



The Central Role of Food

**Congress Paper
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1. ABOUT US: Historical introduction

The Slow Food World Congress to be held in Turin from October 27-29, the sixth in the history of the movement, has been organized in conjunction with the fifth Terra Madre event. Its purpose will be to discuss the political and cultural issues that underlie the daily work of the 1,500 convivia and more than 2,500 food communities that operate in 130 countries round the world. This complex, structured network will be called upon to discuss and share visions and projects capable of giving full meaning to its work. Ideas, values and local organizations (convivia and food communities) are the Slow Food's most precious asset—its foundation—whereas regional, national and supranational organizational structures are the tools at the service of the network, its diffusion and its grounding in local areas.

In the course of time, flexibility and capacity to adapt to this second level have been the true evolutionary force behind Slow Food. In our history, the different organizational solutions have worked in the main, though it is normal in an evolutionary process for correct insights to alternate with errors. But the lifeblood of the livability and endurance of movements comes from visions and ideas that generate good practices. The more ideas are diverse, shared and suited to local contexts, the broader future prospects will be.

For the first time in our history of twenty years and more, a congress document is to be translated into the languages of the many countries in which we are present, distributed among members, convivia and communities and released to the media, political and cultural institutions and other organizations that work to defend the environment, common goods and primary rights. The hope is that it will spur a broad world debate ahead of the Congress and help inspire ideas and practices in the various local areas.

The intention is for the document to be an open one, for it to stimulate the great potential we represent in the world thanks to our diversities. These we unite in fraternity, since it is only fraternity that can embrace the complexity of the world. Diversity is not for governing but for loving, and the sharing of ideas is an act of freedom. Union and diversity, therefore, can run together and progress together.

The Slow Food Manifesto, written poetically and with intelligence by Folco Portinari and signed in Paris in December 1989 by the founders of the movement, was the first chapter in the story of a way of thinking now shared in every corner of the planet. Its originality has inspired the history of Slow Food and is still topical today. The right to pleasure, the importance of consciously living life at the right pace, the value of cultural biodiversity—these are the issues at least two generations of Slow Food managers have been trained to work on.

In the second half of the 1990s, awareness that the world of gastronomy needed to mobilize to protect a great agrifood heritage threatened by mass production inspired Slow Food to create the Ark of Taste and the Presidia. The defense of plant species, animal breeds and knowledge at risk of distinction has always been the cornerstone of our work. At the beginning of the new century, our organization and our network had already gained ground in most western countries, but the real turning point was still to come.



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In 2004, Terra Madre asserted itself as Slow Food's most important, ambitious initiative: a dream come true that, every two years since then, has extended its influence over every continent, improving the work and the self-esteem of thousands of food communities, who now see their sacrifices and ideas acknowledged in the network and through the network. Terra Madre makes clear to all the injustices of a global food system that depletes the planet's resources and compromises the future for the generations to come.

Terra Madre makes us think about a concept of food quality based not only on taste properties, but also on respect for the environment and fair earnings for producers.

"Good, clean and fair" sums up a model that not only gives our movement coherence on the inside, but also earns us authority and respect on the outside. In 2007, the World Congress in Puebla, in the Americas, intercepted this wave of innovation partly thanks to young people who, through the Youth Food Movement and the University of Gastronomic Sciences, began to view Slow Food and Terra Madre with growing interest. Since Puebla, the seeds of Terra Madre and Slow Food have begun to germinate with increasing intensity. A strong, differentiated approach is starting to take root, which is bound to grow even more over the next few years and override the limitations of a way of gastronomic thinking that is now old and outdated.

A holistic vision of gastronomy and the building of the capacity to override concepts disrespectful of the value of the planet's different cultures are the greatest challenges facing us in the years to come. In the course of time, what first appeared simply as a clever insight—the central role of food as a point of departure for a new form of politics, for a new economy and for new social relations—has become a shared certainty. It is a certainty that has matured gradually not only inside Slow Food but in every part of the world, with the awareness of millions of people.

The central role of food, so firmly asserted in this document, implies the belief that the right to food is the primary right of humanity—ensuring not only its own life but also that of the whole planet.

This assertion will have important consequences for our way of behaving and working. It will help us to overcome the atavistic limits of the gastronome who cannot see beyond his own plate, landing us on safe shores where sobriety meets true pleasure, enlightened agriculture ensures goodness and beauty, savor walks hand in hand with savvy and the local economy is concerned with creation and the future of young people. Without the right to good, clean and fair food for all, these demands will not be met and all humanity will suffer as our mother earth is suffering now.

Given not only the multitude of delegates attending but also the diversity of their cultures, religions and individual and collective backgrounds, for the first time ever the composition of our Congress will be an expression of a true world network. We have reached the conviction that one way to vivify and strengthen Slow Food and Terra Madre is through mutuality and the overriding of organizational prejudices born of diverse sensibilities. It is a big gamble, but it is one well worth seeing through.

The debate on this document will be animated by meetings and get-togethers in every corner of the world in which Slow Food or Terra Madre communities live and work.

Let's hope that all this extraordinary wealth will give us the energy we need to continue to dream.



2. WHAT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT: The right to food

To say that food has to become a central element of our thinking about people again is to say something eminently political. That of food consumers is a “non-category” insofar as actions targeted at food consumers are targeted at all humanity. This is why they are political actions *par excellence*.

Nowadays we think of consumers as people who “buy” food, but if food concerns us only insofar as it is sold and bought (thus becoming a competence of economic policy and not of politics as such), then we lose sight of food as a right. Yet that which is essential for survival *is* part of the sphere of rights: this is why we speak of the right to food and the right to water.

Ever since it was formulated in article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1966, the idea of the right to food has been accompanied by the right to freedom from hunger.

Point 1 of Article 11 of the Covenant asserts “the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions”, while point 2 recognizes “the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger”.

