

Convivial Pursuits

**A guide to organizing Slow Food
activities, projects and events**

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Introduction and Acknowledgements

Welcome to *Convivial Pursuits*, a guide that helps convivium leaders help each other.

One of the most vital roles you play as the leader of your convivium is in organizing activities. Convivium activities are very important to the movement because they are the way in which the Slow Food philosophy is made real. These activities are often the first point of contact for people – like us – that are interested in good, clean and fair food and curious about our movement. Many convivium leaders, and hopefully you yourself, have found that the more activities a convivium holds the more members tend to join and renew. This is certainly something we want, and will help the movement increase its presence and the difference it can make in our communities, but it is not the only purpose of activities. The events you organize are also the venue for your existing members to get together, share stories, flavors, ideas and the passion that unites the entire Slow Food movement.

It is for this reason that an active convivium is a successful convivium.

But then, what is a *successful* activity? As we have learned in talking to leaders all over the world, convivia can have any number of goals and countless ways to achieve them. But whether your goal is to raise money for Terra Madre, share a quiet meal with other members, defend biodiversity, a combination of these or something altogether different, a successful activity is one with a clear goal that it meets while making every effort to break even financially.

For this, the options are many, and the strategies numerous; with that in mind, we have collected a number of examples from convivia worldwide to illustrate some possible goals and some ways to achieve them. From a dinner highlighting sustainable fishing practice in Spain to a successful fundraiser in Maine, from a farmers' market in Lebanon to a camp-oven cook off in Australia, we hope that these stories will inspire convivium leaders everywhere – offering a starting point for new convivium leaders and some new ideas for those that have been doing this a little longer. This guide has come from all of you, and it is for all of you.

We are as ever grateful for all of the work you have done, not only on this guide, but also in creating a vibrant and dynamic part of the movement in your area. And like the Slow Food movement, this guide will always be a work-in-progress that can only benefit from your input. We've chosen this online format to allow the guide to be easily updated and hope you'll contribute your ideas and suggestions and more examples to make it even better – just write to us at international@slowfood.com.

Guidelines

1. Enjoy yourself.

First and foremost, Slow Food is about the pleasure we can find through food and enjoying it with others, and this is vital not only to your activities themselves, but also to the whole process of organizing them. You and others in your convivium are more likely to organize an activity again if doing so is not a stressful, traumatizing experience. And it certainly need not be. While the idea of finding pleasure in organizing these activities may not seem foreign to you, it is easily overlooked, especially given that there might be many goals rolled up into your activity that you wish to reach, not all of them having to do with enjoying yourself.

This fundamental principle of pleasure is very important to uphold in your activities. As many convivia have found, sharing the Slow Food philosophy in a personal, convivial way is the most effective means of making an event enjoyable and bringing in new members. People can understand why it is important to support local food producers if they meet a farmer or fisherman face to face and make that connection between these people, the food on their plate and the pleasure that food offers.

So we repeat again: enjoy yourself and spending this time with others.

Being able to take the time to do this takes us directly to #2:

2. Start Slowly.

In other words: Be realistic. Know your limits. Proceed with caution.

And by this, we're referring to every aspect of activity planning. Of course, every convivium is different: some have just enough resources to plan the three activities required by the International Statute, while others may be able to hold events monthly or even more frequently. Being effective and staying sane mean finding the mix and frequency that is just right for you and your committee.

By pacing yourself, you can ensure that your event is a success. Getting a positive reaction to a simple event will increase support for your convivium and future activities and bring people back for more – this goes for both organizers and participants – while taking on too much can be detrimental if too many problems arise and may even discourage people from participating or helping out again.

However, knowing your limits is *not* necessarily the same thing as limiting yourself. Stay open to diverse and creative ideas and work out what is reasonable to do now and what can wait for the future. Consider also what is seasonal and what can be held another time because it is independent of season. Brainstorm the types of activities and goals your convivium would like to achieve and start with those which provide a good introduction for members and the local community and which are on a par with available resources.

When you're first starting out as a convivium, the best option may be to stick to organizing the three events or activities required by the Slow Food International

Statute. This will help to build momentum (attracting more members and more local recognition) and a solid base with which to launch more ambitious undertakings.

This base includes not just the members and potential members that participate in the activities, but also the members involved in organizing them. Feasibility has a lot to do with how much the organizers will enjoy themselves, how motivated they will be and the level of continuity you all can attain.

3. Plan, plan, plan.

The best – and perhaps only – way to ensure that your activity or event is a success is to plan it carefully. Know what to expect and what possible problems might arise so that you'll be prepared for whatever comes your way. Having a brilliant idea for an activity is only a part of the process of organizing an activity; to ensure its success, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- **Why?**
What is the purpose of your activity? What do you hope to achieve?
- **What?**
What kind of an activity will this be? What food do you want to highlight?
- **Who?**
Who will attend? Who are the best food people to involve in the event? Who will host it? Who will publicize it? Who will pick up supplies/food? Who will cook? Who will clean up?
- **When?**
When will you hold it? Is it timely? When is the food producer (educator, speaker, special guest, etc.) available to participate?
- **How?**
How are you going to organize the activity? What kind of help do you need? What kind of supplies or resources? How will people get to the activity site?
- **How much?**
How much will it cost? How much time or work will it require to set up or organize?
- **How many?**
How many people will attend? How many do you need to attend to meet your budget or to make the event possible? How many will be needed to help out?

4. Go out there with arms wide open.

Slow Food is, unfortunately, sometimes misperceived as an organization that caters to gourmets and thought to be exclusive in that respect. This can discourage people from participating in activities – particularly if the activities tend to be expensive or held only at expensive restaurants.

As you know, we believe that good, clean and fair food is for everyone, and it is important, as representatives of Slow Food, for us to reach out to those who might not necessarily be familiar with these concepts or our philosophy or have access to them.

It is natural that the desires, interests and financial means of your convivium's members determine what activities you do to a large extent. Don't forget, however, that the kind of activity you want, the location and the cost of participating all determine who *can* or will attend. You can find different audiences for each event you hold throughout the year; offering a broad range of options and reaching out to many different kinds of people – young or old, food producer or urban professional – will strengthen your convivium and strengthen Slow Food in your community. Diversity is the key!

Specifically, groups that are often overlooked that you can target include:

- **Students and young adults** (18- to 35-year-olds). Place notices for your activities on university campuses or in local bookstores or cafés. Film screenings (focusing on food, of course) or more casual get-togethers like barbecues and picnics might appeal more to this age group. Keep the price point pretty low (and keep in mind that many university groups often attract young people to their activities with the promise of free food). Young people are often very motivated by the political aspects of eco-gastronomy as well and may be interested in books focusing on these issues. They are also likely to attend events where they can get their hands a little dirty (like picking fruit or making cheese) and are certainly interested in visiting and getting to know local food producers as well.
- **The elderly.** Think about organizing your activity together with a retirement home/assisted living community. Retired persons may also have budget constraints, so keep this in mind if your activity requires payment. Several convivia have created activities or programs that match up children or students with older people in a mentorship program. Older people can be looked to for their vast knowledge about foods, traditions or practices that are no longer well known or appreciated. They can pass on the history of local food traditions to younger generations in person – which is the most effective way. Invite them to come speak or participate in your activity. In Italy, for example, retired people often grow produce for a small supplementary income, and convivia often ask them to come and help with their school gardens and to guide children through the process of planting, maintaining the garden and harvesting.
- **Indigenous peoples.** These groups have some of the strongest ties to a region and its food culture and should not be forgotten as an important part of your community. Enable and encourage their participation in your convivium activities and ask them to share their knowledge.
- **Cultural groups.** Many countries are multicultural. This can be a wonderful source of knowledge about different food traditions and products within your own area, and about how the interaction of different cultures has created your area's own particular food traditions.

5. Use what you have.

Or, more to the point, *whom* you have. Whether you have five members or 500, there is a wealth of talent, resources and contacts among them that you can tap into to help ensure that your activity is successful. Find out where your members' abilities and interests lie, and divide tasks and responsibilities accordingly.

This includes all aspects of an activity, from planning it to the activity itself:

- If a member is a skilled writer or graphic designer, for example, she might put those skills into writing or designing eye-catching publicity materials for the activity or even merchandise (market/tote bags or t-shirts with the Slow Food convivium logo, for example) that can be sold to raise money.
- Another member who knows local media outlets (newspapers, radio, etc.) or has contacts there might pass these materials on to be shared with the greater public.
- If a member is particularly knowledgeable about wine (or bread or cheese or some native variety of a fruit or vegetable, etc.), the activity itself could be focused on a particular product, with a presentation about the food or drink, a tasting or even some prepared dishes or a meal using or complementing the product.
- If a member is a teacher, he may be able to help draw up a curriculum for a taste education activity for kids (or adults).

Look to your neighborhood or area for ideas and resources. Some of the most valuable activities for not just the organizers and convivium but also the community can come from the relationships you cultivate close to home. If you don't already know the people who run the restaurants near you or the producers and chefs in your area, get acquainted and investigate ways of collaborating.

See #6 for more on working with local groups or people.

6. Partner up.

Collaborating with a range of local people and organizations opens possibilities and is crucial to increasing the reach and diversity of activities undertaken. It can also be very important logistically to provide resources, allowing you to put money, time and effort elsewhere.

Consider partnering up:

- with local restaurants and chefs
- with local producers, businesses and retailers (particularly those that focus on traditional and local foods): farmers, fishermen, butchers, pubs, breweries, dairies, cheesemakers, cheesemongers, wine importers/retailers, food processors
- with other convivia in the area or farther afield
- with local educational institutions: kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, universities and training colleges, hotel/hospitality schools, culinary schools
- with farmers' markets

- with public entities: local council, farmer or producer associations, local commercial associations, tourism committees
- with local festival committees, to present activities within an existing local framework
- with artists and musicians
- with local food writers or columnists

Collaboration can come in all shapes and forms:

- Establish a relationship with restaurants where you can hold regular dinners (or other activities), get a reduced price for your group, or whose chef would be willing to participate in your events or give cooking demonstrations.
- Donations don't always have to come in monetary form; you can request wine, beer, cheese, produce, participation from producers, etc. Be sure to promote/thank your donor accordingly; ask producers or experts to come and speak at your event and present their special products.
- Set up exchanges with other convivia: one group can host the other in their homes and go to visit local producers together or share meals together; hold joint activities with other convivia (this can also help divide up the work of organizing an activity); or invite food experts from other convivia to come and speak at your activity.
- Start a school garden; hold after-school programs at a local elementary school; invite local students to your activities (see #4); hire culinary school students to come and cook at your convivium event.
- Set up a stand at your local farmers' market where you can do cooking demonstrations with produce from the market, feature your favorite local producers and give out information about Slow Food.
- Approach local entities for community grants or organizational support for your activity; get Slow Food involved in other associations' or groups' events.
- Hold Taste Workshops at festivals.

