

A TERROIR-IST'S MANIFESTO FOR EATING IN PLACE

Know where your food has come from through knowing those who produced it for you, from farmer to forager, rancher or fisher to earthworms building a deeper, richer soil, to the heirloom vegetable, the nitrogen-fixing legume, the pollinator, the heritage breed of livestock, & the sourdough culture rising in your flour.

Know where your food has come from by the very way it tastes: its freshness telling you how far it may have traveled, the hint of mint in the cheese suggesting what the goat has eaten, the terroir of the wine reminding you of the lime in the stone you stand upon, so that you can stand up for the land that has offered it to you.

Know where your food has come from by ascertaining the health & wealth of those who picked & processed it, by the fertility of the soil that is left in the patch where it once grew, by the traces of pesticides found in the birds & the bees there. Know whether the bays & shoals where your shrimp & fish once swam were left richer or poorer than before you & your kin ate from them.

Know where your food comes from by the richness of stories told around the table recalling all that was harvested nearby during the years that came before you, when your predecessors & ancestors, roamed the same woods & neighborhoods where you & yours now roam.

Know them by the songs sung to praise them, by the handmade tools kept to harvest them, by the rites & feasts held to celebrate them, by the laughter let loose to show them our affection.

Know where your foods come from by the patience displayed while putting them up, while peeling, skinning, coring or gutting them, while pit-roasting, poaching or fermenting them, while canning, salting or smoking them, while arranging them on a plate for our eyes to behold. Know where your food comes from by the slow savoring of each and every morsel, by letting their fragrances lodge in your memory reminding you of just exactly where you were the very day that you became blessed by each of their distinctive flavors.

When you know where your food comes from you can give something back to those lands & waters, that rural culture, that migrant harvester, curer, smoker, poacher, roaster or vintner. You can give something back to that soil, something fecund & fleeting like compost or something lasting & legal like protection. We, as humans, have not been given roots as obvious as those of plants. The surest way we have to lodge ourselves within this blessed earth is by knowing where our food comes from.

Gary Paul Nabhan, Ph.D

On behalf of Renewing America's Food Traditions (RAFT). Organized by Slow Food USA, RAFT brings together seven of the country's most prominent education, conservation and food organizations to carry out a common mission. From Buckeye chickens to Creole cream cheese, Makah Ozette potatoes to Pacific rockfish, RAFT initiatives bring food producers, chefs and consumers together to develop and promote conservation strategies, sustainable food production and awareness of the endangered foods and food traditions of the United States. www.garynabhan.com