



Slow Food®



Fondazione Slow Food
per la Biodiversità
ONLUS

Ark of Taste and Presidia

The Ark of Taste was set up to catalog, describe and draw attention to currently fading flavors from around the world and food products (linked to a specific community and culture) at risk of dying out, yet with real productive and commercial potential. Its mission is to preserve these endangered tastes — fruit and vegetables, fresh and cured meats, cheeses, cereals, pastas, cakes, sweets and so on — and give them wider exposure.

The idea of adopting this biblical metaphor for food dates back to 1996 and the first Salone del Gusto in Turin. A year later, the newly established Scientific Commission of the Ark in Italy drew up product selection criteria. In brief, food products must: be of outstanding quality in terms of taste, be rooted in a specific local geographic area, be produced by artisans, be farmed sustainably and be in danger of extinction. The Ark now boasts over 700 food products from 52 countries, from Argentine Capia Corn to Sicily's Iblei Mountain Thyme Honey, from Navajo-Churro Sheep in New Mexico (USA) to Finnish Kalakukko bread.

Commissions were set up in other countries around the world, first in the USA and Germany, then in Switzerland, The Netherlands, France and Spain. The International Commission was established on October 26 2002 at the Salone del Gusto in Turin and comprised members from these national groups. This body monitors the selection process throughout the world and offers a way for different countries to share their experiences. The Ark can also choose food products from countries where there are no commissions or where Slow Food does not yet have members.

Slow Food Presidia

The presidia are the operational arm of the Ark of Taste. These small projects help groups of artisan producers preserve traditional growing methods and products. Sometimes it is simply necessary to unite producers, help coordinate marketing and promotion, and establish quality and authenticity standards for their products. However, when an artisan product is close to disappearing, greater effort may be required; it may be necessary, for example, to build a slaughterhouse, to install a new oven, to renovate a dilapidated farmhouse ...

The presidia are projects specific to local geographic areas. They may involve a single cheesemaker — perhaps the last custodian of a cheesemaking method — or a group of thousands of small farmers, but the goal remains the same: to promote artisan products, stabilize food production techniques, establish stringent production standards and, most importantly, to ensure a viable future for traditional foods.

In Italy there are 177 presidia involving more than 1300 small-scale producers that protect the most endangered products from Veneto's Burlina cattle, whose milk is used to make Grappa Morlacco Cheese, to Garfagnana Potato Bread from Tuscany made of wheat and mashed potatoes, from Pitina cured meat from Friuli to Sicily's natural sweetener, Manna, extracted from the bark of two types of ash tree in the Madonie Mountains. In 2008 Slow Food Italy created a brand for Presidia producers. Placed on the packaging, it protects and adds value to the product, helps consumers identify authentic Presidia products and guards against the increasing number of falsely labeled products. Only products featuring the colorful "Presidio Slow Food®" logo are truly part of the project (www.presidislowlowfood.it).

With the addition of 120 international presidia, the Slow Food network has expanded to include examples of biodiversity from around the world, such as Bario Rice from Borneo in Malaysia, Mananara Vanilla from Madagascar, Huehuetenango Highland Coffee from Guatemala and Oscypek cheese made in the Tatra Mountains in Poland. The challenges facing small-scale farmers in the Alps or Apennines are equivalent to those of the *campesinos* in Chiapas and the final few heroic makers of raw milk cheese in Britain.