Without this second point, Article 11 would not raise such pressing questions. Its choice of words should make us stop and think. It speaks of freedom from hunger, because hunger is a form of slavery, above all physical slavery, that may translate into social and economic slavery, often involving the very governments of countries that are slaves to hunger, in which case it becomes political slavery.

This is why our movement has to declare a fight against hunger, just like the fight against slavery was declared in the past. The fight against slavery was a long one lasting three centuries, and in some places in the world—only a few, fortunately—it has yet to be won. We have to fight hunger because hunger is, above all, a form of injustice, of arrogance towards other human beings who have the same rights as we do. We will be unable to feel “at home” with our right to food until we know that the right is guaranteed to all.

There is something else in Article 11 of the UNO Covenant that attracts our attention: the point which speaks about the “continuous improvement” of living conditions. We have to ask ourselves whether there is a limit to that “continuous improvement” and what the concept of limit actually means. Do those who have achieved the guarantee of the right to food and freedom from hunger have the right to improve themselves even though another part of humanity has yet to achieve that guarantee? Or do we reach a point at which the improvement of one compromises the right to food of another?

It is the job of an association like ours to contribute to a review of the prospects of these rights. Because Slow Food protects the right to pleasure, and pleasure based on the suffering and slavery of others cannot exist.



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Another point worth reflecting upon is that the right to food does not appear in Article 6 of the UNO Covenant, which refers to the right to life. How come? Life appears among civil and political rights, food among economic, social and political rights. Water does not appear at all. It eventually appeared in the rights field in 2010, when the UNO sanctioned the right to clean, safe water for cooking and hygienic purposes as an essential right for the “full enjoyment of life and all human rights”.

It is as if there were something accessorial about eating. In the UNO Covenant food does not enjoy the same civil and political right status as life. Our Association should open a serious debate to incorporate in the right to life the rights to food and freedom from hunger, working tangibly to realize them.

The Covenant was of course a product of its time, in particular of the belief that humanity could disengage itself from its own needs and physical dependences. “Life” is almost like an abstract concept; food, one of the elements of dependence, appears among social and economic rights. But here we have the germ of one of the concepts that need to be corrected, because food is not a right solely of those who have the money to buy it.

The dream of a life independent from the seasons and, more generally, from time and change, the utopia of freedom for many civilizations, was built on two main pillars: technical progress and money. Countries with enough technology would see their right to food ensured. The food industry and market-oriented industrial agriculture were the leading paladins of this vision.

But a universal right closely connected to the very existence of humanity cannot be conditional. Without technology and money how can the right to food be guaranteed?

But that is not all. The havoc the type of agriculture described has wrought upon the planet and human health is now there for all to see. Not only has that system failed to cater for humanity as a whole but only for those who could afford to pay, it has also damaged the resources of all, including those who have not benefited from the results, thus contributing to the non-achievement of fundamental rights by the weakest.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights has explored the definition of the right to food, identifying the following obligations for States:

- to **respect**, meaning to refrain from interfering with the means of subsistence of their citizens and their capacity to provide for themselves;
- to **protect**, implying the constitution of a system of rules on food safety, environmental protection and land ownership;
- to **fulfil**, implementing suitable policies to ensure the weakest access to resources or, in extreme cases, direct assistance to at least allow freedom from hunger.

The first obligation alone would suffice to reveal the harmfulness of the industrial agrifood system determined by the international organization of markets in the late 1960s. For Slow Food and Terra Madre, this obligation has to do with respect for



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traditional, sustainable forms of agriculture—the only ones that have always protected agrobiodiversity, resources and cultural diversities—whose standard bearers are small-scale producers, women, the elderly and indigenous populations.

Slow Food's experience—first with the Presidia, then with the Award for the Defense of Biodiversity and, in recent years, with Terra Madre—has taught us that food security, seen as quality, access to and diversity of food is not guaranteed by systems which produce a few products over large extensions of land without connections with local cultures and with the sole objective of improving positions on international markets.

From this point of view, the work we have done recently in Africa—the continent that pays the highest price in terms of the right to food— encourages us to continue wholeheartedly in this exemplary direction. The “Thousand Gardens” project, the fight against land grabbing, farmers' markets, food communities, the rights of indigenous peoples, the campaigns of our African members—all these elements have convinced us that working with local communities is indispensable if we are to ensure the right to food. Given our sense of universal fraternity, we feel obliged to give all the backing we can to the African network that operates within our movement. This network is fully aware that the future of Africa is in its hands, but nobody should forget how the root cause of the continent's problems resides in old and new forms of colonialism. And we have to realize that the future of Africa is the future of the world. Decolonizing our thinking as a token of reciprocity and generosity is an indirect way of supporting the communities we are part of and of our right to food in every corner of the Earth.

For food security, the right to food, can only be achieved by respecting cultural diversities, which create physical and psychological well-being inside communities, and also small local economies, which take care of their areas and revitalize business activities and human growth to become universally repeatable and adaptable model experiences.

This is why making the right to water, the right to food and the right to freedom from hunger central to policymaking means putting people, not markets, at the center. We think that this is the task of a policy to defend a common good and that this is the ambit in which our association has to move with ever increasing decision at all levels and on many fronts.

We have to wage a relentless war on starvation: in Africa and in South America, in Asia and in the United States, in the countryside and in the great metropolises. There are no more urgent wars to be fought—there are no alternative priorities. We cannot speak about sustainability, about rights or about the future, if we do not speak, first and foremost, about hunger. Slow Food intends to take the battlefield without hesitation, fighting this war with no holds barred. FAO estimates that it will take 34 billion dollars a year—a ridiculous figure compared to the sums spent to bail European and American banks out of the financial crisis—to reverse the trend once and for all.