While approaching local businesses may seem daunting at first, Slow Food can actually smooth the way. Those that subscribe to the same Good, Clean and Fair philosophy that we do will find that it makes sense to join forces with Slow Food.

Emphasize to quality food producers and restaurants how working with your convivium connects them to the consumers they want to reach: Slow Food members are passionate about food, educated about what they eat and interested in knowing how it is produced and prepared.

Two notes of caution:

- Partnering exclusively with only one (or even just a few) of the same people or groups may prove limiting; trying different collaborations not only increases your convivium's ties to different parts of your community, it also will encourage greater variety in terms of the activities themselves.
- While having a sponsor may often help you overcome some of the challenges of organizing an event, it is best to avoid relationships where the sponsor determines or dictates any aspect of your event or if the sponsor's is not in line with Slow Food's.

7. Make it sustainable.

Sustainability is very much a part of our Good, Clean and Fair philosophy and is also very important in organizing activities. Keeping your convivium active and able to put on events means taking care to ensure financial and social sustainability while taking ecological sustainability into account.

Financial sustainability

Keeping your head above water when it comes to finances is crucial to keeping your convivium healthy and active. When financial problems emerge, the stress of overcoming these can take over from the key purpose of the convivium, make it difficult to pursue or expand future activities and projects and may even weaken the convivium.

Aiming for your activities to at least break even or to collect a moderate profit will keep participant fees low while covering your costs and allowing for the accumulation of a little savings. Membership fees should not be used to organize or hold convivium activities, and the portion of the membership fee owed to the Slow Food International Office should not be used for these activities either.

Having extra funds in the bank means you can hold an occasional free event or supplement entrance fees on an event you wish to make accessible but that has unavoidable high costs attached. Your savings can be used to purchase supplies, to cover overhead or planning costs (telephone charges, postage, travel, etc.) or to get farther-reaching or more high profile publicity (newspaper, radio or Internet ads, professionally designed and printed posters or flyers). It also means you are able to pay producers or professionals for time spent giving farm or production tours or in guiding workshops, increasing the sustainability (not to mention feasibility) of activities for those involved in helping to make them possible.

While making a little money for your reserves can be extremely useful, it is not necessary to do so in every activity you do. In organizing a variety of events, it is always important to offer activities that are free for participants and free or inexpensive to organize.

Profit generating events can be tied to particular projects (Terra Madre, a publication) or to boost general funds once a year.

Especially important: Collect deposits for events that have significant financial outlay or require extensive planning (as for those activities that might require reservations in advance, as for a restaurant, hotel or group outing). In the case that insufficient participants have registered by the closing date that you establish, in order to cover costs, postpone or cancel the activity. Ensure that you negotiate prices well in advance to avoid problems or nasty surprises. Take the financial risk out of the equation by planning.

Social sustainability

Many convivium leaders note that the task of organizing activities often falls to the same group of people. This is a common occurrence in community or nonprofit organizations, but if you can find ways to spread the workload around it will prevent burn out or feelings of unfairness or resentment from creeping into the group.

Involve your members in brainstorming ideas for events and then strongly encourage them to take charge of bringing their idea to fruition. People are more likely to help out if they feel they have a vested interest in the activity. Empower your members by rotating responsibility for organizing activities, delegating tasks and giving them important roles in these activities. This will encourage them to help out more in the future.

It's important – while very often difficult, as you probably know all too well – to reward those who volunteer their time and energy, so if possible, try at least to find small ways to compensate those whose hard work make your convivium's activities possible. You could, for example, let them take home any leftover food or wine from your activity. Along the same lines, carefully consider whether it makes sense to accept free goods from a farmer or other local producer – it is the rare one that already makes enough not to need or appreciate compensation. It is also important that your membership remember that they are *members* rather than simply participants in the activities organized by the convivium. They too have an important role to play in organizing these.

Allow producers involved in your events to sell their products when appropriate, as this may help cover some of their expenses.

Environmental sustainability

As a movement for **eco**-gastronomy, we must try to run our activities in a way that is respectful to the environment.

Waste management is a key consideration for larger food events. Where possible, provide reusable or biodegradable alternatives to disposable plastic cups/plates/utensils and allow for on-site waste sorting for recycling (cans/bottles might even be collected and recycled to raise a little money) and composting (which can go to school gardens or local producers). If you work with produce or farmers' markets, encourage a move away from plastic bags or even ban them – use paper bags where needed and sell reusable shopping bags or include them in the entrance fee to events.

Transport is a crucial consideration in ensuring that an event runs smoothly, but also has significant environmental consequences in terms of pollution and congestion. Aim to allow for use of more efficient or less polluting modes of transport. For example, urban events should ideally be located within easy reach of public transport and provide space for people to leave and lock up their bicycles, while group excursions can utilize less polluting means of transport such as natural gas buses or trains. You may even set up a car share program for meetings or dinners.

Furthermore, using regional produce significantly reduces the fuel miles and pollution involved in bringing the meal to your plate.

8. Thrive on diversity.

Slow Food works to protect the diversity of our foods and the ways of life involved in producing them. Similarly, your convivium activities should take advantage of all the possibilities that diversity offers, in terms of the activity itself, the people you target to attend, the people you collaborate with, the food you feature, the cost of

attendance, the place you hold the activity – in other words: every single aspect of your activities, before, during and after.

This is rewarding in so many ways: not only will a variety of events prove more interesting for people to both organize *and* attend, you'll also tend to attract many different kinds of people to your activities; you'll bring in new members from all walks of life; your convivium will be more closely linked to many more local entities like producers and businesses; and the momentum and interest generated by all of this will help generate interest and ideas in future activities for your convivium.

Don't limit yourself to typical supper-club fare. Slow Food is much more than just going out to a restaurant every once in awhile or throwing dinner parties for your friends. While you, as an important part of Slow Food, are working to preserve the world's biodiversity, you should also be sampling it, both for the enjoyment of it and to remind yourself why you got into this in the first place.

Remember, too, that your convivium is unique in the panoply of Slow Food organizations, and that the distinctiveness of your own community is part of what makes Slow Food and its members such a diverse and thriving community. We encourage you, then, to explore what's special about *your* community and to emphasize it. In doing so, you'll find resources, enjoyment, and friends that you never knew were there.

9. Get inspired.

The sky's the limit! Here is just a sampling of the many, many activities that convivia all over the world organize. Some examples of the kinds of events listed are included at the end of this guide.

Pleasure! Your convivium's activities – just like Slow Food itself – are fundamentally about pleasure: the pleasure of getting together and enjoying good food. Pleasure can also be found in exploring the diversity of your area in your activities. Involving different age and ethnic groups is a way for your convivium to expand its horizons and the scope of its events. Sharing with other convivia, near or far, through joint activities can also serve this purpose. Although pleasure is a part of all Slow Food activities, it is particularly visible in:

Dinners

Linking food and culture (film, music, etc.)

Joint/shared activities with other convivia

Trips and outings

Engaging diverse groups from your area

Special activities (bake-offs, cook-offs, contests, etc.)

Many of your convivium's activities will also reflect one or more elements of Slow Food's mission:

Defense of Biodiversity: Activities and projects that highlight and support local food products as well as products of Terra Madre communities or Slow Food projects like the Ark and Presidia are very effective ways of contributing to the protection of traditional cheeses, grains, vegetables, fruits, and animal breeds in danger of disappearing. Here are some examples from convivia around the world that have made defense of biodiversity the focus of an activity or project:

Promoting an Ark or presidium product
Sustaining a Terra Madre community and convivia born of Terra Madre communities
Festivals and fairs
Promoting local knowledge on a traditional food
Fundraisers

Taste Education: The idea that taste need not only be cultivated but also actually taught highlights how the pleasurable aspect of tasting is linked to a vast amount of knowledge that can inform food experiences at any age. You can read more information on these programs prepared by the Taste Education office. Convivia have put together many vibrant and lively taste education activities and programs, which include:

Sensory workshops for children
Taste Workshops for adults
Slow Food in schools (cafeterias, Farm-to-School, school gardens, courses for teachers)
Courses for members and Master of Food
Cooking classes
Community projects (in hospitals, prisons, etc.)

Linking producers and co-producers: Drawing on the amazing diversity of producers in their area, convivia put in place many opportunities for long-term exchanges and for establishing connections between producers and co-producers (many of whom are Slow Food members). Types of activities include:

Promoting local producers
Promoting a local product
Farm or producer visits
Farmers' markets
Bringing together chefs and local producers
Festivals and fairs
Fundraisers

Taste Education

“Taste Education means keeping an open mind.” – Maria Larsen, Mar del Plata.

“Taste Education means avoiding [having] economic powers of food lead us where they want, starting when we are little.” – Jorge Hernandez, Zaragoza.

“Taste education means teaching how to develop the awareness of the different flavors in the mouth, relating them to their origins and to how food is produced, stressing the need for clean water, clean earth and fair trade.” – Santiago de German Ribbon, Bogotá.

Food and taste education is one of the pillars of the Slow Food movement. Many of our convivium activities around the world focus on providing a pleasurable way to increase understanding – amongst adults and children alike – of good, clean and fair food and regional traditions. We want to extend the invitation to eat with enjoyment and consciousness to those that are interested in being more than consumers and becoming actual co-producers of their food. Through convivium events, members and participants are given the opportunity to learn methods and tools for a critical and more considered approach to their food, thereby becoming more knowledgeable in their consumer choices.

