Slow Food®

Bite Size Slow Food

Save Biodiversity
Save the Planet

The tree of food

Food is soil, seeds, water, nourishment, flavor and culture

Edited by: Silvia Ceriani, Serena Milano and Raffaella Ponzio
With the contribution of: Roberto Burdese, Eleonora Giannini and Piero Sardo
Thanks to Gabriele Borasi, Sergio Capaldo, Mauro Cravero, Silvio Greco, Cristiana Peano, Andrea Pezzana, Paola Rebuffatti and Francesco Sottile for scientific consultation
Translation and editing: Carla Ranicki, Simone Gie, Catherine Mann
Graphics and layout: Claudia Saglietti and Alessia Paschetta
Printed in April 2015 by La Stamperia, Carrù (Piedmont) - Printed on recycled paper

SLOW FOOD

Slow Food is an international association that promotes good, clean and fair food for everyone, thanks to the voluntary work of hundreds of thousands of people all around the world.

Our Projects

 The **Ark of Taste** is a catalogue that gathers together thousands of traditional products at risk of extinction from all over the world.

 The **Slow Food Presidia** directly involve small-scale producers, preserve ancient knowledge and represent concrete examples of sustainable local development.

 The **Earth Markets** involve small-scale producers who sell local, seasonal and sustainably produced food directly to consumers.

 Slow Food **gardens** (school, community and family) are cultivated with agro-ecological techniques, help people appreciate the value of food, and teach respect for the earth.

In 2004, Slow Food created **Terra Madre,** a network of food communities made up of farmers, fishers, herders, artisans, chefs, youth, activists and researchers who are working to promote a new food culture, based on saving biodiversity, protecting the environment and respecting local cultures and traditions.

www.slowfood.com
www.slowfoodfoundation.org
www.terramadre.org

THE SIXTH EXTINCTION

Plant and animal **species**—as well as fungi, microbes and bacteria—are disappearing at a staggering rate, unprecedented in the planet's history. Each year, 27,000 species are lost forever. That's three every hour.

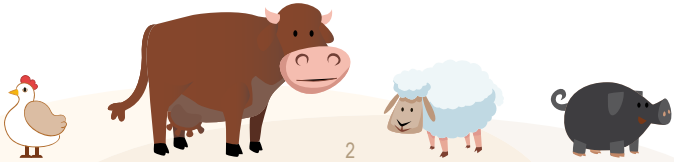
Every year, we also destroy 10 million hectares of **rainforest** (in Borneo, Amazonia and Africa) in order to make way for oil palms and fields of soy.

The **mangrove forests** and **coral barriers**, home to numerous species and offering vital protection to the coasts, have already been reduced by 35% and 20% respectively.

In 2007, honey **bees**, which pollinate many of the vegetables we eat, began suffering mass die-offs. In Europe, mortality rates were around 20%, while in the United States they reached over 40% during the 2013/2014 winter.

A study carried out in 2011 by researchers at the University of Exeter predicted the permanent disappearance of one in ten species by the end of the century. We are witnessing what is becoming known as the **sixth mass extinction**. During the fifth, 65 million years ago, the dinosaurs died out. Yet there is a substantial difference between this current extinction and those of the past. This global ecological crisis is being caused by humans.

In the last 70 years, we have destroyed three-quarters of the agro-biodiversity carefully selected by farmers over the previous 10,000 years.