It is our job to pressurize our different governments into making the war on hunger the priority of world policy. We can't afford to wait any longer.



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2.1 From food to soil fertility

Food is what ought to remind us every day that we are part of Nature, that we belong to Nature, that we are inside Nature—the greatest living system. Food comes from Nature via the Earth and through it becomes culture. It then returns to Nature, again via the Earth. Exactly as we do who, at the end of our lives, become part of the Earth again. Our metabolism is that of all living systems: animals, plants, micro-organisms, the Earth itself. Ancient poets described metabolism as “the life breath”. I eat something that comes from the Earth, I digest it, I absorb its energy and then I restore it to the Earth. The planet on which we live also works in this way and its metabolism is what ensures life.

The soil too is a system made up of living beings. Its fertility depends on the life of these organisms and is indispensable for ensuring the lives of each of us and the life of the planet. In both cases, food production is of the utmost importance. The soil eats up what we restore to it, digesting and restoring in turn in a continuous cycle of connections that science has yet to explain fully.

By threatening and compromising soil fertility and soil's role as a living system, we jeopardize Earth's “life breath”, our life and the life of the planet we live on.

Choosing what to eat enables us to defend fertility, now increasingly threatened the world over by the intensive growing and breeding practices of industrial agriculture, by the misuse of chemicals on the land, by the dumping of sewage and effluents in the soil, by industrial waste, by refuse and so on. Then there are other forms of speculation that literally kill the soil, such as large alternative energy plants—solar cells on fertile land, for example—or large-scale engineering projects such as dams, bridges and roads. Sometimes the benefits of these projects fail to compensate for the definitive loss of fertile land. But in many areas of the planet, especially those considered most “developed”, soil fertility has another big enemy: overbuilding and indiscriminate urbanization. We do not possess enough data to give a full picture of the situation at global level—and probably many rural communities are still not affected by these problems or only partially so—but in many parts of the world the building of houses, apartment blocks, shopping malls and industrial plants is taking away huge swaths of land every day that could be producing food or at least ensuring our “life breath”, if only by remaining fallow and absorbing rainfall. This “consumed” soil has been lost forever.

It is hard for us to take a stand against this building work and these large-scale engineering projects individually, as ordinary inhabitants of this planet. But we can do it if we join forces as citizens and link up with other organizations to make our voice sound out loud in defense of soil fertility as a common good. It is easy, moreover, to choose or cultivate good, clean and healthy food that respects and maintains soil fertility. These are the arms we possess as food producers and co-producers to transform the simple act of eating into a message directed at those who fail to understand that soil fertility is sacred and that when a piece of land is “killed”, it is highly unlikely that it can come back to life again. With good, clean and fair food as a central part of our existence, we help maintain the “life breath” down the centuries.



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2.2 From food to the salubrity of water

Like our bodies, 70 percent of our planet is made up of water. The land we live on is enclosed in and crossed over by water. All our actions have an echo in a place of water, whether it is the sea, a river or a lake—or simply the air, which releases the substances it contains into water.

With regard to water, the adoption of the interdisciplinary approach, which demands analysis of every problem related to nature, becomes unavoidable. We have to understand the impact of our behavior on the land—not only in the agrifood sector, but also in other sectors of human activity, such as tourism, transport, industry, building and tourism—on the quality of internal waters and the sea.

This is why Slow Food is increasingly called upon to make pronouncements on issues that apparently have little to do with its immediate interests. Our behavior as consumers/users involves the same level of responsibility as that of politicians and industrialists. It is necessary to learn to reason in terms of our “water footprint”: meaning how much and how we move, how much occupation of the soil (hence “waterproofing”) we cause, how much water we fail to save or waste, how much water the food we choose “costs”. The planet only has one water supply network. The life of every drop of water we drink is connected to the life of the sea. The life of the river that runs through our city before running down to sea is connected to the water used by our factories.

There are three sides to the matter that we have to consider.

In the first, we can include all human activities that have nothing to do with food. Road building, transport, industry—all these activities need water and have consequences on water.

In the second, we can place all agribusiness-related activities, including the production of alternative energies. The way in which we cultivate our fields or raise our livestock may seriously pollute aquifers or use up too much water. In general, large-scale crop and livestock farming involving non-traditional varieties or breeds—hence unsuitable for a given area—require several inputs in terms of energy and water. It also implies high levels of water wastage and considerable outputs of, or failure to store, CO₂, with ulterior consequences in terms of problems for the water cycle. It may also contribute to climate change, another factor that affects the water cycle. The same applies to industrial food processing and distribution.

The third concerns food that comes directly from water, hence fishing, sea fishing in particular. At a planetary level, the situation of the seas is worrying: not only are they adversely affected by human activities on land, but they are also under such pressure from fishing that certain fish stocks are starting to teeter on the verge of extinction. It is necessary to grasp the scale of the problem in order to understand just how much damage and waste industrial fishing can cause and the level of sustainability small-scale coastal fishing can ensure. Besides, attempts to transfer productive models tested on land, such as farming, have clearly shown that, save for a few exceptions, their ecological impact is such that they cannot for the moment be considered a viable



alternative to fishing.

All of this concerns us and Slow Food's commitment in this field has to grow.

2.3 From food to the salubrity of the air

In our towns and cities, the fine dust and heavy metal particles in the air are above the safety level for most of the year. Lung and skin diseases caused by exposure to toxic agents are increasing, as is the frequency of tumors. The quality of our air is deteriorating all the time and, as a result, so is the quality of our lives. In health and, hence, money terms, the costs are weighing more and more on family and state budgets.

In 2010, 115 million containers were moved round the world and there was also, of course, a huge flow of goods transport by road and rail.

This means that the impact of global commerce on the quality of the planet's air is staggering. Food is largely responsible for increasing the already astronomical figures, with huge quantities of products travelling round the globe to go from field to table.