Education activities undertaken by convivia over the past 20 years have gradually led to the development of many key overarching programs, such as School Gardens and the Master of Food. Several of the examples that follow illustrate how from modest beginnings education programs can be developed into complete, structured and innovative activities.

Sensory Workshops for Children

The pervasiveness of modern fast life and an industrialized food system often means that young people and children may never develop a meaningful relationship with the food they eat or learn where it comes from and how it got on their plates. When they do know more about their food, however, they are very willing to lead their families to good, clean and fair food when given the opportunity.

Food education is commonly reduced to nutritional coursework in schools and takes a disciplinary stance. In contrast, Slow Food taste education in schools focuses on the senses, creating new avenues of communication and introducing a new principle: the principle of pleasure – of discovery, playfulness and conviviality at the table.

In the classroom

Sensorial analysis conducted in classrooms is already a widespread activity and one of the easiest education activities to organize. Your members can work directly with children and teachers by holding workshops at your local school and helping them use their senses to get to know different foods. This sensory approach can also lead to discussion about food culture, regions and seasonality.

Organizing Sensory Workshops for children

- Identify a school interested in hosting a workshop/s.
- Meet with teaching staff to discuss how to integrate the activity into the school’s curriculum, possibly establishing a food and taste education program if there isn’t one.
- Develop a list of members or local experts who are able to lead the workshops.

- Develop a list of local producers who are able to contribute to the workshops with their products and knowledge.
- Schedule the activity in advance to work with the school timetable.

Taste Workshops for Adults

Slow Food first used the Taste Workshop in 1994 at Vinaly, Italy's premier wine exposition. Since then, it has become a fundamental component of many Slow Food events (such as Salone del Gusto, Cheese, A Taste of Slow, Aux Origines du Goût and Slow Fish, to name a few) and is the basis for hundreds of events organized by convivia all around the world.

Food and wine experts guide these tasting sessions with the assistance of local producers and/or cooks, passing on their special knowledge through a pleasurable experience. Participants use all their senses to understand a product's particular qualities and characteristics, comparing their experiences with each other in light of the instructor's guidance.

Organizing Taste Workshops for adults

- Develop a list of quality products suitable for the workshop(s).
- Develop a list of pairings for these products (for example, wine to accompany savory or sweet products or appropriate foods to accompany wine tastings).
- Choose a comfortable, quiet location for the tastings, without odor or other interferences.
- Ensure that the instructor can be situated facing the participants or in some equally suitable arrangement.
- Plan for and obtain the appropriate dishes, glasses, tablecloth, of restaurant quality, and correct tasting glasses.
- Ensure the workshop is delivered professionally, is efficient and stays within indicated time limits.
- Workshops are recommended to have a maximum duration of an hour and a half.
- Ensure that the instructor can be easily heard; use a microphone if necessary.
- Give your workshops catchy titles and promote the activity well in advance.

School Gardens

There is renewed interest in school gardens today as a truly multidisciplinary approach to taste education. It is not just about hoeing and harvesting; a garden offers opportunities to discuss biodiversity, geography and the history of food cultivation, the science and economy of production, environmental issues, food preparation and, most important, sensory experiences – the flavor, smell, appearance and feel of produce you grow yourself.

School gardens also provide an opportunity for young gardeners to meet people in the local community who can pass on their knowledge of working the earth, seasonality and local production. Some school gardens are also beginning to sell part of their harvest at local organic markets or markets established at the school.

Key Educational Characteristics:

- Projects are long term, usually run over the course of several years.

- Educational activities are multi-disciplinary, exploring ecology (ecosystems, horticulture principles, etc.), nutrition, sensory and taste aspects, culinary history and culture.
- Children taste the fruits of their labor, using garden produce in cooking or taste workshops.

Practical Elements:

- Environmentally sustainable cultivation techniques are used, following organic or biodynamic principles.
- Indigenous, regionally significant or heirloom varieties are included in the garden, as well as one or more presidium or Ark products where possible.
- No genetically modified products are allowed.
- Varieties that can be grown and harvested within the school year offer more learning possibilities.
- The role of water and the importance of sustainable water use are addressed.
- School cafeterias and/or workshops provide opportunities for food tasting and preparation.
- A school kitchen is a very useful addition for the taste education aspects of the program.

Note: In Italy, Slow Food offers teacher-training courses (see last section) to assist schools in carrying out school garden projects autonomously. A network of trainers has slowly been created throughout the country.

Steps for starting a school garden

- Identify an interested school.
- Establish a working group of convivium members and school representatives who are dedicated to developing and implementing the program. Divide responsibilities according to task areas: garden development, garden supervision, taste education, communications, financial management, etc.
- Explore possibilities of collaborating with local authorities and agencies, community organizations and private entities on the project, particularly through contributions of resources (materials, labor or funds, for example).
- Agree upon and sign a protocol with the school and other partners.
- Identify potential volunteers to assist with the garden throughout the year, including school holidays (parents, grandparents or other community members). Identify farms and producers who may want to collaborate.
- Schedule training and information sessions for teachers, parents and volunteers.
- Regularly hold meetings to monitor and develop the program.
- Extend the program with a market for students to sell their produce.
- Hold events to celebrate achievements.
- Obtain press coverage or pursue other types of communication to make the project known.

A Slow Food history of school gardens

The first Slow Food school garden project was created in Berkeley, California, at the Martin Luther King School in the mid-1990s. This pilot project was promoted by Alice Waters, International Vice-President of Slow Food, to encourage healthier eating habits among American youth.

In 2003, the Slow Food International Congress identified the school garden as a key project in line with the Slow philosophy, leading to the decision at the Italian Congress in 2006 to develop 100 school gardens across the nation. The school garden is a major instrument for taste education and developing themes such as eco-sustainable development and making wise consumer choices. The school garden also constitutes a privileged space in which to build learning communities, involving students, teachers, parents, relatives, convivia, local authorities, producers, restaurants and other interested organizations and persons in your area.

The school garden project is rapidly expanding throughout the world. Participants are finding ways to improve the access of younger generations to the multifaceted world of food. Each region has its own particularly way of going about this. In Italy, the projects are set up around vegetable gardens, while in the United States, the emphasis is on using produce in kitchens and making local produce accessible to school cafeterias. The Lebanese farmers' market, Souk el Tayeb, reaches out to children through food tales. In Austria, schools exchange the plants they cultivate, creating strong links within the network of school gardens.

We believe that all these initiatives should get to know and support each other and feel part of a unique and large network.

Courses for Members - Master of Food

Convivia around the world offer tasting courses to their members and the public, often focusing on a particular product. In Italy's case, a concept called the Master of Food was created several years ago as an extension of this, bringing together training courses offered by convivia around Italy into a collaborative, national program with shared goals and educational approaches, and subjects offered at the local level. In relating the Italian experience, we hope to motivate and assist others interested in developing a similar model.

Master of Food in Italy

The Master of Food program is a food education project for adults developed by Slow Food Italy, consisting of 23 courses that are only available to Slow Food members. On completion of 15 of these, participants are awarded the Master of Food. The idea is not to train professionals, but to bring knowledge to consumers, stimulating their curiosity and promoting responsible choice making.

The Master of Food program is organized by individual convivia according to their members' interests. Each course is delivered in three, four or six lessons lasting about two-and-a-half hours each. Each session includes a theoretical component to develop an understanding of the cultural context and the production process and leads up to a tasting of the particular product.

Each participant is given a booklet that summarizes the lesson and features a card for jotting down tasting notes and a suggested bibliography, as well as a book published by Slow Food Editore on the subject.

Organizing a Master of Food program

- Establish a national working group with representatives of convivia to define a vision for taste education and to develop a strategy and themes relevant to the national food culture and production.
- Identify food experts (specialists in specific products or productions, i.e. butchers, sommeliers, cheesemakers or affineurs, etc.), and experts in curriculum development and development of training programs (teachers).
- Together, the experts and working group will develop the curriculum, goals, content, methodology, syllabus, costs, products and teaching materials.
- Identify those who will be carrying out the courses (aforementioned experts, for example).
- Promote the project details to all convivia and members.

Note: Do not hesitate to contact the Slow Food Italy Education Office, or Italian convivium leaders for their help and advice.

Tertiary/Continuing Education

Introducing regional food culture to hospitality schools

By contributing to areas of tertiary/continuing education that are related to the world of food, Slow Food can make an important impact on the way things are done in the future, such as in agricultural studies, hospitality schools or environmental and food policy.

Slow Food Italy has turned its attention to future operators of the food and wine sector in developing a training program for students and teachers of hospitality schools, encouraging the former to become guardians of regional culture and tradition. In addition to taking courses to increase their sensory knowledge, students are guided in developing a deep understanding of the region through direct contact with regional products and research into their history, production chain, distribution and marketing channels and particular taste profiles. This program was established with public funding.

Community Programs

Some convivia have recently been taking their education activities further, developing successful projects in partnership with social institutions such as prisons and hospitals, which offer a whole host of benefits to the community at large. For instance, working with a hospital to transform meals can enhance nutrition and care, provide cultural enrichment (not to mention oftentimes better tasting and more nutritious food) for patients and increase use of local produce.

Slow Food Italy is also working at an administrative level, providing training for public officials who are responsible for school cafeteria contracts and developing a system of certification for cafeterias that introduce Good, Clean and Fair foods to their tables.

Teacher Training Courses

Teacher training courses were developed in Italy to disseminate a particular approach to food education: an approach focused on sensory and taste culture to compliment the nutritional programs that are often conducted in schools.

After years of education and training experience with children and teachers, Slow Food Italy has been accredited by the Ministry of Public Instruction and Education, allowing the organization to formally train teachers in schools.

The courses are held over several sessions and focus on cultural context, pedagogy and tasting techniques drawing on creative and scientific sensory analysis.

Examples from the Convivia

Asheville Convivium
Asheville, North Carolina, USA
Event: Terra Madre Fundraiser
Convivium leaders: Mark Rosenstein, markrosenstein@bellsouth.net; Kelly Davis, keldavis@verizon.net

“The Lips of the Snail” is Asheville’s Terra Madre fundraiser – intended to raise money for airfare to send delegates to Terra Madre – but it’s been so popular that the Asheville convivium wants to have it every year. With lots of food, beer, live bands and a funky name, Asheville’s fundraiser can’t help but be a success.

