



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

DECEMBER 2024 NEWSLETTER



When Higher Prices Are Worth It

We often hear complaints about high prices for fresh produce at farmers markets, and how expensive it is to eat at restaurants that use local and seasonal products. There are many and good reasons for those high prices.

High Costs

Let's take Slow Food's Snail of Approval program as an example. A Snail award recognizes businesses that meet the Slow Food standard of **GOOD, CLEAN and FAIR food for all**. For a restaurant to receive the 'Snail', it means that the food they serve tastes **good** at a **fair** price. They source **clean** ingredients that are organically grown and humanely-raised for the **good** of the planet and the farm workers. It also assures that they pay a **fair** wage to their restaurant staff.

What Goes into Those Costs

The often higher menu prices reflect the more sustainable and ethical practices that producers adopt, as well as the challenges of adhering to strict standards that ensure the health of the environment and the well-being of workers and animals. Here's why:

- **Higher Production Costs:** Organic farming avoids synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides. This means that organic farmers must rely on more labor-intensive methods like crop rotation, manual weeding, and natural pest control. In place of synthetic fertilizers, more costly soil amendments, such as organic compost and minerals, are needed.
- **Certification and Regulations:** Obtaining organic or humane certification involves rigorous processes, including inspections, documentation, and ongoing compliance with specific standards. These certifications often require fees and administrative costs, which are passed on to consumers. Humane certifications for animal products also include adherence to animal welfare standards, which may require additional facilities, space, and care.
- **Labor-Intensive Practices:** Humanely-produced products, especially those involving animals, usually focus on better living conditions, access to pasture, and lower stocking densities. These practices require more land, more time for care, and often more labor. Additionally, these farms may employ higher welfare standards for their workers, which can add to overall costs.
- **Supply Chain and Distribution:** Organic and humanely-produced goods often come from smaller farms or specialized producers who may not benefit from the same economies of scale as large industrial farms. Smaller operations may have higher per-unit costs for transportation, packaging, and distribution, which are reflected in the final price.
- **Environmental and Ethical Commitments:** Organic and humane practices prioritize environmental sustainability, biodiversity, and ethical treatment of animals. These considerations can involve additional costs related to land conservation, water management, animal welfare, and reducing carbon footprints.

Committing to Good, Clean and Fair

We can't afford to eat out very often, but when we do, we can support restaurants that follow the practices we've described. Let's step-up and support our Slow Food awarded restaurants, especially during these often-challenging winter months, by making a commitment to visit one or more for a delicious meal. Helping them out also helps our recognized farms and artisan producers – it's a tightly inter-dependent system that relies on all of us to succeed.

Snail of Approval Restaurants

Geyserville

- [Corner Project](#)
- [Diavola Pizzeria & Salumeria](#)
- [Geyserville Gun Club](#)

Healdsburg

- [SingleThread](#)
- [Troubadour Bread & Bistro](#)

Occidental

- [Altamont General Store](#)

Petaluma

- [Belfare](#)
- [Lunchette](#)

Santa Rosa

- [Americana](#)
- [The Naked Pig](#)
- [The Spinster Sisters](#)

Sebastopol

- [Americana](#)
- [Handline](#)
- [Psychic Pie](#)

Valley Ford

- [Estero Cafe](#)

Windsor

- [Maison Porcella](#)
- [Pizzaleah](#)

Sonoma County North Calendar

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

December

2 *Slow Books: Invitation to A Banquet*, by Fuchsia Dunlop

10 Terra Madre Day Dinner, Idlewild Wines, Healdsburg (There are a few seats left. Act fast to snag one!) [Sign up here.](#)