Food production has to be sustainable and enhance the quality of life and the environment—the air first and foremost. This is possible only with small-scale agriculture. Monoculture sees food as a commodity whose value is dictated exclusively by price. It cannot by its very nature be concerned about the impact of transport and the use of chemicals. Monocultures are dangerous for the environment and for people living near plantations. Air quality is deteriorated by chemical agents (fertilizers and pesticides) and the burden is made all the heavier by the huge amount of CO₂ emitted to transport products from one side of the globe to another.

This can and must not be tolerated any longer. It jeopardizes the salubrity of the air, the quality of our lives and our very survival. It is unthinkable that our future should still contemplate an agricultural system envisaging the arrival on our tables of food mostly produced thousands of miles away and conserved for sometimes very long periods to allow it to survive its useless journey.

We must and wish to question and radically change the prerequisites of a form of agriculture that has become a threat to the environment. Small-scale, local and organic are our answer to agroindustry with negative externalities.

2.4 From food to the defense of biodiversity

The question of biodiversity has long been at the top of the Slow Food and Terra Madre agenda. By "biodiversity" we mean the sum of all forms of life on the planet, comprising not only single species but also entire ecosystems.

The United Nations have declared the years 2011-2020 the "Decade on Biodiversity" and Slow Food intends to play a leading role in the initiative.

We have always promoted good, clean and fair food and, in so doing, have held in our hands an unmatched tool in the fight against the loss of biodiversity at many levels, from the wild to the agricultural. To promote local food and quality small-scale food



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production is, in fact, to protect animal breeds and plant varieties that may sometimes be less productive in an absolute sense, but do possess great capacities, matured over thousands of years of evolution, to adapt to a given organic and soil and climate conditions.

It is necessary to stress this point and raise awareness of the potential of quality food for the conservation of biodiversity, both biological and cultural.

The data are alarming and attention is growing even at institutional level (2010 was the “International Year of Biodiversity”). If we continue at this rate, by the end of the century 10 percent of all living species will be extinct. Another fundamental point for any understanding of the scope and magnitude of the phenomenon is that it is not only wild species that are at risk of extinction but, also and above all, species domesticated for the production of food. “FAO estimates that, to date, 75 percent of varieties of agrarian crops have been lost and that just twelve plant species and five animal breeds provide three quarters of world food” [Slow Food Position Paper on Biodiversity]. This means that we are well on the way to rendering the living system we are part of fragile, and that this system will have fewer and fewer resources to adapt to the inevitable changes and growing problems caused by the irresponsible use of natural resources.

Biodiversity offers us services that we cannot reproduce in any other way and which we cannot do without. To cite only the most glaring, a system with a high degree of biodiversity is capable of responding adequately to climate change and performing a very important function in climate regulation by keeping conditions constant, alleviating global warming and protecting very broad areas of the planet from the risk of hydrogeological upheaval. And let us not forget that the value of biodiversity is also aesthetic (hence economic, since much of our tourism, for example, owes its existence to our agrarian landscapes) and spiritual (hence protective of collective health) and that, last but not least, it performs a regenerating function. It is no coincidence, in fact, that the areas with a high level of biodiversity are the ones in which soil regeneration is highest and fastest, and in which the impact of polluting agents artificially released by human activity is mildest.

Biodiversity is important not only with regard to animal and plant species, but also to an infinity of human activities (cooking, craft food production and other craft activities, traditional medicine, rituals, festivals and so on) incapable of surviving the standardization of crops and production and processing techniques.

A production system that puts the survival of the planet at risk has to be countered by Slow Food and Terra Madre’s vision of food: it cannot and must not become a threat to biodiversity. Paradoxical but true, today we are living through a moment in history in which the main threat to the life of so many species is precisely the production of food, the element indispensable for life.

Large-scale food production, agroindustry, monoculture, chemical agriculture—these are the main culprits of the disaster. Sustainable local agriculture based on native techniques and species, which does not make indiscriminate use of chemicals, which does not waste water resources and which is concerned about more than just quantity—this is an effective tool to correct the current situation. We simply cannot go on like this. If agriculture manages to save itself, then it will save the planet too. And it can do so by privileging the local dimension, traditional and native varieties and the small scale.



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There is no other way out. The Terra Madre food communities are an example of this virtuous model.

The question of traditional and native varieties demands further reflection: seeds form the basis of any form of plant agriculture, determining not only its produce but also its model. Monoculture, so-called market-oriented industrial agriculture, is based on the productive performance of its own seeds, which have to be uniform and identical anywhere and in any climate. These are what are known as “commercial hybrids”, the fruit of the crossing of pure parental lines. The first generation produces good results, but insofar as these seeds are “clones”, not “families”. They do not possess the variability that converts into resistance and allows traditionally multiplied native species to respond more flexibly to the challenges of the climate and the conditions of a given area, they need to be supported by more external inputs (water, pesticides, insecticides and so on).

Sustainable agriculture, which seeks to have as little impact as possible on resources, even helping to keep them in good health, requires traditional seeds and has to maintain authority over how they reproduce, multiply and renew. Such seeds are increasingly less known today just as the expertise needed to protect them is increasingly less common. It is all very well to ask more and more people to grow their own gardens, but if these gardens can only count upon commercial hybrids they will only do half their job. True, they will be important for health, for the economy and for the landscape, but at the same time they will fail to truly protect the biodiversity of seeds and the environment. The many farmers who are still capable of reproducing and multiplying their seeds, all the consumers who have the authenticity of what they buy at heart and marketers who intend to work not only for profit but also for the good of the planet—all these people have to realize that there can be no food sovereignty without traditional seeds, hence must forge an alliance to up the ante on their importance. GMOs are an extreme case that hogs the limelight, but the interest of companies for the patentability of seeds is now shifting from GMOs to conventional seeds, indeed from seeds to finished products. In order to protect biodiversity and the practice of food sovereignty, it is thus necessary to firmly reassert the value of traditional seeds and find tools to curb their loss and that of skills, now underway at every latitude.