How Asheville puts the spotlight on Terra Madre (and Slow Food)

Southern Hospitality

The Asheville convivium was founded four years ago in a city of about 80,000 people, the biggest in its area. By this time, Asheville was already home to an incredible infrastructure of farmers’ markets, as well as the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, which promotes the local food of the region. So, there was a lot of stuff going on here already. But now there’s also a Slow Food convivium that boasts 50 paying members and an email contact list of over 400, with all kinds of people from students to retirees.

Fundraising Goals

We held a fundraiser for Terra Madre in mid-September whose aim was to raise money for the airfare of some of our delegates to attend. This year we have 10 people going to Terra Madre, and four of us can pay for ourselves, but for the other six, there’s no way they could go to Italy. This particular group of delegates we call the ramp people – a ramp is a wild onion, extremely pungent, that looks almost like a scallion when you dig it up. Through a project called the Smoky Mountain Native Plants Association, people are allowed to harvest these ramps in a sustainable way from the national park. A lot of the people involved subsist on the money they make from this farming. One of the delegates, for example, is from Graham County, about 90 miles from Asheville, and he’s probably never been further than Asheville. So for him to go to Italy is just going to blow his mind.

The Idea: Lips of the What?

We had a very successful pig roast a few years ago, and this time around we knew we wanted to have a really nice party. Naming the thing was one of the hardest parts, and I can’t tell you how many people tried to talk us out of the name we eventually settled on: “The Lips of the Snail”. Everybody goes, “What is that?”, which is a great opportunity to draw people in and start talking about what Slow Food and Terra Madre are all about. We knew who our audience was and whom we were trying to target, and “The Lips of the Snail” is kind of funky and irreverent, which is perfect for our community.

Name aside, though, a key aspect of this event’s success was our board of 11 members who planned the whole thing – and not only their connections but also their enthusiasm. Delegation and follow-up are both really important; it really helps to assign people to what they are doing and remind them of it. The owner of the B&B that hosted it became a member of the board during the course of the event, and we have a brewer who got the beer donated and organized the entertainment, getting three local bands to come perform for free. A lot of us are in the food business, too, so we were able to get 15 restaurants to donate as well as three bakeries, and two local grocers donated 300 pounds of meat. The

major expenses were furniture rentals and disposables – which, with the rental discount the B&B owner got, came to only about a couple of hundred bucks.

The Funds and How We Got Them

The tickets at \$30 apiece drew in most of the funds we raised, but another good idea was the silent auction, which was all donated stuff like dinner for two, a day at a spa, books, pottery, and things like that. This drew in a good \$2,500; for us, it was a lot more successful than the raffle we did a few years ago, where each person's ticket has a raffle number and somebody wins something. You don't draw in any extra cash that way.

Promote!

Another key to the success of this event was having a good graphic designer. It's important to get something that looks professionally done, and we had this cute little snail with lips for the advertising. Another board member set up PayPal [an online money transfer service] on our website so that people could buy tickets online. Our advertising, too, was often free thanks to board members' connections – two board members, for example, are friends of a guy who has a radio show on local public radio, so we got a lot of radio exposure. An alternative weekly donated some ad space for us, and since I own a restaurant, I had my marketing person work on this too, and sent an email to everyone on my email list. One of the local pizza guys – who is also a board member and going to Terra Madre as a delegate – put little flyers on his pizza boxes for the few weeks preceding the event. Each board member, in short, is very involved in the local food community, and we all tapped into our local markets to promote the event.

But probably the biggest advertisement for our next event is the event we just had. This was such a positive experience for so many people that whenever “Lips of the Snail” gets mentioned next year, people will know what it's about and be looking forward to it. In this sense, it's nice to have a memorable name to reuse, so that people remember the good time they had and know what to look for and tell their friends about next year.

Bonuses and What We Learned

We were hoping to earn \$6,000 for airfare, and instead we got almost \$8,000. Most of this will go to airfare anyway, but now we're thinking we'll do “Lips of the Snail” every year, not only the years Terra Madre is held, so that way we can raise some money for Slow Food USA.

We are making a book of notes to work from for our next event. The philosophy of this particular convivium is that things need to be kept as reasonably priced as possible, but one of the things we could've done is charged a little more money to get some support for Slow Food USA. We had a lot of food left over, too. That's really tricky because you don't know how many people are going to show up. I think that we would also try to get the Terra Madre and Slow Food story out a little in advance, because the real purpose of the whole event is to engender understanding of this international food community.

Biarn Convivium and Zaragoza Convivium
Béarn, France; Zaragoza, Spain
Activity: Joint convivium event
Convivium leader: Gilbert dalla Rosa, slowfood.biarn@wanadoo.fr

Bridging the Pyrenees in France and Spain, the Biarn and Zaragoza convivia came together to share their experiences in their respective regions. The discovery of the Spanish Aragon region by the Béarn Convivium has opened up possibilities of combining efforts to further the food traditions of the fascinating region.

Exchanging Experiences: Spanish and French Convivia Combine Efforts

Active and Accessible

Our convivium is situated on the northern border of the French Pyrenees, in the Aquitaine region. The department of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques comprises two historical entities: the Basque country turned towards the Atlantic coast, and Bayonne, the Béarn (Biarn in Occitan), grouped around the city of Pau (150,000 inhabitants).

Created in January 2001, our convivium has about 100 members. We have a majority of retired members, most notably from the teaching professions, but there is also a good third made up of professionals involved with quality food products.

To maintain our membership we must organize almost one activity a month and send six to seven four-paged information letters by post to our members, since 40% do not have e-mail access. Despite our efforts to vary our activities and to search for sponsors, despite the esteem we have acquired in Béarn and the networks we have created with other associations, recruitment of new members is very difficult for us.

In Béarn, if we want to gather more than 30 members for a workshop and a meal, we cannot exceed 30-35 euros per person. This limits some of the scope of our activities. We note that the members who joined in 2001 had expectations mainly in terms of gastronomy, of discovery of taste and of conviviality. Today, our members appear more concerned with ethical questions.

Study Trip Offers Possibility of Exchange

In August 2005, delegations composed of five members from our convivium and the Zaragoza Convivium in Spain met in Canfranc, France. We discussed many potential joint activities, including: a study trip to the Huesca province for the Biarn Convivium, a visit from a delegation of the Zaragoza Convivium in support of the Aux Origines du Goût Slow Food exposition in Montpellier, joint collaboration with producers, creating fact sheets on the protection of biodiversity and food heritage according to the methodology developed in Aquitaine and Midi-Pyrénées and a feasibility study for a possible biannual pastry exposition that would be held alternately in Aquitaine and in Aragon.

Discovering Another Region

With 40 Bearnese members, among them many excellent producers, we headed to Aragon in November 2005. Slow Food Zaragoza organized our itinerary and guided us in getting to know their quality products. The goal of our meeting was to compare our experiences in terms of promoting our respective niche and quality products. We also wanted to discuss

the similarities between our two regions in terms of social issues. We share interests in terms of biodiversity and the reinstatement of indigenous breeds and species, and we are working in comparable ways on taste and quality. We discovered the pastry shop Ascaso in Huesca that produces a cake that is very similar to the *Russe* of Oloron. This rekindled the idea of a joint pastry event on either side of the Pyrenees.

Beyond their symbolic role for producers, these types of exchanges and meetings “in the field” permit an awareness of the complementariness of our two Pyreneese regions. They can especially help us assess how ancient historical relations, through the Camino de Santiago for example, can today be reinstated in a cultural project that aims to promote high quality products.

Beirut Convivium

Beirut, Lebanon

Event: Beirut Farmers’ market

Convivium leader: Kamal Mouzawak, kamalm@cyberia.net.lb

Through working directly with small producers, the Beirut Convivium was able to start Lebanon’s first farmers’ market. Providing an outlet for Lebanese producers, Souk el Tayeb is also host to numerous complementary activities, such as market visits and cooking classes for children.

Beirut’s First Farmers’ Market

The Beirut Convivium, founded in 2000, is quite small at present with only 10 members, but it is also very active. We have managed to build a network of people interested in helping with the activities that help illustrate the Slow Food philosophy.

I started organizing a producers’ market in Beirut two years ago called Souk el Tayeb. This was the first market of this type established in Lebanon.

Providing an Outlet to Sell Quality Products

This was the natural evolution of a long engagement with producers around Beirut. Over several years I have approached a great number of small producers and we have worked together on quality. At first, we worked in a very hands-on way, trying different techniques. At present we function in a more efficient and structured way, defining quality protocols for example.

But what is the use of a quality product if you cannot sell it? And not just sell the product but sell the producer as well, and his techniques and his territory, and the values he defend. We needed a practical project to embody the whole of Slow Food philosophy; a project that would bring producers and consumers together, and that would serve an educational and informational purpose as well as a promotional one.

Obtaining Official Help and Support

We had some difficulties in approaching local authorities, which are not always cooperative with this kind of initiative, but in the end we obtained permission to use a parking lot, every Saturday, from 9am to 2pm.

For the moment, the local authorities do not provide any additional kind of help or support. It is the founding market committee that supports all the projects we develop.

Food Communities from across Lebanon

Today, 40 food communities sell their own products at the market. Some of them are individual producers and some represent communities of up to 100 people. At the moment, we have more transformed products on display than fresh ones, except for some produce or bread. For example, we sell many jams, dried or candied fruits and pickles. The market doesn't yet sell highly perishable goods such as meat because the practical aspects, such as refrigerated transportation, are too expensive.

The producers come from all over the country. At first, it was hard to convince them to come to the city with their products. Once we had their agreement to participate, I proceeded with finding a suitable location and attaining authorization, which involved a lot of paperwork (licenses, insurance, police forms, etc.)

The results for the producers have been extremely encouraging. Some of them make 70 per cent of their sales at this market. This has enabled us to convince more producers to participate, and also to start a network of small regional markets.

Going Beyond Selling Quality Products

We also decided to build a shop in the city of Byblos, with a selection of the best products from the markets. Given this is not merely a marketing and sales project, we also organize educational activities for children and adults in the vicinity of the shop and market. These activities focus mainly on eating well and living healthily. We recently held an apple festival and there was a contest for the best apple production and lots of games for children involving apples. We also organize storytelling activities. We bring the children to the market for a shopping tour where different producers explain their wares, followed by cooking classes. Sometimes, we take groups of children to visit the producers directly on their land and farms. We try to always have parallel activities and to promote a certain idea of life, more than just stopping with the products themselves.