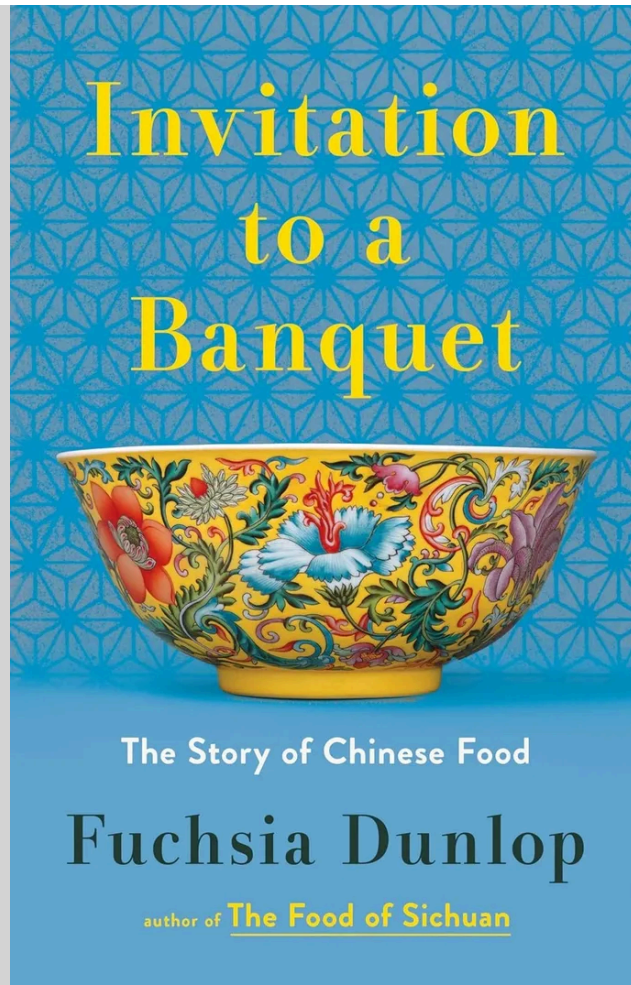
Followup

In October, Mai Nguyen spoke at our chapter's annual meeting about the importance of growing and consuming a variety of grains. Mai has a newsletter that will keep you up to date on the world of grains. You can subscribe through her [website](#).

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](#).



DECEMBER SELECTION: *Invitation to A Banquet: The Story of Chinese Food*, by Fuchsia Dunlop

Chinese was the earliest truly global cuisine. When the first Chinese laborers began to settle abroad, restaurants appeared in their wake. Yet Chinese has the curious distinction of being both one of the world's best-loved culinary traditions and one of the least understood. For more than a century, the overwhelming dominance of a simplified form of Cantonese cooking ensured that few foreigners experienced anything of its richness and sophistication—but today that is beginning to change.

In *Invitation to a Banquet*, award-winning cook and writer Fuchsia Dunlop explores the history, philosophy, and techniques of Chinese culinary culture. (Amazon) [Read more here.](#)

Spotlight: Leith Leiser-Miller and Nicholi Ludlow, *Psychic Pie*



In each newsletter, contributor Allison Eckert spotlights a member of our Slow Food community. This month features a conversation with the co-owners of Sebastopol's cult favorite, [Psychic Pie](#).

Leith Leiser-Miller and Nicholi Ludlow are co-owners of the beloved Psychic Pie, which will celebrate its third year dazzling taste buds with farm-to-pan, Roman-style pizza in 2025. They are partners in business and in life, co-parents to two young children who are prominently credited in the restaurant's webpage describing their [mission](#). Why might a pizza place need a mission statement, you ask? Leith and Nicholi were happy to answer that very question during a torrential downpour in late November, nimbly balancing nap schedules, intermittent Internet outages, and waxing philosophical to describe their vision of a better food system for all.

Psychic Pie and the Cost of Good, Clean, Fair Food

The pies that Leith and Nicholi craft in their Sebastopol kitchen are of a different ilk altogether than most pizza joints'. Their two-day sourdough base is an alchemy of organic flours and the couple's years of practice baking bread and slinging dough. (They worked together in the elevated San Francisco pizzeria Del Popolo before setting up their own family business.) Local, farm-direct ingredients lovingly scattered atop a living dough result in a pie you won't forget, and it should come as no surprise that Psychic Pie's prices reflect the unique quality of their offering.

“Our produce, meat, and cheeses come from Sonoma County, or from California, at least,” Nicholi shares. “We spend a lot of effort trying to build those connections with producers,” echoes Leith, adding that “bringing in ingredients right from our area takes a lot of intentionality.”

The pair find that the extra effort to carefully source the best our region has to offer is worth it, in the end. Serving **Good, Clean, and Fair food** is “the most responsible way to do business,” Nicholi says, since “sourcing seasonally and organically benefits the health and economy of our county.” He and Leith have chosen a harder path to walk, forgoing more generous margins by refusing to cut corners on sourcing, but they know that their “ideal customer” understands the community benefit of eating with them, facilitating their “counterculture” efforts to build something better on a local scale.

Community Response to Prices that Reflect Higher Value

The pair have found plenty of these “ideal customers,” but their road to local renown was not without its bumps. At first, Leith notes, some customers suffered “sticker shock” at the price of their pizza, and their team had to step in to assure diners that their food is “sourced from our local county and priced appropriately.” Nicholi candidly added that “we’re far cheaper than we should be, considering the things we’re sourcing,” but he knows that customers are concerned with their budgets—just like mom and pop pizza shops are. Leith and Nicholi welcomed these cross-counter conversations about sourcing and pricing, and, along the way, they supplanted customers’ ideas of what pizza “should” be (cheap, unhealthy, and voluminous) with what it can be, when done right (high-quality, a treat, and perfectly filling in smaller, “just enough” amounts).

