

JIM EMBRY



MINISTE
A

interview on Salone del Gusto-Terra Madre website as USA delegate to the 2012 International Congress

Salone del Gusto - Terra Madre

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Growing the Good (Slow) Food Revolution
From a very young age Jim Embry has been working to fight against social injustice and support those in difficulty. The Lexington Sustainable Communities Network, which he founded, is a hub of ideas, activities and projects: school gardens, food education, support programs for people who have been subjected to violence or are recovering from an addiction. We can never stop thanking Jim and those people who, like him, have made the Terra Madre dream possible.

You have been an activist involved in social justice from an early age, was the question of food production/consumption already an important part of the movement in the 1970's or is this something that has happened more recently? In your opinion are the social justice and food movements one?

For many of us activists food production/consumption (food justice) was linked very closely to the social justice and peace movements of the 60's and 70's. In 1968 while attending Dr. King's funeral I met labor activist Ernie Green who offered me a summer job working in Brooklyn, NY and it was there that I was first introduced to the concept of what we now call food justice. In 1971 I met the Vietnam War protestor and comedian, Dick Gregory who further illuminated for me the politics of food and also inspired me to adopt



a vegetarian diet as a political, spiritual, health and ecological statement. During the 70's some 300 natural food co-ops were created and I was a founding member of the Good Foods Co-op here in Lexington which had a focus even back then on local, organic and healthy foods along with community gardening. But certainly in the past 20 years there has been an enormous global awakening to the detrimental effect that our industrial agriculture system and the fast food culture are having on the health of people and the planet. Yes in my view the social justice and food movements are linked at the hip. While the movement to create sustainable communities encompasses all of the social justice movements, a local and healthy food system is the foundation for a sustainable community. However the prevailing Newtonian worldview leads us to think of Mother Earth as a bunch of unrelated mechanical parts to be exploited and abused. But I ascribe to quantum or systems thinking which teaches us that we are all inter-related, interdependent and all made from the same source.

How did you come across Slow Food and Terra Madre and what compelled you to join?

In the spring of 2008 I received information from a friend about the Terra Madre gathering and its connection to Slow Food. After reading the on-line information, I immediately joined and fell in love because the concept and principles were absolutely consistent with my values and work. A few weeks later I applied and was later selected to attend Terra Madre later in October. My love and support for the Slow Food movement was deeply amplified by my experience at Terra Madre.

Can you tell us more about the Lexington Sustainable Communities Network? How has the local Lexington community responded to your initiatives?

Sustainable Communities Network formed in 2006 is like a spider web of relationships that extend locally, nationally, internationally and maybe one day inter-galactically! Since we consider a local food system as the foundation of a sustainable community, we work with all sectors of the food system in re-creating sustainable connections with food that encompass political, ecological, social and spiritual dimensions. Over the past 6 years we have: hosted an annual local food summit, trained 300+ teachers to organize school gardens, inspired the creation of 40+ community gardens, sponsored a monthly food film series, provided workshops and retreats for the faith community, given 45+ talks a year on Slow Food, Terra Madre and food justice, wrote articles or given interviews to various media, helped plan several statewide and national conferences on food security, served on the local government Climate Action Plan Team, and guided efforts to create a food policy council.

Since we all come through women, since women provide the best first local food with breast milk and since women are the primary providers of food nutrition and education we have developed very substantial projects with women's groups such as: community gardens at Chrysalis House, the program for women healing from drug and alcohol addiction, gardens and nutrition classes at Family Care Center, the high school program for pregnant and parenting teenagers, garden and farm visioning for the Bluegrass Domestic Violence Program, the program for women healing from physical and emotional spouse abuse, and a children's garden for the One Parent Scholar House, the program for single parents attending post secondary school.

We have received tremendous support , involvement and requests for our services from every sector of the local community. Through our initiatives we work closely with K-12 schools, farmers, women’s programs, refugee groups, the judicial system, faith groups, local and state governments, food co-ops, universities, various local media and of course local producers! We have received numerous recognitions and awards, do about 45 community presentations each year and serve on numerous commissions and planning teams.



Do you think the number of so-called "co-producers" in the US is growing? Are people paying more attention to the story behind the food they eat?

Yes! Without a doubt the number of co-producers is growing exponentially every year throughout the US. Our friend Wendell Berry said years ago «eating is an agricultural act» and many more people now understand and are manifesting the meaning of that profound statement. Over the past 20 years we have witnessed a 50 per cent increase in farmers markets and CSAs, expansion of farm to cafeteria initiatives at K-12 schools, hospitals , universities, and even jails,

local and organic foods available in many more groceries and restaurants demonstrating that Americans are expressing our desire for quality food that is produced in harmony with the environment and local cultures.



Setting up a vegetable garden can seem like such a simple action, but in practice it can have a very strong impact.

Why is it such a powerful instrument in your opinion?

Last century the mantra was that we all needed to be computer literate but in this century because of the

ecological crisis and the human disconnect from nature we must now insure that we are all eco-literate with a sense of sacred relationship with the Earth. By working and playing in a garden children before they can read or write can learn eco-literacy, not to fear bugs and bees, how to work together cooperatively and they learn how to become agents of change in their community. In the garden we get to touch the soil, the sacred medium that we are all made from and learn systems thinking. In my view beginning children working and playing in a garden is the most important foundational activity to teach sustainable living, citizenship, activism and sacred Earth

connections.

What are you taking with you to Turin this October and what are you hoping to bring back?

Using extensive community outreach and education , I will take the love and activism from myself and my community to Turin. Before my previous trips in 2008 and 2010 I used various forms of media , gave numerous presentations and set up photo exhibits to inform my local community that I was a delegate to Terra Madre and inviting them to” travel with me”. This was my way of “taking the community with me” which I will do again this year. After another fabulous Terra Madre experience in October, I will bring back the love, the creativity, and the activism of the people that I will meet as well as the many memorable tastes of food in the Salone! This experience will be shared with my community through presentations, photo exhibits, articles and simple conversations about my own excited exclamations of the powerful Slow Food communities around the world!

<http://www.public-republic.net/we-are-all-artists-with-multiple-avenues-of-creativity.php/>

www.kentucky.com/2012/01/18/2032845/tom-eblen-unity-award-winner-not.html

<http://salonedelgustoterramadre.slowfood.com/dettaglioStampa.plp?tipo=UltimaOra&id=3390da80bd4bc44089df2ccff7d0cbf3en>

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