This project embodies the Slow Food philosophy and allows concrete practical actions to perpetuate traditions. For anyone who would want to start such a project, I would advise first having a strong belief in the necessity of the project and then try to develop some kind of institutional support, as it really helps significantly.

Bogota Convivium

Bogota, Colombia

Activity: Taste Workshop for adults

Convivium leader: Santiago de German-Ribon, riboncolombia@cable.net.co

The Bogota Convivium has focused particularly on Taste Workshops in the events they organize. In this corn Taste Workshop a variety of chefs prepared and presented corn-based dishes to the participants.

Retracing Roots: Corn Tasting in Bogota

The Bogota Convivium was founded two years ago. It is active mostly in Bogotá, a city of 6 million in a mountain climate ideally suited for growing fruit. Nearby, there are native

forests and lakes where trout is farmed. The coffee cultivations start one hour from Bogotá, at altitudes below 1,800 meters, and three hours from the capital, at altitudes below 500 meters, you can find a hot climate and tropical fruit cultivation.

Bogota Besieged by New Cuisine

There is currently a big debate regarding the food culture in Bogotá, since the past few years have witnessed a proliferation of oriental and fusion restaurants, with traditional food being increasingly relegated to a few restaurants and the marketplaces. At the same time, however, a more sophisticated Colombian cuisine is emerging, and Colombians are spending more money on food and are eager to learn more about it. The supermarket chains are also making better food available, like good wine and olive oil.

Our convivium counts 25 active members, who pay a subscription to the convivium in addition to the Slow Food subscription. The members all have very different backgrounds and complementary skills: there are entrepreneurs, an anthropologist, a journalist, restaurant owners, a coffee specialist, an urban planner, an organic shop owner, a gastronomy school teacher, a lawyer, a farmer from an organic community and so on. There are six very active members who participate in almost every event.

Focusing on a Colombian Staple

Up to the present, the convivium has done mostly food and Taste Workshops to spread the Slow Food philosophy. We try to gather 200 people for a lunch where, for example, artisan and industrial flavors are compared. Specialists like our coffee specialist conduct these workshops.

One of the most satisfying events we've done was a workshop dedicated to corn, since corn is an important part of South American food culture – Colombia's in particular. Different chefs came and presented corn-based dishes. There was fermented corn beer, which is a traditional product in danger of disappearing. Speeches were made during and after the dinner about producing in a "good, clean and fair" way. We even showed the Terra Madre 2004 movie, and people were very enthusiastic about it, since many inhabitants of Bogotá still have strong, nostalgic ties to the countryside, and many of them feel guilty for not helping farmers. Participating in workshops like this one thus helps people see how they might be able to lend a hand to the farmers.

Each of the 10 most active members of the convivium invited 20 guests and 20 journalists. Some gastronomy schools were also invited, as well as some 'society' personalities, ecological representatives and farmers from the areas of conflict in Colombia. Each person was greeted with a Chicha cocktail (a local alcoholic beverage), and then the chefs presented their dishes one by one, explaining how they were made, where the ingredients and recipes came from and how to taste and enjoy them. The dinner was held in a large house with a professional kitchen, owned and facilitated by the Andres Bello foundation, a gastronomic association whose director is a friend of the convivium. Some members of the association were also in charge of organizing the transportation of the indigenous farmers.

The Enthusiasm We Generated

Not only were the participants extremely satisfied with the dinner, but we also got some good press coverage including a two-page feature in a magazine. There were even some people there who seemed intent on starting their own convivia in Cali and Medellín. Given the success of the event, we've decided to repeat it every year, and we're hoping to get more journalists to come next time – we've even formed a committee of convivium members whose job it will be to convince journalists to come, and to greet and seat them during the

event. We also plan to have a convivium member at each table next year, to direct the conversation and make sure the guests fill out the satisfaction surveys. They might even help improve the kitchen logistics.

Boston Convivium

Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Activity: Dinner/Gatherings for young adults

Convivium leaders: Rosemary Melli, oliodimelli@comcast.net and Peggy Hogan, phoganhome@comcast.net

Despite their unique position in a vibrant, college city, the Boston Convivium found that they needed to make a special effort to reach out to young adults. Traditionally a difficult group to appeal to with convivium activities, this convivium decided to organize casual, monthly evenings at a wine bar where young adults could meet other young adults.

Appealing to a Younger Crowd

The city of Boston, where our convivium is situated, is a university and college city. We also have many food policy and nutrition organizations in the area, as well as a huge medical community. Many students are interested in issues related to food, and as a result, we have many students in our membership. We also have a diverse group of cultures and ethnicities, from Irish to Italian to Caribbean.

The Boston Convivium wavers around 300 members. We have grown exponentially from when I became a member six years ago and had only 50 members. We have been able to gather quite a few young people and as a result our members average 40 years of age. Many of our members are in their 20s and 30s. I attribute the presence of these age groups to the young and hip spirit of Boston.

Attracting Young Adults

How do we interest young adults in the activities of our convivium? I worked at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and they had the same problem. Their clientele was aging. They organized some focus groups and found out that young people were looking for ways to meet other young people of the opposite sex. They ended up putting on Friday night evening meetings.

At the Boston Convivium, we don't want people who just have money and can travel around the world. We want people who are young, vital and active in their community. We needed events that were inexpensive. We decided to organize a regular evening where people could meet other young single people, once a month on Wednesdays.

Making It Casual and Inexpensive

Participants pay \$25 for four plates of food and three glasses of wine. We try to offer foods and wines from all over the world. Our co-leader Alex Loud knows wine and is a good speaker. He describes the wines we serve and the restaurant presents the food. We also invite producers. For example, we had a grass-fed beef producer who came to talk about his cattle. We like to try to put our membership in touch with the people who are growing our food.

Easy Access

We never use a venue for more than six months, as we do not want to favor one restaurant. We also want to make it convenient for everybody, because Boston is big. By choosing a wine bar as a type of venue and by making it a two-hour event, we gave it an extremely casual feel. People could come on their bikes and they didn't have to get dressed up. It's good to have a habitual event, to have some continuity, so that participants know what to expect. They can plan to meet the same people there; it's not something that you missed and that won't happen again.

We always have our flyers and give our pitch. We want to convert people. We thought of making business cards with the dates and people could pick them up and give them to friends, but we never had to. We were always full.

Where We Are Headed

For the past few years, the structure for organizing has been just the three of us leaders and then the rest of the members would pitch in as needed. We are putting up an ad to have a permanent type of help for certain types of activities. Now we want a more formal structure with people who will commit for a year. We want to know who will work on fundraising, on public relations and on the events themselves. We need people to come up with ideas for events.

Our goal is to have people believe they are part of something alive. We want them to feel that it's not just an opportunity to come to activities, but to actually become activists. We are trying to broaden more into the philosophical side of Slow Food, not just the eating side. That is where I guess we feel the weakest. We would like to know more about issues that aren't necessarily 'glamour' issues. We know how to put on events; we know how to get a crowd out. But to become activists and change people's way of seeing the world is a bit more difficult.

Bündner Herrschaft Convivium
Bündner Herrschaft, Switzerland
Activity: Promoting local product/Taste education
Convivium leader: Rainer Riedi, info@slowfood-grischa.ch

The Plantati Ernetefest was an activity organized by the Bündner Herrschaft Convivium, with help from Plantahof and Biotisch. Teams of children learned about potato plants through hands-on workshops where they planted potatoes and oversaw their growth from seed to mature plant. At the last gathering, the children harvested their potatoes.

Digging Up Valuable Lessons

The Bündner Herrschaft was founded in 1997 and is based in the city of Chur. Chur, with a population of 32,500 people, is the capital of the canton Graubünden (Grisons), which has a mix of urban and rural populations. We organize five to six events a year with the convivium. At present, we have about 65 members and have experienced constant growth. Our members average 45 years of age.

Cooperation Leads to Potato Project

Plantati Ernetefest was held in 2003 at the Plantahof, an agricultural center for education and consulting. It was a cooperative effort between Slow Food, the Plantahof and Biotisch.

Over five separate meetings, about 40 participants with children played an active part in planting various kinds of potatoes. Different teams were organized and every team had its own type of potato to plant. Each team then monitored the growth following the cycle of the plant over the year.

Plantahof Provides Guidance

All these gatherings were guided by competent staff at the Plantahof, who equipped participants with knowledge about the plants, the soil, the climate, and other interesting aspects of cultivation. At the first meeting, the potatoes were planted, while in later meetings, the group had to care for the sprouts and more mature plants.

Precious Potatoes

At the last gathering, the potatoes could finally be harvested and the atmosphere was like digging for gold, because every one of those precious potatoes was like a little nugget, especially for the kids. After the harvest the potatoes were examined by a jury of participants and children, paying attention to weight, size, form and yield. For every session, a winning team was awarded a prize.

Good Feedback

This event gave valuable insight regarding the origin of potatoes, the work needed to grow them and the cycle of plants during the year. The Plantahof staff were very informative and to this day our convivium receives good feedback from our members. The project was published on the Plantahof website as well.

The project was supervised by Franca Ciocco from Plantahof, who prepared everything for this activity except the communication to our members (which we took care of). We inform our members by e-mail, fax and mail. We also use our website to advertise our events. This event was also announced in the Swiss press, the Swiss Slow Food newsletter *Adagio* as well as at the international Slow Food Congress in Naples.

Central Rift Convivium
Central Rift Valley Province, Kenya
Community Food Gatherings
Convivium Leader: Samuel Muhunyu

One of Kenya's first convivia organizes community gatherings aimed at bringing together all the kinds of wisdom in the community on traditional foods.

Community Food Gatherings: Sharing Traditional Food Knowledge in Kenya

Key Learnings

Inclusion – Share leadership and organizational roles amongst many people and for diverse inputs

Promotion – Use existing lines of communications.

Youth – Provide competitions aimed at youth to gain their interest and involvement.

