

# Slow Food movement racing across the globe



I went along to the Slow Food Event organised by Queen Margaret University knowing very little really about what it stands for and what it means. I had some idea that it was local food served locally in season.

The global grassroots campaign works to give everyone in the world the opportunity of taking pleasure in food that is good for them, good for the planet and good for the people who produce it.

But I could not have had a better introduction to it than to listen to the President of the Slow Food Movement formed in December 1989, Italian Carlo Petrini.

Petrini is a bit of an evangelist but it is easy to be swept up in these kind of ideas if you have any thought for your health, what you eat and if you can perhaps be encouraged to understand how cavalier the world has become with the food it produces.

Carlo Petrini had been invited to speak by Queen Margaret University's MSc Gastronomy team at the Hawthornden Lecture Theatre at the National Gallery of Scotland and the evening began with a welcome from Petra Wend the principal of the university. She explained that the course is very timely but also the university was founded as the Edinburgh school of cookery in 1875, and its ethos was about improving the health of working classes by improving the food they ate.

The course they run is the only masters programme in the UK based around studies of food culture and food systems. (It sounds great principally because they get to go on field

trips!)



The audience assembled in the Scottish Café owned and run by Victor and Carina Contini who prepared the tasty canapés served before the lecture.

Mike Small of the Fife Diet and Denise Walton of Peelham Farm

also spoke about their own take on the importance of Slow Food.

Small talked about the good, the bad and the ugly in food production in Scotland. He said: "We have gone from joking about deep fried Mars bars to boasting about Timberyard. We have access to great fresh produce. We have a distinct anti-GM policy and there are great signs of positivity in Scotland."

He stated that on the bad side 17m hectares of agricultural land is owned by 0.25% of the UK population, and that in Scotland we have the most unequal land ownership model in Europe. Small told us that half of the UK's privately held land is held by 432 owners while only 16 people hold 10% of the land in Scotland.

Small explained that we have problems with both childhood obesity and food banks in 2015. There is now a staggering half a million people in the UK who regularly depend on food banks.

You might recall that one of the recent food scandals involved horsemeat but according to Small it resulted in very few prosecutions. Tesco was involved in the scandal but he told the audience that the supermarket chain is now involved in food education in schools which Small thinks is most troubling.

Denise Walton said that in the last two years their customers are coming to buy because 'their food is hurting them'. For them food has become a battleground, and they suffer from allergies to ingredients such as gluten. She claimed that in their shop what she witnesses is that people now look for food without preservatives which will cause them any further harm. What she urged is that Scotland must become a good food nation and that our food journey must start off with breast-feeding.

Petrini explained that in 2015 people spend more on losing weight than to eat and the other side of the coin is that we

throw away 40% of the food we produce. In 2050 there will be 9 billion people in the world, but our food production system is based on waste and only looks at profit margins. He suggests that the world is in a terrible crisis and cannot continue in this way.

While we need food to live, Petrini is adamant that we appear to expend far more energy producing the food than it gives us, and he insisted that there must be a paradigm shift. He asserted that our resources are finite and every corner of the world is losing degrees of fertility after using chemicals and pesticides for 150 years. There will soon be no water left for example and as most of our water is used for agricultural it is wasted.

We are losing genetic species in fruit vegetable and livestock. Losing this biodiversity is what troubles the Italian most. In his native country the so-called "Milk Mountains" were used to rear cows for milk for centuries. These cows produced beautiful milk used to make great local cheese called Provolone del monaco, but it is no longer possible to make this cheese owing to the industrialisation of the dairy industry. Each native cow produced only 12 litres of milk per day but the price paid is now so low that the farmers needed to produce more milk. The native cows were replaced by Friesians which produced 40 litres of milk per day, but the milk is no good for making cheese so the cows and the cheese have both disappeared.

This was the most graphic demonstration of the dangers of ignoring local produce and a good reason for at least knowing more about the Slow Food Movement.

Slow Food in Edinburgh began in 2001 and on the second Monday of every month they hold a relaxed informal dinner at an Edinburgh restaurant featuring a local producer or guest speaker. On 9 March 2015 the Big Table will be held at Café St Honoré and will feature Sascha Grierson from Hugh Grierson

Organic Farm Newmiln explaining the organic philosophy behind their business. Learn more on their [website](#) or on Café St Honoré's website.

The UK movement runs educational programmes promoting forgotten foods and working with top British chefs to help everyone find a better way to eat.

Carlo Petrini's outstanding contributions in the field of the environment and sustainable development have also been recognized by the United Nations Environment Programme, which named him Co-Winner of the 2013 Champion of the Earth Award for "Inspiration and Action".

His skills as a communicator and the originality and importance of his message, implemented through Slow Food projects around the world, have aroused the interest of international opinion leaders and media. In 2004 he was named a 'European Hero' by Time magazine, and in January 2008 he was the only Italian to appear in the list of '50 People Who Could Save the World' drawn up by the prestigious British newspaper The Guardian.