2.5 From food to the landscape

If we are members of the Slow Food movement and if we are part of the Terra Madre network, it is not only because we are concerned about the way we eat, but also because we are aware that, to eat in a good, clean and fair manner, it is vital for us to take good care of the part of the planet we live on. We love the places in which we live and work and we feel the duty to preserve them, using resources in such a way as not to hinder their renewal and seeking to realize their potential through agriculture. We feel obliged to take care of our land, because anyone who takes care of someone or something is showing love. And it is love that we feel for our land. Whether in the countryside or in the city, our ambition is to live in places in which food production, distribution and consumption are activities in harmony with the system in which they take place—which should never be distorted or compromised or destroyed.



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Usually, a place that is productive in a good, clean and fair way is a place we like. A nice place. It could be our fields, where we grow vegetables or graze animals. Or a rural or urban garden. Or where we go to market to meet and swap ideas and information. Or maybe even the place where we are convivial and have social relations with our friends. All of this is connected to food. For when food is good, clean and fair, everything is part of a system that is visibly beautiful. Meadows, woods, gardens, hamlets, villages, towns and cities that respect Nature—they form the daily landscape that we like the best, the one we would like to see every day and love to visit when we are on our travels. The landscape and its beauty are treasures that help us to live better, that make us feel well. They make existence more pleasant and they enhance the pride we feel for our land. Through food we thus have the opportunity to ensure that beauty surrounds us all the time and that future generations can enjoy it too. Beauty is not an option or a luxury, nor is it antithetical to human progress. In industrial societies too, much beauty has been squandered for the sake of a misguided idea of “progress”. Victims of “progress” are also the many agrarian societies that suffer neglect and dereliction or an excessive intensification of farming activities. Beauty has disappeared from their countryside.

In antiquity, beauty was also sought after and “cultivated”: our ancestors, at every latitude, always pursued it. Today we have to reiterate that, as in the past, beauty is indispensable for human well-being, a synonym of civilization and real progress. The more the beauty around us, the more there is real well-being. The beauty of the landscape is the most immediate proof of an area’s health, well balanced between human activity and natural luxuriousness. Beauty is an indicator of harmony, just as harmony has always been an indicator of beauty.

Beauty is a value—an absolute value but also a value of food. Good food not only gives pleasure, but is also a creator and conservator of beauty. The quality of the landscape in which we live is also symptomatic of how much our systems are good, clean and fair. This is why it needs to be defended.

2.6 From food to health

Eating “well” is a key element of good health. One of the many functions of food—one of the many rights of which it is a vehicle—is thus that of health. But this, alas, also means that the fate of food is tied to the fate of those rights.

In the market-dominated contemporary world, food—and the values and rights related to it—has become a commodity. Food is sold, food is bought and food is wasted.

The same is happening with health.

In the rich world, which unites the damage of highly industrialized food to that of an increasingly sedentary lifestyle, diseases such as obesity and diabetes and cardiovascular complaints are at an epidemiological danger point. What is this, if not a waste of health?

In the rich world, remedies are developed for disorders that could be avoided. But avoiding disorders is not functional to the market, hence resources that might be allocated to education and prevention fail to find the right channels. And consumers who are less and less informed about food fall ill more and more and buy an increasing



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number of medicines. Health is a commodity.

Where there is no money, there is hunger for health, but this is a world for which the market has no interest. It is very profitable to create—simply by investing in training—ignorant wealthy consumers who eat badly and have sky-high cholesterol levels. They are in a position to buy medicines and nutraceuticals. It is highly unlikely that, with no food culture, they will be of any use, but that is not a problem for the market. Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, a poor person may catch malaria but cannot buy a remedy that has not been developed anyway.

The market cannot put right the damage it causes. It is necessary to intervene to thwart both the increase in “diseases of prosperity” and hunger and malnutrition.

Health should be considered a common good. The health of an individual is part of a system of interdependencies, part of the health of a community and its ability to take care of its territory, itself and its future.

Health is not a personal effect. Of course, we have rights *to* our health, but we are not the only ones responsible *for* our health nor the only victims of our lack of health. There cannot be individual health without collective health.

Health is a common good because it concerns not only the present generations, but also those of the future. To future generations we transmit not only our DNA, but also an environment and a level of health directly connected to the way in which we behave and eat today. And what applies to health also applies to other common goods:

- everyone has the right to have access to it
- everyone has the duty not to waste it and favor the conditions for its renewal, conservation and fair distribution.

The path that leads me to choose food inadequate for my body, hence to create the conditions for my own personal heart attack is the same that leads me to support a food system that exacerbates climate change, for example, maybe causing drought in parts of the world where, if I had behaved differently, people could be living better. Instead, they have neither enough wealth to buy health nor responsibility for the health problem that has been foisted upon them.

Sustainable food production, combined with adequate suitable citizen-consumer education, helps create and maintain health. This is why we believe that health falls within the competence of Slow Food.

2.7 From food to knowledge and memory

In human history, food production, conservation and distribution have built an immense legacy of knowledge that has been conveyed through time and space and is constantly changing to ensure adaptability and efficiency. Storing memory and handing down knowledge from one generation to the next are an effective method for not repeating the mistakes of others, but also a primary condition for discovering new frontiers and new



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opportunities. For centuries, this knowledge has been one of the distinctive characteristics of communities. Women, farmers and the elderly were its main repositories and transmitters.