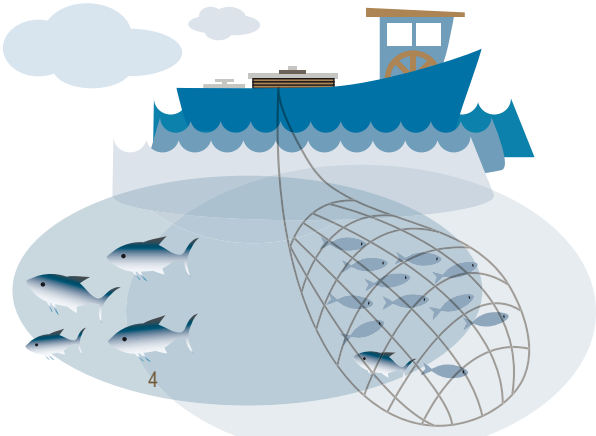


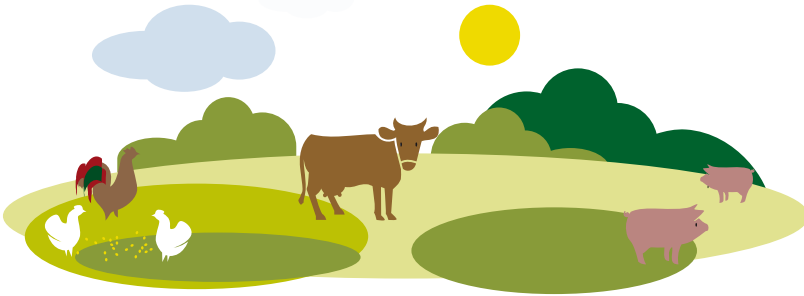
The equilibrium was destroyed when we began running farms like industrial factories. Industry has no time for the rhythms of nature. It has no seasons and no patience. It must always mass produce, in large quantities, as quickly as possible.

Industrial agriculture began in the United States after the Second World War as the military machine was restructured. Ammonium nitrate, one of the main components in explosives, proved to be an excellent ingredient in the production of fertilizers. Previously, soil was enriched by rotating crops with legumes like beans and peas and by using animal manure. But suddenly it became easy to buy fertilizers, as well as pesticides, herbicides and fuel for machinery. In effect, we began feeding ourselves with oil.

A handful of multinationals seized control of our food, patenting hybrid seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and weed killers, and imposing their own rules on the market. The top three (Monsanto, DuPont Pioneer and Syngenta) now hold 53% of the world **seed** market, and the top ten control 76%. The circle was closed with genetically modified seeds, the extreme extension of this process. By 2013, the 1.7 million hectares planted with **GMOs** in 1996 had grown to 175.2 million hectares.

The story is much the same with the seas and oceans. Industrial fishing fleets have become increasingly numerous, powerful and efficient, thanks to highly advanced technology. Sonar, airplanes and satellite platforms are used to identify shoals of fish. Often the sea bed is raked by huge dragnets, which destroy everything in their path. **Industrial fishing** is enormously wasteful, with more than 40% of the catch being thrown back in the sea. Meanwhile fertilizers, pesticides, garbage and oil are ending up in the water. Plastic waste has formed enormous floating islands in the water, and carbon dioxide emissions are increasing the acidity of the oceans, jeopardizing the marine food chain.





LET'S START FROM BIODIVERSITY

Biodiversity is the diversity of life: of microorganisms, plant and animal species, ecosystems and knowledge. It is our insurance for the future, because it allows plants and animals to adapt to climate change, unexpected events and attacks from disease and parasites.

Biodiversity can be domesticated as well as wild. Alongside the flora and fauna living in nature, the knowledge of farmers has produced thousands of plant varieties and animal breeds, whose shape, color, fragrance and flavor reflect their local history.