Our Convivium

The Central Rift Convivium, created in October 2005, is in the Central Rift Valley Province (pop. 1.5 million) and has 62 members, many from Terra Madre food communities and a few representing local organizations (whose combined memberships total 200) to assist small-scale farmers who could not afford individual membership fees to be included.

The objective of most of our convivium events – one is organized every three months – is to share/exchange information on traditional foods, including how to grow them and cook them.

Broad Community Participation

A different subcommittee is formed for every event to ensure representation of men, women, youth and elderly and different kinds of expertise and to expose as many members to leadership and organization roles as possible.

School youth are also encouraged to participate and a competition is organized for them as part of the event and is judged by those from their grandparents' generation.

Using Community Communication Networks

Events are communicated or publicized by requesting teachers of schools to send messages through the students to their parents, requesting religious leaders to announce the events during worship, printing posters and placing them strategically in market centers and other public places and going around in a vehicle with public address mounted and announcing the event a week before and the eve of the event. So far the most effective communication tool is spreading by word of mouth, and posters, leaflets and brochures are also quite handy in reaching out to people in this rural environment. The convivium members and the community in this region do not yet have reliable Internet access.

Our Biggest Event So Far

The most memorable event organized by the convivium so far was the seed/food fair that was held on February 16, 2006, which brought together 127 adults (75 men and 54 women) and 82 schoolchildren. The focus of this event was traditional mushroom gathering and recipes. During the event we awarded a local producer for the quality of her yogurt and ghee made traditionally from cow milk. Two students were also awarded for the quality of their food samples.

Central Victoria Convivium
Central Victoria, Australia
Activity: Cooking competition
Convivium leader: Mary Ellis, liberty@netconnect.com.au

This low-key cooking competition, with teams cooking in cast iron pots over campfires, has quickly gained high participation from locals new to Slow Food, attracts hundreds of visitors and promotes local ingredients.

Camp Oven Cook-Off in Central Victoria

Key Learnings

Diversity: Keeping activities low-key and fun makes them more accessible to the whole community and helps us step beyond our usual networks.

Promotion: Develop a good relationship with the press and present them with something catchy.

Sustainability: Join forces with others in the community to increase the ripple effect of our activities.

Where We Are

Our convivium formed around four years ago, and is based out of the small town of Daylesford, around 100 km northwest of Melbourne. We cover a large part of central Victoria however, stretching from western Melbourne towards the South Australian border. It's a large area and we make a real effort to encourage the establishment of new convivia in other towns, with two smaller convivia already opened. We have around 85 members, and although our membership is very mixed in many ways, nearly all members are over 35 and we would prefer to have more young members.

Camp Oven Cook-Off??

The Camp Oven Cook-Off is an outdoor cooking competition in which teams of people cook one dish in a cast iron pot over a campfire. We hold the event over one day in a paddock next to a rural pub – the proprietor is a member of our convivium and is the key organizer of the day. Teams of five people register to compete prior to the day and pay a \$75 entry fee. At our first cook-off last year 28 teams participated and this rose to 48 this year.

Teams arrive on the site at 10am and receive the same basic ingredients (meat and veggies) to which they can add anything they bring along or purchase at the local produce store, which is set up especially for the event and only stocks local ingredients. Having the store on-site means the cooks and punters are introduced to local produce. Visitors can also buy prepared food and drinks throughout the day.

Mixing Up the Punters

A very diverse mix of people gets involved this event, and it is really the demographic diversity that makes it so good. Further, there is a huge diversity in what people cook. Locals who normally probably wouldn't mix start chatting and trying each other's dishes. This is what we aim for in our community events: to provide the opportunity for people to be active rather than passive, to 'get dirty'. When people actually do something, they appreciate it much more, and it also means that people can't accuse Slow Food of being 'gastronomic elitist types'. Putting on this type of laid-back event is so enjoyable because it is about living the philosophy and not ramming it down people's throats.

Slow Food for Everyone

The biggest benefits of this event are, by far, demonstrating that we are not an elitist association and generating awareness and openness to our activities. It proves that there are great things to do concerning food and local producers on a down-to-earth scale. We also increase awareness of the range of regional produce available – both among the locals and those traveling from Melbourne who are pleasantly surprised to learn the full range of foods produced in the area. That's the good thing about bringing in people from afar; you attract people to the district who have an interest in food, local businesses and restaurants profit and so you spread the benefits of your event into the broader community.

Around 1,000 people attended the event this year, including many coming from Melbourne or other convivia. By attracting this many people we also generate great interest in Slow Food. In fact, many people were coming up and asking questions about the

association so the connection with Slow is clear. We also provide communications materials from SF at the event.

Joining Forces

The local branch of the Country Fire Authority is crucial to the Camp Oven Cook-Off. They agree to come on the day and prepare all of the campfires, then stay on to control them. Apart from the purely practical benefits of this partnership, this collaboration broadens our networks into the community. In other activities, we aim to partner with community groups where we can. In particular, we like to work with a few key organizations in a small rural community – schools, the Country Fire Authority, Country Women’s Association etc. – to create a day of events and activities. We want to help build the momentum and then on the day leave the running of the event to them and hope to get a new convivium established as a result.

Working with the Press

Local promotions were kept simple with roadside signs and posters around town, but we were fortunate to get much broader publicity in the lead-up to the event. Two articles were published in *The Age* (a major newspaper) and ABC Radio broadcast a piece on it. I have a well-established relationship with that paper, as does the event manager, which is something that all convivia need to try and develop. Many convivium leaders complain that they don’t get press. We know that we definitely won’t get any worthwhile press for an expensive dinner – most of our events have an element of madness or silliness and this interests them.

Getting the Job Done

This event is ideal, as a member of our convivium, who is also an events organizer, owns the pub and does most of the work. In return her business benefits from the publicity and takes the money on the day, giving a portion to our convivium. As she is an events organizer everything is done very well, including budgets. She has assistance from other SF members in promoting the event to the community and we actually get on the phone and try and inform the social networks to encourage people to participate. Otherwise, there is not a huge amount of help from other members. Around 60 per cent of our events are run in this way, where the proprietor helps us organize the event. We only develop these relationships if there is a feeling of trust and the business supports Slow Food ideals.

Our Policy on Donations

Our philosophy is not to take donations from small producers, as we believe it goes against sustainability and the Slow philosophy not to pay for their produce. We would definitely take sponsorship from bigger companies, but it is hard to come by and difficult to find a medium-large company with a philosophy in line with ours. We are currently pursuing a sponsorship deal with a large company that has great potential, as I already had a good relationship with the local representative of the company and the theme of the event is very suitable for both parties.

Coolporteur Convivium

Gap, France

Activity: Dinner/Promoting local product

Convivium leader: Philippe Rostain, philippe@slowfood.fr

The Coolporteur Convivium organizes a themed dinner focused on kid meat, which is traditional to the area. Members actively participate in cooking the meal that will be later enjoyed by the entire group.

Rediscovering a Traditional Meat: Coolporteur Cooks Kid

High among the Hautes-Alpes

We began thinking about our convivium in 2002 and our first official event was in spring 2003. The convivium is based in the town of Gap (pop. 40,000). Our convivium covers most of the Hautes-Alpes region. We have between 50 to 60 members and have maintained our membership throughout the years, as we feel the ideal size for our convivium is about 50 members.

Our membership is composed of some food professionals, but the majority are food enthusiasts. The average age is around 50 years old, but we are starting to attract younger members – one, for example, is a student in hospitality school. While we are trying to develop more activities aimed at children, we are finding it hard to find ways to attract young adult members. We are aware of this problem and are trying to solve it.

Working with a Theme

We have organized a recurring event focusing on organic kid meat obtained directly from a producer and that we have butchered ourselves. Kid meat is traditional in our region. For each meal, we choose a different theme and we invite a cook (professional or not) to come teach us a recipe using this type of meat. The day is divided into two parts: we start the day with the cooking lesson and in the afternoon we enjoy the meal we've prepared. We also invite a speaker to discuss the theme selected. This year for example, we invited a speaker to discuss fair trade.

The Importance of Active Participation

This activity is successful because it permits people to participate and to get involved. I find it a shame that people only come to Slow Food as consumers – that is, that they come only to eat well and be introduced to good wines. This activity permits members of the convivium to get to know each other better as well. By highlighting kid, we are bringing attention to a forgotten meat.

For this event, we have been able to secure the use of an entire inn. The innkeeper allows us to use his kitchen and dining room for free, which is pretty amazing. The cooks are volunteers if they are amateur and the professional cook we had charged us a lower fee. We also obtain the kid meat at a reduced price.

Planning the Event

We have a committee of six people that organizes events, with three of them forming the office committee that takes care of daily affairs and consequently meets more often. In planning the kid meat dinner, we make financial calculations on our projected expenses before the event and decide on a minimum price for the event. This minimum should allow us to make a small profit. We contact our partners, such as the kid producer, the butcher

and the cook to make appointments and arrangements. Once the cooks have chosen the recipes, we decide on complementary groceries for the meal and select someone to go buy them. We then organize promotion and communicate the event to our members.

As this is a members-only event, we rely solely on e-mail announcements and post for the 10 per cent who do not have e-mail yet. If we do not reach our target numbers with our members, we have a list of interested parties to whom we send a second mail-out. For the event itself we publish the menu and the recipe for the kid meal. We try to have some written up for all of our activities so that people can take something home with them.

Cork City Convivium

Cork, Ireland

Activity: Cork City Festival

Convivium leader: Clodagh McKenna, clodaghmckenna@eircom.net

The Annual Cork City Festival is not just a Slow Food event, but a city event as well. With approval and cooperation from the City Council, Slow Food Cork can close off an entire street for a day to host tastings, workshops, a pub-crawl and much, much more. Inexpensive and in the middle of the city, the idea is to make the event totally accessible.

Getting the Whole Town Involved: Cork City Festival

The Cork City Convivium represents an area with a population of 200,000 people, 400,000 if you include the broader metro area, and after only six months we have about 30 members. Our hope, though, is to double our membership during the Cork City Festival (held in September). Organizing interesting events makes people feel like joining our convivium.