Combined with native cultures, this variegated cognitive system is now defined as traditional knowledge. In the course of time, it has been reinforced by practice and handed down orally inside families and communities. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, with big business's control of science and the commercialization of knowledge through patents, a dualism was consolidated between official science and traditional knowledge that is of no benefit to the common good. Slow Food believes that only through dialogue, dialectics and the mutual exchange between these two realms of knowledge is it possible to imagine a sustainable future. But this dialogue must take place among peers, thus enhancing mutual competences and specificities.

New technologies are by no means at odds with this dialogue and may, indeed, help to catalogue and spread traditional knowledge. The University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenzo is working in this direction through a system of applied research entitled "The Granaries of Memory". New audiovisual tools allow students, food communities and convivia to collect oral records and convivial practices and rites to catalogue and subsequently make available to all those interested in knowledge transmission. The small university in Pollenzo, opened in 2004, the same year as Terra Madre, is part of our broader educational project. The fact that it is attended by students from 62 different countries is the best guarantee possible of vitality, longevity and progress for our ideas and our projects

Meanwhile, other forms of socialization of knowledge are springing up within the world of Slow Food. They include training schools for young farmers in other universities and the "Grandmothers' University" in Ireland. Insofar as they are a guarantee of innovation and a holistic approach capable of lending dignity to community knowledge, it is important to incentivize diverse pluralist knowledge systems. Just as communities claim food sovereignty, it is equally vital to grant sovereignty over the knowledge that has developed in the course of time at the service of the common good. The exchange of this knowledge among the Terra Madre communities is our movement's most important and most gratifying mission. Participatory democracy cannot exist without the recognition and circulation of the food knowledge of communities for the well-being of future generations and the natural world. The right to food without the socialization of knowledge is a mere pipedream.

2.8 From food to pleasure, social relations, conviviality and sharing

The grassroots organizational structure of the Slow Food movement is known as a convivium, a word that conjures up the banquet, getting together round a table not only to break bread but also to talk and discuss and indulge in social relations. This is arguably the highest, noblest concept that food culture has consolidated in the course of time. Social relations, the swapping of ideas and stories, affectivity, friendly joking and even business agreements—all these things can take place through the sharing of food.



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Towards the mid 1970s, Ivan Illich, one of the great contemporary thinkers, popularized a new concept of conviviality and convivial society, pitting it against utilitarianism and the production systems that mortify the labor of millions of people. Conviviality reinforces the pursuit of the common good and the capacity of every individual to shape his or her own future by generating efficiency without degrading the environment. In fact, small-scale agricultural production, well-rooted local economies and food artisans could be the leading players of conviviality. At this moment in time, the support the Slow Food movement and Terra Madre provide to the world's farmers, fishers and shepherds is the most important contribution to change for a food system that has stopped working. The best expression of conviviality is a conscious rapport between consumers and producers—no longer passive but now aware, responsible co-producers. Farmers' markets and community-supported agriculture are very real forms of sociality and new conviviality. This is the new playing field for politics, and it is here that the economy and intergenerational relations can be changed, that the return of young people to the land can be incentivized and that dignity can be restored to young farmers.

Knowledge transmission from one generation to another is also an act of new conviviality.

For all these reasons, it is important to reassert the importance of the name—convivia—that we give our grassroots organizational structures, precisely because it is here that it is possible to create not only the pleasure of the banquet but also new forms of conviviality. We are the only movement that manages to encompass the right to pleasure and social and cultural commitment. In other words, the pleasure of shared commitment.

In its dual meaning of eating food and social relations, conviviality is an essential component of human well-being and can be achieved creatively and in diverse ways all over the world.

The whole Slow Food movement is called upon to express this creativity with commitment and passion.

3. WHAT WE ARE DOING

If we analyze the operational prospects offered by the points discussed above, we cannot help but stress how each of them refers to a sphere not so much of the opportunities food gives us to design a better world as of inalienable human rights. Soil fertility, the salubrity of the air and water, biodiversity, the pristine landscape, health, knowledge and memory, social relations – these are rights, not the privileges of those who can afford to buy them. It is our duty to reassert them. But how?

The four ambitions listed below are the ones to which we should devote our commitment over the next few years. These are the goals we have identified for our next mandate.

3.1 A return to the land

We are not being rhetorical when we say that, for humanity—the whole of humanity—a return to the land will be vital. We have every opportunity to make this happen, and



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there are many ways to approach the problem so that everyone is involved, no one excluded.

In the first instance, a return to the land could mean actually growing crops and farming. All over the world the countryside has been depopulated. More and more often, young people no longer feel the need to carry on the work of their fathers. Where their families have stopped working the land for generations, farming work is rarely seen as a life options for youngsters.

In industrialized countries, the first to experience this process, the countryside has been emptied of people and filled with machines. The same thing is happening, at a varying rate, in newly industrializing countries. According to UNO data, since 2009 more than half the world's population lives in urban areas. Three years ago, country was overtaken by town for the first time in history (3.42 billion urban inhabitants against 3.41 billion urban dwellers) and forecasts based on statistical calculations confirm the trend for the future. So who is going to grow our food?

We need people in the countryside, so it is necessary to encourage young people to return to farming. To do this it takes land, tools, infrastructure, simpler red-tape, funding, proper education and the handing down of traditional knowledge. But what is necessary most of all is to restore pride and dignity to farm work, one of the most useful, delicate, important and, it has to be added, beautiful forms of labor of all. Making food for oneself and for one's neighbor is the purest and most complete way of giving food a central role, of being a harmonious part of natural systems, of interacting respectfully with these systems to make them evolve and of drawing from them a means of sustenance and a gratification that few jobs in the world can equal.

Objectively speaking, however, not everyone has the chance to return to the farming profession. People who live in urban areas, for example. But even in urban areas, it is possible to "go back to the land". Indeed, this is becoming an absolute necessity now that the number of people in the world who live in towns and cities easily exceeds those who live in the countryside. On the one hand we can "cultivate towns and cities", on the other we can all become co-producers. We can and must become farmers again, even if we do not actually grow anything.