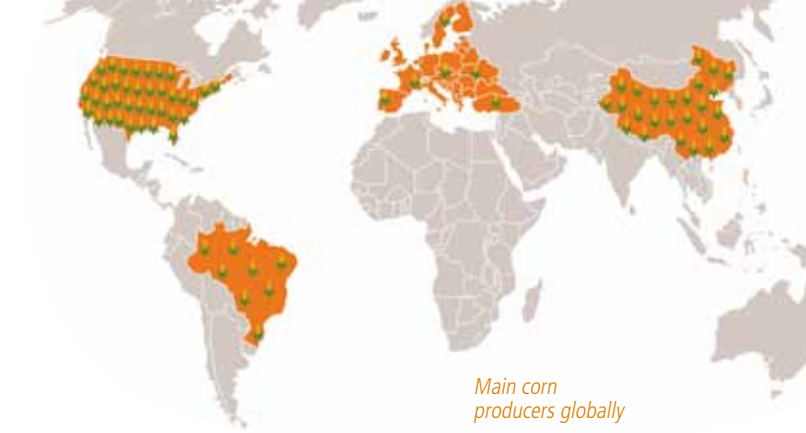
Thanks to selective breeding, local varieties and breeds have adapted to their surrounding area, naturally becoming stronger and more resistant, requiring less water and needing fewer pesticides, fertilizers and veterinary treatments. Biodiversity is also an invaluable reservoir of medicinal remedies.

START WITH YOUR LOCAL AREA. GET TO KNOW IT. DISCOVER YOUR LOCAL VEGETABLES, FRUITS AND ANIMAL BREEDS, AS WELL AS TRADITIONAL BREADS, CHEESES AND CURED MEATS, AND THEN TELL US ABOUT THEM!

Traditional knowledge is part of biodiversity, and has allowed generations of farmers to cultivate the most difficult land, and to transform milk, meat, grains, fruit and vegetables into thousands of foods: bread, couscous, cheese, salami, preserves, sweets…

Protecting biodiversity means respecting all diversities, of places, bodies of knowledge and cultures. It means growing many different things, but on a small scale. It means producing less, but giving more value to what is produced, and minimizing waste. It means eating mostly local food. It means promoting a system that is balanced, durable and sustainable. It means protecting the small-scale farmers, fishers and herders who understand the fragile equilibriums of nature and work in harmony with ecosystems.

THIS IS WHY SLOW FOOD BELIEVES IT IS POSSIBLE TO FEED THE PLANET AND GUARANTEE GOOD, CLEAN AND FAIR FOOD FOR EVERYONE, BY STARTING FROM BIODIVERSITY.



Main corn producers globally

A WORLD OF CORN

We are what we eat. So said the famous 19th-century philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, highlighting the indissoluble bond between mind and body, and the importance of how we feed ourselves. Two centuries later, Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* completed the quote: "If you are what you eat… what you are is corn."

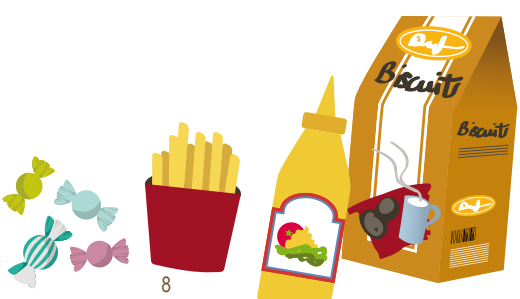
If you don't regularly eat popcorn, corn on the cob or tinned sweetcorn, you might think that can't be true. But in fact we all eat corn a number of times a day, and if you live in the United States, you're eating almost nothing but corn.

These days, corn is found just about everywhere, feeding the cattle that become steaks and hamburgers, as well as chickens, pigs, turkeys, sheep and even salmon. Eggs, cheese and yogurt are made of corn, and corn appears on the list of ingredients of many processed foods sold in supermarkets—sodas, cookies, mayonnaise, chips, ready-made sauces, candies—under unexpected names like glucose, glucose syrup, ascorbic acid, citric acid, malt, maltodextrin, crystalline fructose, modified starch, sucrose…

Corn, more than any other crop, dominates the fields and supermarket shelves: It grows quickly, produces high yields and is very versatile. If your main objective is increasing agricultural productivity, then it is the ideal product, and the figures speak to its success. Global corn production has increased 374% in recent years, reaching 974 million tons in 2014.

