable broth
2 cups water 2 cups kale or spinach, chopped
1 teaspoon dried thyme
1 teaspoon dried rosemary
1 bay leaf
Salt and pepper to taste
Olive oil

Crusty bread (stale preferred) cut into bite-sized chunks

Instructions

1. In a large pot, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add the diced onion, carrots, and celery. Cook until softened, about 5-7 minutes.
2. Add the minced garlic and cook for another minute until fragrant.
3. Stir in the diced potatoes, diced turnips, cannellini beans, vegetable broth, water, thyme, rosemary, bay leaf, salt, and pepper. Bring the soup to a boil, then reduce the heat to low and let it simmer for about 20-25 minutes, or until the potatoes are tender.
4. Once the potatoes and turnips are cooked, add the chopped kale or spinach to the pot and cook for an additional 5 minutes until wilted.
5. Taste and adjust the seasoning if necessary.
6. To serve, place chunks of crusty bread in each bowl and ladle the soup over the top. Let the soup sit for a few minutes to allow the bread to soak up some of the broth. Drizzle with a little good olive oil.

Visit our [website](#) for more details and a printable copy of this recipe.

Membership

Welcome New Chapter Members!

Jessica Frost Tracy Mattson Virginia Pitts Samantha Ramey Eidell Wasserman Evan Wiig

And Welcome Back:

Briana and Chris Herrod

[Join or renew your membership online](#) and list Sonoma County North-CA as your chapter. If you prefer to renew locally by check, please download our [membership form](#) and follow the instructions. Several times a year, Slow Food USA promotes **Pay What You Can Day** where you can join or renew for any amount on one day only. Watch your email for these promotions.

Newsletter: Carol Diaz, Allison Eckert, Kate Hendricks, Lisa Hunter



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