It is not difficult to cultivate towns and cities, and the most immediate tools to do this are gardens. There are many examples of community and personal urban gardens in Slow Food and in the Terra Madre network. Urban greenery can be productive and not only decorative. And suburban agriculture is indispensable for building local food distribution systems, such as farmers' markets or group buying, even in towns and cities. Last but not least, suburbs and the countryside just outside urban areas are able to serve cities with local, seasonal food. Food processing also needs to return to the land, seen as a return to ancient, traditional knowledge, to the know-how and trades that are disappearing along with biodiversity and the farming labor connected to them. Recovering, relearning and supporting trades and evoking the most profound importance of craftsmanship are another way we have for returning to the land, whether in rural communities or in the middle of a metropolis.

But the easiest way to go back to the land is possible for all of us wherever we live. It is



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our choice of food, our awareness that “eating is an agricultural act”. Only in this way can we transform ourselves from passive “consumers” into active “co-producers”, sharing our knowledge of food with those who produce it, appreciating and paying the right price for their efforts to provide good, clean and fair food, following the seasons, seeking out local food as much as possible, promoting it and teaching its characteristics and production methods to their children. To become “co-producers” is to become farmers deep inside, to learn all about food again and then return to the land, without necessarily cultivating it directly. Co-producers support people who go back to the land and believe that food can continue to embody important and indispensable values for a life worthy of the name.

But the return to the land is also a political question. In each of our countries, it is the job of politicians to make choices and implement policies that go in the right direction. It is our job to ask questions, to stress the urgency of the matter, to raise it in the appropriate centers of decision-making and assert the responsibility of politics for making certain decisions.

3.2 The war on waste

Forecasts all seem to agree on the fact that, in 2050, there will 9 billion people sharing the planet. Considering that today (with a world population of 7 billion) a billion people do not eat adequately, the prospects look gloomy. The most disparate and “authoritative” voices are increasingly stressing the fact that, to feed everyone, it will be necessary to increase productivity by 70 percent (with cultivated land decreasing in the meantime).

Hence the rush to genetically manipulate seeds to create hyperproductive plant species. Hence the idea of feeding meat animals on antibiotics and hormones to make them grow in half the normal time. Hence the inevitable destruction of forests to obtain arable land (which nonetheless loses its fertility in the space of a few seasons anyway).

In short, who can worry about biodiversity, animal well-being and climate change when people are dying or risk dying of hunger?

But there is an element missing in this analysis—often left unsaid more in bad faith than out of shallowness—that cannot help but leave us with our stomachs knotted: namely that today the earth produces food for 12 billion people. Forty percent of all food produced is wasted and turns to waste without even getting near to the table.

Food is wasted for different and sometimes opposite reasons according to areas of the planet. In the global North, too much food is produced and bought and it is often disposed of even before it perishes. On top of this, an increasingly numerous segment of consumers have forgotten the lessons of their elders—who experienced hunger in the past—and developed a shallow approach, often also the fruit of a loss of culinary culture and skill. People demand only the finest cuts of meat and only a few fish species, the ones that are easiest to cook. Uniformity is perceived as a merit and non-standard fruit and vegetables get discarded. As a result, a shameful amount of food ends up being incinerated—its subsequent disposal, incidentally, requiring further energy consumption.



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In the global South, on the other hand, food is wasted for lack of adequate infrastructure, conservation facilities and prompt transport. But food is also wasted by pitting the production of biofuels, biogas and large quantities of feed for animals in competition against food for humans. In some parts of the planet this competition is heavily biased towards the interests of speculators and agribusiness.

Faced with this situation, the productivism paradigm starts to creak, at which point it is up to us to try to break it down altogether. We cannot continue to accept a situation in which the soil is increasingly put under stress and needs to be fertilized with chemicals to conserve its productivity—meaning polluted, useless aquifers. Above all, we cannot accept the fact that all this is happening without the waste on which the system is based being called into question.

Productivism and waste—the one complementary to the other—open the way for the technicization of food. The risk is that the door will be opened once and for all to a scientific approach that looks to technology for magic solutions to a scarcity that does not exist.

We have to fight against food wastage. We have to restore value to food and sacrality to the moment of its consumption. Besides being stupid, senseless and costly, wasting food is an immoral act.

It is necessary to stress that the system in which we find ourselves as consumers, producers or intermediaries is founded on a mechanism of waste and overproduction and on the rapid selling off of stock to put new products on the market. In other words, waste is no accident; it is organic to the system.

If this albeit perverse mechanism can be endured as far as goods are concerned, when food enters the system it stops working. Unfortunately, according to the agroindustrial approach, food has become, to all intents and purposes, a commodity whose value coincides exclusively with price and on which it is possible to speculate and gamble. Above all, like other commodities, it has to circulate rapidly and unhindered. In the consumer society in which we live, it is unthinkable for the production-consumption-disposal-production cycle to stop. On the contrary, the aim is to step up the closure and reopening the circle as much as possible.

Slow Food has to fight this battle, a battle for civilization. World hunger has to be beaten and the war on waste can and must become the emblem of the battle. It is necessary to restore value to the concept of food and, once and for all, stop seeing it as a good.

3.3 Local economy and participatory democracy

The local dimension respects the needs of the land, and we can actively support this dimension through the act of producing or choosing the we food eat. Our convivium and our food community are the places in which we can work and act so that the portion of the living system entrusted to us and of which we are part can work constructively. In practice, it is at the local level that change can start. For it is to be expected that we know our land, warts and all, in the minutest detail, that we can promote its merits and correct its defects, that we understand it and are in a position to watch over it.