A typical product of industrial monocultures, the corn we find on our plates is completely different from the thousands of traditional varieties with brightly colored kernels that are still grown—in tiny quantities—in their homeland, in Mexico and the Andes. The corn we know today produces cobs that are always yellow, with the same weight and length, from plants that are all the same height. This hybrid corn, often genetically modified, is produced using industrial methods, and has a huge impact on the environment, not to mention our health.

Speaking of health, the excessive consumption of industrial foods is closely linked to the rise of diseases and chronic conditions like obesity, type-2 diabetes, cancer and heart disease. Sugar, in particular, is public enemy number one for human health, and many of its cheap substitutes derive from corn, like high-fructose corn syrup, which in the last 30 years has become the world's primary sweetener.

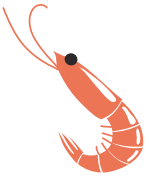


THE SHOPPING CART

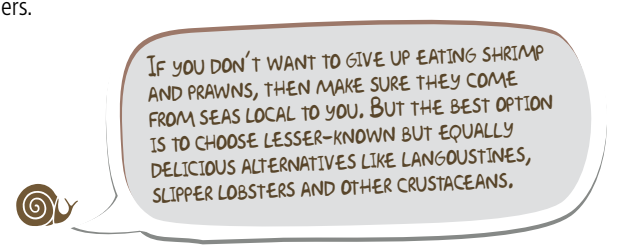
But corn is not the only thing we buy in huge quantities, often without thinking about the implications. In our cart, we might also find…

Steak. Meat consumption is reaching increasingly unsustainable levels and the environmental costs of such an unbalanced diet are enormous. Producing a kilo of beef using industrial farming systems releases on average 36.4 kilos of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere (the livestock industry produces 18% of the greenhouse gases responsible for global warming, a higher percentage than the transport sector) and requires around 15,500 liters of water and 7 kilos of plant-based feed.
Continuing to eat meat at the rate to which the West has become accustomed (and which developing countries are now approaching) is unsustainable. This is also because excessive consumption is closely linked to the suffering of animals in intensive farms.

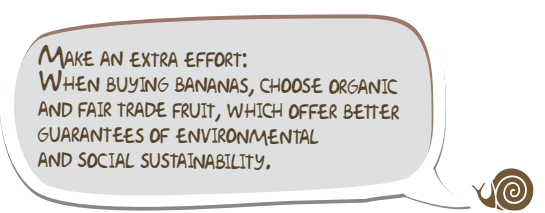
Eat less meat, of better quality, from farms that care about the welfare of their animals and the quality of their diet. Choose local breeds and buy lesser-known cuts of meat to help prevent waste.



Shrimp. Have you ever wondered where the shrimp on your plate come from? Often they come from the tropics, where they are fished intensively. But stocks are close to the maximum limit of exploitation and the techniques used to catch them are devastating to the environment. So are farmed any better? No, because vast swathes of mangrove forest are destroyed every year to make way for shrimp farms, with serious consequences for the environment and small-scale fishers.

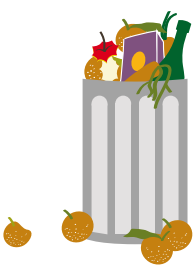


Bananas. Globally, the banana industry is controlled by five multinationals that grow the fruit on huge plantations, using massive amounts of pesticides, synthetic fertilizers and fungicides, and often exploiting local laborers. After the harvest, the bunches of bananas start a lengthy journey, first by ship across the ocean and then by road to warehouses where they are ripened before being sold. The market is dominated by just one variety, Cavendish, while the many others are ignored.



Snack cakes and sodas. Are you sure the best snack is an industrial cake and a sugary drink? Maybe you don't know that industrial sodas—sweetened with high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) and full of additives and coloring—are one of the main causes of obesity. Or that snack cakes almost always include palm oil among their ingredients. Large areas of rainforest are cut down every year to make way for oil palm plantations.