Quite the To-Do

Local government and local producers join forces in Cork to organize the Annual Cork City Festival, which is an official City-of-Cork event as well as a Slow Food activity. We close down the main street on one day and have 60 producers in a farmers' market. There is a Slow Food awards gala to recognize people like butchers, bakers and so on, and there's an entire day of workshops held in a hotel, on things like feeding kids, Ark products, how to shop, producers from Cork, and even butchering and breadmaking workshops. Then there's a Slow Food pub-crawl, for which we have paired up farmers with local pubs, so the producers present dishes in every pub for 5 euros. The mayor and all kinds of important people attend, so it's quite the to-do.

Designed for Everyone

Also to that end, the festival focuses on being accessible and approachable, which I feel is the way to get ahead with Slow Food in Ireland. The intention behind the workshops, for example, is to educate people in a way that's not intimidating, so we try to make the information we transmit as everyday and basic as possible. The lack of food culture here means it's important for us to ensure that people can relate to what we are offering. We also offer good prices and get good sponsorship for the event to make it accessible financially, and they're even accessible geographically, since the workshops are held in the center of the city. Advertising as broadly as possible ensures a diverse crowd, so we get newspaper features and distribute pamphlets and posters – 300 posters to every convivium in Ireland, 10,000 brochures, some to the Irish convivia, and the rest for

distribution in Cork itself. We pay a company to have those put up at the butchers', bakers' and shops, so that people can see them while they're thinking about their food.

Making It Official

Since this is an official event, we have to get permission from the town council for basically every step, and we also divide up each individual part of the festival so that one person is responsible for each aspect and for finding people to work for them. For this, we produce a detailed list of responsibilities, so that everyone knows what they have to do and everything is out in the open.

There are a few ways to ensure that we don't take on more than we can chew, like making sure an event is likely to have enough bookings, organizing a budget and always doing our costing beforehand to make sure that, at the very least, we are not losing money.

Organizing events that are too pricey and in posh restaurants tends not to give a good feeling to people, so we avoid that, but we do make sure that people pay up front, especially if there's a restaurant booking involved. For example, we have restaurants take bookings directly and add 20 per cent to the price they would ask, and then we collect the extra 20 per cent. But we never *promise* restaurants a certain amount of bookings – we do not want to break any bridges with anybody, and we certainly don't want to take business away from restaurants and hotels.

Working with Other Convivia

Sometimes the Cork Convivium holds joint events, as well; like with East Cork, West Cork, or even Dublin. National activities that involve holding the same event on the same day, like a national picnic day, would really bring Slow Food Ireland together and provide support for the smaller convivia.

Delhi convivia

Delhi, India

Event: Promoting local products

Convivium Leader: Maya Jani, navslow@yahoo.co.in

The two newly founded Delhi convivia have organized two events this past year. The first event focused on Delhi street food, which is in danger of disappearing. The second event was a mango festival where participants discovered the many uses of the mango. Both the events and the convivia benefit from the support of Navdanya, an organization that focuses on biodiversity, food security and traditional knowledge.

Delhi Convivia Revive Local Traditions

Partnering to Further Our Reach

The Delhi convivia, also called *Apnaa swaad* (Our own taste) were founded one year ago. The city of Delhi is very spread out so it is impossible to have one single convivium for the whole area. We divided into two units, one in the south and one in the east of the city.

We have five members in each convivium. We collaborate a lot with Navdanya for the organization of our events, and at this time we do not organize our own events, but rely on their support to create joint events.

We have very diverse members because we do believe in diversity, don't we? We have a member in her 80s and she is very enthusiastic. We have others in their 60s and some in their 30s, so I guess we cover a large spectrum of ages. Some of the members are housewives, some are nutritionists – it is a cross section of people, although we are mostly women in the convivium.

Exploring Delhi Street Food

Our first event focused on Delhi's street food, which is very ancient and traditional. Currently, there are many new hygiene laws coming into effect in Delhi and these are putting street food in danger. This style of food is vibrant and actually feeds many people. We contacted a street-restaurant that has existed for more than 150 years and brought them to the Navdanya stall at Dilli Haat.

Normally to eat street food you would have to go into the Delhi streets, and some people are afraid and won't do that. People enjoyed this activity because there was a connection to food culture. It demonstrated that street food culture is also ancient and traditional.

Honoring Our Grandmothers' Knowledge

Our second event was a month-long mango festival at the Navdanya stall. Among the activities, we organized cooking demonstrations with mangoes. The objective was to demonstrate that you could do so much starting with one basic ingredient. There are many recipes that our grandmothers used to make and this kind of knowledge is at risk of disappearing with them. There was a great willingness to learn and to keep this type of knowledge alive during the workshops, because people realized that this is endangered information. There is great change away from the slow ways of cooking in India. When people are shown that these recipes are not tedious, there is a kind of joy that returns in making the recipes.

With some recipes, we learnt how to make short cuts, as it is better to make the recipe than to not make it at all. People think that it takes so much time to make pickles, but when our recipe instructor made two or three different kinds of pickles right in front of us within a few minutes, there was a realization that they could also make these and many said they would try the recipes at home.

Coming Together to Plan

Normally we contact our convivium members to plan out an activity. We have a meeting and choose an interesting topic, something that will attract more people. We then allocate a team to work on the activity and divide responsibilities. We identify a venue and somebody suitable to lead the workshop. For example, for the mango demonstration, we found a lady that knew about mango recipes.

Regarding publicity, newspaper advertisements are extremely expensive in India. Usually, we send out information on an activity to our membership base via e-mail. The convivia members spread the word in their networks. We also advertise through the Dilli Haat stall.

Raising Awareness, Making an Impact

One of our stumbling blocks has been reaching out to new people. We would like more people to join, but in Delhi people are very busy. It is difficult for them to take time from their busy schedules. Our output has always been more than our input, but we do not call it a loss as we have gained in terms of awareness amongst young and old alike. The popularity gained is not equated in terms of money. We have a very positive impact.

There are many opportunities to bond on the subject of food. Whether it is the relevance of seasonality, or foods that will help us fight climate change. Along with Navdanya, we like to incorporate many different issues into our activities.

Denver Convivium

Denver, Colorado, USA

Activity: School garden and market

Convivium leader: Matthew Jones, matt4food@mac.com

A school garden and taste education project established in a US public elementary school, undertaken with community support and participation, has grown over four years to operate through school holidays and feature a students' produce market.

Seed-to-Table: Students' Garden and Market in Denver

Our Convivium

Our convivium started in the year 2000 in Denver, a city of over 2 million people located at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. There are other convivia nearby, but our 100 members come almost expressly from the urban area. Initially, Slow Food was of great appeal and almost trendy, and we quickly reached our highest ever membership in our first two years. The face of SF Denver has changed somewhat since then, however, to become more serious about our programming, making it truer to the SF philosophy. While our membership is lower now, members are more serious about these types of activities. Around 5 to 10 per cent of members are producers. Generally our members are 45-plus in age, with many retired folk and a few young people who are usually heavily involved in food issues through education, nutrition, production etc.

A Team Effort

Generally, many of our members contribute with specific skills useful in development or management of events: teachers assist with curriculum development for schools, grant writers help us apply for money, business people use their networks. We have a steering committee and an education committee who prepared a handbook regarding our taste education goals and activities. Around 20 of our members are involved in educational projects, five to 10 of whom are involved in planning.

In the Seed-to-Table event, members have undertaken all sorts of volunteer roles: designing the garden, supervising children, managing budgets, teaching taste education, planning and coordination, cooking and food preparation. One member works in landscape gardening and helped us get the required materials. Members involved in this project feel revitalized by it and feel they have done something very positive, which is crucial to keeping our convivium active and positive.

Seed-to-Table in Denver Elementary Public Schools

Denver has been working intensely with a local, primarily Hispanic elementary school (6- to 11-year-olds) for four years, establishing a school garden and taste education program as well as a farmers' market operated by the students. This is one of five elementary schools that are working with SF Denver, but the only one with the unique addition of the farmers' market at this stage.

The project began with building a raised-bed school garden and curriculum development in taste education. Following the successful introduction of the garden and education program, enthusiasm from the school community and a small financial grant gave us the opportunity to expand the project to continue the garden over the summer months, when the school is closed, and to establish a farmers' market operated by the students to sell the produce. Thus, it became a kind of business incubator as well – the students keep the garden and market alive while school is on vacation and learn much about responsibility and business. We were able to pay the children something for their time spent on the project over the summer, as many take summer jobs and couldn't give their time otherwise, as well as paying a supervisor. The two paid school gardeners were interviewed and hired by SF Denver. One is actually a retired teacher from the school. At the end of summer the children are thanked with a Harvest Festival, a dinner put on by the school to show appreciation to all involved in the project.

Joining Forces, Sharing Resources

This project has been possible only through various partnerships. The partnership with the school is of course fundamental, but there are also many opportunities to partner with various individuals, businesses or organizations with similar ideas and goals.

We began by identifying a school with a garden area and openness to working with Slow Food. Following this, we developed a relationship with a community group who was building learning landscapes (playgrounds) in schools, aimed to increase physical activity. We were able to join their project to include school gardens at the same time, and it is through this relationship that we were able to quickly get projects off the ground with five schools. The chance to extend to a market garden project came from our strong relationship developed by working with the school for some time, which led us to being successful in receiving a neighborhood (community development) grant to fund the market.

We have also been working in coalition with the Denver Community Garden organization and other local groups. We work together with like-minded community groups to broaden our opportunities (shared grants/resources) and reach (using their promotional network). Developing partnerships can also be serendipitous, with people seeking us out. Sometimes the biggest successes can come about through building a Slow Food component into someone else's program.

Community Spirit

This project has built an enormous amount of good will, becoming a major community unifying action. After the garden was established, people started to drop by from the local community and ask what was going on. Locating the garden adjacent to a public street (on the school property boundary) made community contact easier. Many of the parents are working and can't volunteer their time, and actually many of the kids work as well, which is why it was good to compensate them for their efforts with a small wage over summer vacations. The involvement of the school and community, who took it on as their own project, made this a success, and this is what we aim for, to build up a program and then let the school community take it over completely.