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The most logical thing we can do is to support and enact local-scale practices. Acting on a local scale means, above all, making local economies: taking care of the home, of the land, setting off virtuous processes or enhancing existing ones. It is also possible in the ambit of food production and distribution and the choices we make when we do our shopping. In the local dimension, it is easier to be co-producers, helping producers to ensure that they are gratified, suitably remunerated and enjoy decent living conditions. In turn, everything should be done to ensure that “co-producers” can buy food at prices that are fair for themselves and for producers. The best way to set off the little big changes we are hoping for is to start from our own lives, our behavior and the relationship we have with the land and the people who live on it.

We have to support the small scale at the productive level because the future of agricultural systems will be production in the local dimension, mainly for the local community. It is a way of producing that, insofar as it is carried out *by* people looking after the land *for* people looking after the land, can save native animal breeds and plant varieties, hence biodiversity. It avoids overexploitation of resources such as land, water and energy to ensure that they can be renewed and will be available in the future. The small scale is the dimension in which traditional and popular knowledge can be handed down from father to son, but also handed on from farmer to farmer. The small-scale and local economies are conducive to the dissemination and conservation of knowledge, the forming of identity and the affirmation of individuals and communities. At the same time, they are the prerequisites for exchange and the conditions that make it possible, just like the Terra Madre network. We do not intend to build closed local economy and small-scale production/distribution systems. We want them to be strong and independent, hence as open as possible. We have already seen that, without local economies, there would be no Terra Madre, no producers or “co-producers” and no exchange between them: exchange of knowledge, products, information, innovation and sincere friendship.

It also has to be pointed out that the small productive scale is not a “return to the past”, but is as modern as can be—even from an economic point of view. It has been demonstrated, in fact, that many small-scale economies produce at least as much as large-scale or global-scale systems. They are fairer, more sustainable systems for the distribution of wealth and well-being at every level, from the personal to the global.

Finally, local economy and small scale are the most direct forms of participatory democracy; they fully entitle people to be part of a community and make it lively and prolific in a proactive manner. They enable us to take hold of our lives and those of our friends, instead of letting others decide for us on decisive questions such as our rights and the rights of the Earth. We can be the fulcrum of these systems, which are the place of diversity and identity, of sustainability and pleasure, of agroecology and changes in paradigm, of conviviality and gifts. They are the place of happiness and food sovereignty, of a freedom to choose how to eat that is also “existential sovereignty”.

3.4 Permanent education

The key word to describe what we are saying is “education”. There can be no change in behavior and culture, if we fail to accept a commitment to education as an integral part



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of that change. The job of such a commitment is, above all, to question itself, to revolutionize first its own methodologies, then the contents of its teaching. If, as we said in Turin in 2010, “educating means making the future”, the quality of the future we are making depends on the quality and the quantity of the education we are capable of offering.

Who educates whom? And what should the content of this education be? And how should it be taught?

The answer to the first question is deceptively simple: “Everybody educates everybody”. This is undeniable and it is part of our daily experience: we check and rectify all the things we know, the things we understand, the things we learn from many sources by referring to as many other sources. Consciously or otherwise, we are constantly exposed to the educational action of someone or something. But it is just as undeniable that some elements are more powerful than others and that in education there are some actors who do not declare their intents. The market system is a powerful educational actor, but the contents of its education and the messages it conveys are not in tune with our idea of the world, in which the rights we have spoken of— especially the right to good, clean, fair food for all— are guaranteed. Another important actor is obviously school but, admittedly, the whole teaching system needs to be revolutionized to become functional to the change we are calling and move in the direction of universal justice and well-being.

Then come us and associations like ours: our educational potential is very high indeed. We have long made it concrete, teaching by doing, learning by tasting, observing and growing. The experiences first of the Taste Workshops, then of the School Gardens, the educational events we have organized over the years and our association’s incessant publishing work have made us a point of reference for education on the subjects of taste, the environment and agriculture and food. In 2004, these experiences and these skills gave life to the University of Gastronomic Sciences. We have to make sure that young people have the tools they need to practice what we are supporting and working for. The future generations are our greatest investment; they have to be able to make food central to their lives and return to the land fully aware of how important it is to cultivate or be “co-producers”. None of this can happen without a complex, interdisciplinary educational vision and a holistic approach. Every year our University trains dozens of new gastronomes who are fully aware of the fact that on this planet everything is interconnected and that nothing to do with a living system—which is what food is—can be understood without studying that system with an open, complex, interdisciplinary approach.

This is what the main content of our educational actions has to be: complexity and connection. True, it is necessary to study the single elements, but it is also necessary to study with just as much care the reciprocal dynamics that connect them. We have no use for expert honey tasters who have no idea about the role of bees in agricultural production and the damage being done to them by chemical-based agriculture. Without education there is no awareness of the value of food; and without this competence—the ability to recognize quality and value—the only choice criterion is price. This is where market-oriented industrial agriculture comes out on top, since it has the power and/or the arrogance to lower prices.



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The way we conduct education also contains a part of the change we need. All the actors of change—all those who want to see it happen—have equal dignity and are all sources of knowledge. Researchers, children, plants, animals, the elderly, youngsters, producers—each holds a piece of the knowledge we need, each has to find the space and ways to communicate what they know and learn from the others.

All the goals Slow Food is setting itself for the next few years have education as their cornerstone. In this respect, it is also important for us to stimulate the policies of our respective countries and supranational policies so that the educational action intrinsic in sustainable food production is acknowledged and promoted as a further strong point and an element of protection for a community's cultural heritage.

We at Slow Food are committed to education at every level in diverse contexts. We cater for everyone—from children to grandparents, from farmers to engineers—in every corner of the world. We also intend to raise our efforts in this field according to a model that promotes and supports mutuality, conviviality, the small scale and the protection of common goods. In order to multiply our chances of achieving the common objective of a future in which food at last regains the central role it deserves, we must learn to be more and more permeable, to welcome and network with people who go about education with the same spirit as we do.