Think a little harder, take a little more time and try replacing unhealthy industrial snacks with something more wholesome: an organic fruit juice, some freshly squeezed OJ or a homemade smoothie. Bread, butter and jam; a homemade cake. Doesn't that sound good?



Garbage. If you're not careful, every time you fill your shopping cart, you're also filling your garbage can. Don't believe it? Where do all the plastic bottles end up, the excess packaging, the food you bought but didn't get round to eating and the food you didn't even buy—the apple with spots, the crooked carrot—because it never made it to the supermarket? The figures for global food waste are shocking: In North America and Europe, each of us wastes around 280 to 300 kilos of food a year. Meanwhile, in the rest of the world, millions are suffering from hunger.

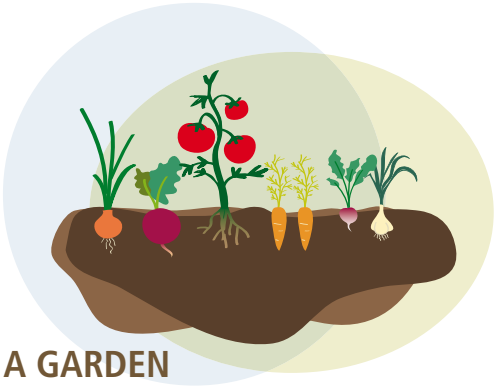
Pay closer attention to what you buy. Choose seasonal produce, which hasn't travelled thousands of miles to reach your kitchen, and if possible, buy directly from the producer. Learn how to cook and use up leftovers, which can be turned into meatballs, croquettes and timbales.

READ THE LABEL!

Consumers have an important tool for making better choices: the food label. Learning to read labels can give us lots of information.
However, labels don't tell us everything. In fact, they usually omit many important details. When it comes to cheese, the label provides the ingredients (milk, rennet, salt), the weight, the best-before date and where the cheese was made. And it will also tell us, by implication, that the milk was heat treated, as otherwise we'd see "raw milk" in the list of ingredients.

So do you know everything there is to know? Before saying "yes," try answering the following questions:What kind of milk was used to make the cheese? Milk from animals raised by the dairy, or bought in, even from another country? Is it milk from a local breed or ordinary Friesians? How were the animals raised? What were they fed? Grass or industrial feed, perhaps made with GMOs?How about starter cultures, anti-mold products, preservatives and other additives? Do you know how long the cheese was aged for, and where?Many of these questions will not have been answered, because labels tend to omit more than they say.

But not all are like this. **Narrative labels**, used for many Slow Food Presidia, for example, describe all the aspects of production that allow a consumer to make a conscious choice.



THE PLEASURE OF A GARDEN

Growing your own food means understanding its value and learning how to avoid waste. It means forming an intimate connection with the land. It means having access to fresh, healthy and tasty vegetables. For this reason it's important that we learn and begin again to tend gardens, at home, in schools and in hospitals. All you need is a small plot of land, a terrace or even just a balcony.

Many types of fruits, vegetables, legumes, aromatic herbs and even medicinal plants can be grown in a garden. It is important to choose plants that are most suited to the area, and seek to recover traditional seeds from local farmers. It is fundamental to care for the fertility of the land, making compost with organic kitchen scraps.

Slow Food promotes the creation of gardens across the world. In particular, it has launched 500 school gardens in Italy and 300 in the USA, and is currently busy creating 10,000 gardens in Africa. To adopt a garden in Africa, visit www.slowfood.com/donate

GROW YOUR OWN FOOD. PLANTING A GARDEN IS GOOD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, YOUR HEALTH AND THE SOUL!

FEEDING THE PLANET WITH GOOD,
CLEAN AND FAIR FOOD FOR EVERYONE IS POSSIBLE,
BY STARTING WITH BIODIVERSITY.

JOIN US!
BECOME A SLOW FOOD MEMBER TODAY

www.slowfood.com