As the co-owner of a small business, Leith cherishes her “power to support the producers who have the right mindset and do things in a beautiful way.” She and Nicholi credit their modality of direct-to-diner counter service with giving them abundant opportunities to share with customers that “we pick up this produce from a local farmer about 6 minutes down the road; your cheese is coming from 20 minutes away—supporting places like ours and farms like these is worth it.” As Nicholi puts it, “living our values is worth more than protecting our pocketbooks at all costs.”

This model flies in the face of our cultural narrative about foods like pizza, which has tended to enable us with the feeling that we should always be getting more for less. That said, Nicholi is sure that customers will be more satisfied and more nourished by eating a modest amount of his pizza (which is sold by weight), than they would eating a vast slab of a lower-quality product. Happily, several years in, Leith and Nicholi have found an audience that appreciates what they bring to the table: complaints are rare, and the like-minded customers, farmers, restaurant owners, and wine makers and they’ve connected with leave them grateful to “finally connect with a community of people who share the same vision.”

Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is... Literally

You can join this group of locavore aficionados by visiting Leith and Nicholi at Psychic Pie for a **dine-in, takeout, or take n’ bake meal**, or buy a **gift card** to share the love.

Beyond supporting their business, Leith and Nicholi urge us to remember that when we eat cheaply, someone always pays the price: the workers, the animals, the environment. So, don't forget to consider who is getting the short end of the stick when you decide to eat as cheaply as possible. Instead, make food you're proud of at home with ingredients you source as well as you can afford to, and when you eat out, be sure to choose an establishment with respect for all the links in our supply chain. The proprietors of Psychic Pie embody that respect, and we're proud they carry our **Snail of Approval**.

Snail of Approval

Save the Date for our Annual Snail of Approval Awards



2023 Snail Awardees

When: Wednesday, February 19, 2025

Where: The Sebastopol Grange

Who: 2024 Snail awardees and renewals, Slow Food members and enthusiasts!

New Snail Awardees

Congratulations to our newest Snail of Approval awardees: the GreenGrocer at many local farmers' markets, [Planetary Potato Chips](#) at many local retail food establishments, [The Altamont General Store](#) in Occidental, [Belfare](#) in Petaluma and [Troubadour bread & bistro](#) in Healdsburg. We honor them for producing good, clean and fair food in Sonoma County and beyond.



THE GREENGROCER
 Winner 2021 707-837-6033

Grilled Cheese \$6 Organic Sprouted Sourdough with Gooby & Toney Cheddar +14 "Loaded Grilled Cheese" + Bacon, Tomato, & Mixed Herbs	Add On... \$2/ea Heritage Bacon Heirloom Tomato Local Avocado Market Veggies Extra Kraut
Farm Egg & Cheese \$8 Two Eggs, Organic Sprouted Sourdough with Cheddar +14 "Loaded Farm Egg" + Farm Eggs, Bacon, Tomato & Herbs	
Breakfast Burrito \$10 Bacon, Veggie or Brie, Cheddar or Goat Cheese and more... Two Farm Fresh Eggs, Kale, Charol & Herbs in a Toasted Flour Tortilla +12 "Loaded Burrito" + Brie, Bacon & Veggie +12 AMT Avocado	
Hippie "Hash" \$12 Home Fried Potatoes, Market Veggies & Shitake Mushrooms with Two Eggs, "New Yorker" & Organic Sprouted Sourdough Toast & Kraut +12 Add Avocado or Bacon +16 Grass Fed Beef or Local Lamb +16 Wild Salmon	
Omelette Any Style \$12 Three Farm Eggs, Bacon or Veggie, Cheddar or Goat Cheese & Sprouted Sourdough Toast	
Wild King Salmon Tacos \$14 Fresh Local Market Salmon, Corn, Tortilla, Goat Cheese & Heirloom Tomato "Salsa"	
A True Grass Fed Burger \$14 Toasted Organic Charol Bun, Local Lettuce, Heirloom Tomato & Your Choice Cheddar Cheese or Goat Cheese or No Cheese. (Crowned by our Devised Darnest!) +12w Add Bacon / Local Avocado / Farm Eggs / Multigrain / Caramelized Onions	
Heirloom Tomato B.L.T. \$14 Olive Oil-Crusted Organic Sprouted Sourdough with Heritage Bacon, Market Greens +12 ea Local Avocado / Farm Eggs / Cheese / Veggie / Bacon +14 Wild King Salmon B.L.T.	



For a full listing and map of Snail of Approval-Slow Food in Sonoma County awardees, visit our [webpage](#).

Membership

Welcome New Chapter Members!

- D. Marc Capobianco
- Rachel Rodrigues

[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 a **Give 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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