



Slow Food®

Food and Taste Education One of Slow Food's major objectives

Today people use their senses less and less. Hence our touch, taste and smell have progressively deteriorated. The pressures of time and the speed of our lives are taking away faculties that can give us a deeper, more varied and more authentic knowledge of the world around us.

These very senses link us to memories of important people, places and times in our lives. The smell of a dish your grandmother used to make, the feel of the soft, smooth skin of a newborn child, the taste of roast turkey, steak and kidney pie or the shortbread that your mother used to make can immediately carry you back to a day, a room, a conversation you were once a part of while sitting at the dinner table. The young generations in particular risk losing touch with the land and the seasons. They also risk any sense of what the act of eating really means.

Slow Food launched the **Taste Education** project precisely to teach young people to develop the use of their senses and help them understand the importance of food as an integral part of a society's culture.

This program is different from many other food education projects because it is not confined solely to nutrition. It also emphasizes that food means pleasure, culture and conviviality. It teaches values and attitudes, enhances relationships and transforms the emotions. Educational material, in the form of courses, talks, conferences and taste workshops, is available for teachers to use in their classrooms.

In Italy one of the first programs was the **Taste Week**, first held in 1993. During the seven days, experts and artisans met with students to share their knowledge and thoughts on food, while sensory workshops allowed students to experience firsthand the important role their senses play.

The next step was to develop a teaching program. During the 1998/1999 school year, **Slow Food Italy** was recognized by the **Italian Ministry of Education** as a **training body in the field of food and sensory education**. Since then, the program has become more permanent, providing training and refresher courses for teachers in schools at all levels.

An estimated 12,000 school teachers have participated in the Slow Food courses since 1998, sharing their knowledge with thousands of students and parents in taste education programs. The course textbook is the manual entitled *Dire, fare, gustare* (Say, Do, Taste).

A new textbook on sensory education was presented at the Fifth International Slow Food Congress in Puebla, Mexico, in November 2007. It is entitled *In What Sense? (In che senso?)* and is available in printed and electronic formats in English and Italian.

Remaining in the area of school education, in 2001 Slow Food USA led the first national **School Gardens** project, with members building vegetable gardens on school grounds to allow children to grow their own food, develop skills and stimulate their senses.

In view of the positive results, Slow Food USA set up an Educational Committee to launch the Garden Project nationwide. In just two years, 30 school gardens sprang up around the US. The program, now called the 'Garden-to-Table' project, has expanded to include after-school cooking programs and farm tours.

Thanks to the hard work of Alice Waters, Matt Jones, Todd Wickstrom and Laurence Mate, among others, the program was a great success, and in 2003 the International Slow Food Congress decided that every convivium in the world should set up School Garden projects. At the Slow Food Italy National Congress in Sanremo in 2006 the school garden was renamed **Orto in Condotta**.

Convivium Gardens follow the three fundamental principles of the association's philosophy: Good, Clean and Fair.

Good, because sensory analysis workshops train children and parents to recognize food by its sensory qualities and demand and appreciate quality in school cafeterias.

Clean, because young people learn to use organic and biodynamic production methods, to source and safeguard the seeds of local food varieties and to reduce food miles by favoring local foods.

Fair because it endorses the passing of knowledge from generation to generation, acknowledging the social role of the elderly and of volunteers, encouraging collaboration between diverse worlds and forming partnerships with developing countries.

Today the number of Convivium Gardens is rapidly increasing all over the world: there are now about 200 in Italy and 100 in the rest of the world.

Teachers in the Taste Education program are trained by instructors, who themselves follow 'Training Courses', another key element in the Convivium Garden project. Such courses cover everything from horticulture to food education to curriculum planning. Instructors are chosen among teachers, educators and Convivium leaders who are active in food and taste education, communications experts, local food promoters, agronomists and dieticians.

Starting in 2008, each year the Italian school gardens will mark the end of the agricultural year with the National Festival of the Orti in Condotta on the *Estate di San Martino* (St. Martin's Day, a kind of Indian summer celebration) on November 11th.

Education has always been an important part of events organized by Slow Food, enabling people to discover quality food and produce in Italy and around the world. Markets and conferences are always accompanied by **specific activities for young adults and schoolchildren**.

Judging by the reaction of the general public, Slow Food's trademark **Taste Workshops** are definitely a winning formula. They were inaugurated at the Vinitaly wine exhibition in Verona (Italy) in 1994, and have since become a prominent feature of Slow Food events large and small. Hour-long workshops are conducted by experts who describe techniques of tasting; discuss how a product relates to others; and explain how it is produced. Often local producers and specialists also take part. The enormous success of these workshops shows how they meet the deep need people now feel to understand food better and relate to it in a pleasurable way, rediscovering sensory awareness firsthand under expert supervision.

People no longer want to think of food as just a necessity or a nutritional requirement, but relate to it through pleasure, using their senses. Many are now interested in discovering and learning about the distinctive qualities of rare and precious foods, but no longer just from an intellectual perspective. They want a guided tasting that gives them a hands-on experience. The enormous success of these workshops shows that taste workshops are meeting these needs.

Because of the large number of people and producers attending from around the world, at large events such as the Salone del Gusto, Cheese and Slow Fish, the Taste Workshops are simultaneously translated into or from English.

Slow Food supports an innovative, original approach to food and taste education based on reawakening and training the senses, learning food production techniques and tasting as an educational experience.

These principles underlie the **Master of Food** program, designed for people who want an alternative to conventional educational courses or short food events. The aim is not to train food professionals so much as to help consumers become more aware, satisfying their interest in food and encouraging informed and responsible shopping choices.

The Master of Food is the most comprehensive and innovative food study program for Slow Food members. It addresses the whole spectrum of food and wine and is divided into 23 subjects that are covered in about 90 theoretical and practical lessons. The courses are organized by *condotte*, the local branches of the association around Italy.

Slow Food members who participate in at least 15 of the 23 courses are awarded the title of Master of Food, recognition of their commitment and dedication in furthering their knowledge of food culture.

Slow Food expects that in 2009 approximately 7000 people will attend 350 courses offered during the year. In keeping with the philosophy of the Master, Slow Food provides business organizations and associations tailor-made courses for their employees and associates.

Starting at Salone del Gusto 2008, examples of the Master of Food program can be found at Slow Food's big events. This year you will find them at Slow Fish (in Genoa, April 17-20) and at Cheese (in Bra, September 18-21).