Gathering Resources

Resources - materials, time and money - were pooled from various sources to allow the project to exist. Materials to build the garden beds were donated; a volunteer agency provided the labor to build the garden (assisted by SF members). Denver Urban Gardens received a large grant (community development and a wellness grant for disadvantaged

social community) and we were allocated \$9,000 of this, which allowed us to pay the supervisors and students in the market program. In addition, there are many small donations that together help to make the program possible: fruit trees and various plants from SF members or local producers, seeds from a seed saver association. We also hold an annual Slow Food dinner dedicated to raising money for the gardens. The money is hard to come by but it is out there.

Willing Workers

We have found the children very receptive to this program and that there is no lack of desire on their part, which is contrary to what some people think. Many of the children here are just one generation from the farm and we have witnessed that they are comfortable in the garden and that it reinforces many positive messages for them.

Edinburgh Convivium

Edinburgh, Scotland, UK

Activity: Recurring dinner

Convivium leader: Donald Reid, info@slowfoodedinburgh.co.uk

The Slow Suppers organized by the Edinburgh Convivium are a simple way to hold a regular activity. They consist of monthly Monday night suppers held in a restaurant offering a fixed £10 menu. With no fixed agenda or theme, the Slow Suppers simultaneously offer an ideal introduction to new members and a way to reacquaint members who have been inactive for some time with the convivium.

Edinburgh's Slow Suppers: Maintaining Contact through Regular Events

Our Convivium

The convivium of Edinburgh was founded four or five years ago and is mainly an urban convivium. Our convivium also comprises the neighboring counties of the Lothians, the border region of Scotland and Fife. These regions are quite rich agriculturally and include some small fishing harbors as well. The city of Edinburgh itself has a population of 350,000, while including the wider area would bring that number to about half a million.

We have a membership of about 225, which has grown quite steadily in the years since we started. We have a large list of contacts and we try to stay in touch with these interested parties. Over the course of time, we have found that a majority of these contacts eventually join up. We seem to be becoming a younger convivium and the professions represented are quite varied. Our convivium has about 20% of its members in the food and drink trade.

We have found that a fairly small number of people lend their skills when organizing events, even though some individuals share a lot of their knowledge and skills. Our committee of seven or eight people generally organizes our events.

A Relaxing and Accessible Evening

An event we have organized since the early days of our convivium and which has been rather successful is a regular event called "Slow Suppers".

Once a month, on a Monday night, we hold a supper in a restaurant where we have negotiated a fixed £10 menu. No booking is necessary for this event, and this lends a relaxed atmosphere to the evening. We have no agenda or theme associated with the supper; it is simply an occasion to get together and people can drop in as they wish. We use the same restaurant for six months then change over to another one.

How We Do It

When planning this event, we have to make arrangements with a chosen restaurant in advance. We identify the right sort of restaurants and approach them to discuss their possible interest in this project. We must also ensure that the size of the venue is appropriate, as we outgrew our first venue quite quickly. As we look for a commitment of six months from the restaurant, they must understand that although it is likely we will bring clients on that night, we cannot confirm numbers since we do not take bookings. The restaurants we have collaborated with in the past are usually quite good about letting us come with whatever amount of people we can muster as Monday is a slow night for them anyway.

An Ideal Introduction to Slow Food

This event makes for a convivial evening and it does not require very much organizing on the convivium's part. We have found it to be an ideal introduction to Slow Food for new and potential members. This aspect is key in explaining the success of this activity. Slow Suppers are accessible to both members and non-members alike. An individual can decide at the last minute to attend, which is unusual since so many of our other activities need to be booked ahead.

Letting People Know

We publicize Slow Suppers by letting our members and contacts know that this event is happening. We have learned that we need to remind them every month that this event is on. We communicate mainly by e-mail and send announcements to both members and interested parties about upcoming events. We also mail a monthly letter about our events in general to our members. Some of the restaurants we approach may do some internal advertising about the Slow Suppers but this is fairly rare. For the supper itself, we prepare some promotional material that announces our upcoming events. We always have Slow Food materials at our events that people can leaf through and take home. We are also planning to prepare some materials more targeted on Slow Food and local food issues which we will place on every table.

Informality and Regularity

The informality of this event is important, as is the convivial atmosphere of having a supper where like-minded people can come and eat together. We are able to offer a very cheap menu, so it's good food for good value. The fixed price and lack of pre-booking has made the financial planning of this event fairly straightforward, as long as the restaurant is OK with the £10 charge. The regularity of this activity is very useful for the convivium.

As a convivium, we know that at least something is happening every month. In this sense, this activity allows new members to feel part of the movement almost right away and it also helps us to draw old members back into the convivium's activities. Having a recurring event has helped our convivium's membership grow. It has also created a better relationship with local restaurants and increased the convivium's profile locally. Having regular meals at selected restaurants allows our members to comprehend what constitutes a Slow Food type of restaurant. I think it has also helped the different chefs on their Slow

Food journey in the sense that it has made them more aware of local produce and what they are cooking.

Castelli Giuliani Convivium
Trieste Area, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Italy
Activity: Taste education
Convivium leader: Gellini Giulianan, paroladigg@libero.it

This taste education project has helped hospitality school students get better acquainted with local food products and traditions.

Integrating Taste Education into Hospitality Schools

Our Convivium

The Castelli Giuliani Convivium was formed in 2002, in the high-plains of Trieste in the northern region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, but excluding the actual city of Trieste. We have a steady membership of around 30 members. Our membership is not rising, as we don't organize many events, with most of our energy taken up with this particular educational event. However, we have grown from an initial membership of just 14 members. Our membership is very young, around 25 years old, and mainly professionals, students and teachers.

Buon a sapersi

“Buon a sapersi” (Good to Know) began in 2005, as a project working with students in hospitality schools with the objective of increasing their awareness and understanding of local products. The course we offer covers one academic year and consists of six to seven sessions of four to five hours each, in which one class or more participates (there are three to four classes in total).

Learning about Local Products

Students and staff give input on the topics studied. The courses offered are based on one theme on diverse product types from which stem the exams on typical local products, like Sauris Prosciutto, Formadi Frant (a cheese presidium), grispolenta (grain) and native grape varieties such as Yellow Ribolla and Schioppettino.

Students are given the tools in finding local products and producers via a regional product map (produced by us) and through diverse information sources (literature research, magazines, web).

Beyond this, the local producers are invited to classes or we meet them directly at a farm or other premises. The students also explore the local trattorias, interviewing those who are actually using local products.

The teachers who collaborate with us are usually from the Slow Food Italy Master of Food program and occasionally university professors from other institutions. First-year students, at the end of the course, instead of writing essays, prepare posters with photos taken during the year and the second-year students made a Power Point presentation for a press release. We always include sensory education.

In the next school year, students went beyond ‘traditional’ wine studies by studying a native varietal, tasting the wines and visiting producers, ultimately planting a vineyard in the garden of the hospitality school.

Why It Succeeds

The project succeeds because of the enthusiasm of the organizer and manager of the course, the continual feedback between teachers and collaborators and subject content that is treated in a way to maintain the interest of students. The results have been excellent and have allowed us to gain the consent of the regional entity that financed the project to have local television coverage.

Cultivating Regional Representatives

While at the beginning of a course many students don’t know much about regional products, by the time they finish they not only can explain them to others but they have also been engaged in actual production techniques. The course in effect produces spokespeople and representatives of our regional culture.

Course Planning and Promotions

I am the key organizer of this project, finding the financing and arranging the syllabus and teaching. The convivium co-leader is my collaborator and assists me with university relations, coordinating the teaching staff, maintaining relationships with producers and organizing visits, and works on the press conferences. In a teaching capacity, both of us are involved in teaching sensorial analysis lessons and in making presentations about Slow Food. In preparing the syllabus, we used the material drafted by the Slow Food Italy Taste Education Office, making modifications to adapt it to our context.

Initially, I personally contacted schools and proposed the project to them. After the first year this wasn’t necessary, as we were already well known and the requests began coming to us. Thanks to regional financing, the schools don’t have to pay and this made it much easier to gain their partnership.

We prepared material to present at meetings with the school directors and teachers, presenting the course and providing an understanding of how to integrate the material into their school curriculum.

Financing

The project received funding of 80,000 euros from the region, and we have next year’s funding coming from the local public administration. The producers often offer their products to be used during the course.

Promoting the Results

At the end of each course we prepare a press conference luncheon, during which the students make presentations on the products they have studied. The students also prepare the menu and lunch for these press conferences, featuring the products they have been studying. Carlo Petrini was able to participate in the press conference the first year and much media attention was given to the event.

Madison Convivium and Mantova Convivium
Madison, Wisconsin, USA and Mantova, Italy

Activity: Convivium Exchange

Convivium Leader: Susan Boldt, susanboldt@slowfoodwisconsin.org Madison Convivium Leader

Over the past four years, the Madison and Mantova convivia have exchanged four visits each. The two convivia are collaborating to share Slow Food principles across continents, and each convivium is enriched by the exchange.

Slow Sisters: Sharing Taste Education Across Convivia and Continents

Connecting Convivia

The Madison Convivium in the USA and the Mantova Convivium in Italy have established a partnership program to exchange ideas, culture and the knowledge they have gained from their Slow Food activities. This unique partnership was the first international Slow Food Sister City project when it began in October 2002. The Slow Food partnership began as a citizen initiative under the Madison-Mantova Sister City program, and has developed into a strong relationship between our two convivia and food regions.

Madison is the capital of Wisconsin in northern USA, and Mantova is in the northern region of Lombardy in Italy.

International Visits

The exchange between the two convivia is based on our respective culinary traditions and the Slow Food priorities of taste education and sustaining biodiversity. Through the establishment of a visitor exchange program, we have been able to share food traditions, hold taste education events and promote our local and artisan products. We have also shared information on farmers' markets and food marketing models, nutritional programs, food stamps, school lunch and school gardening programs.

Over the past four years, members of the Mantova Convivium have visited Madison four times, and Madison members have gone to Mantova four times as well. Two of the trips made by Americans coincided with the Terra Madre event, and a group of delegates and members were able to stay for some days in Mantova after the meeting. This case study focuses on a particular visit to Madison by a Mantova delegation in 2005.

A Weeklong Visit

In October 2005, we hosted a seven-day visit for three Mantova members – including a prominent chef, a culinary assistant and the regional manager of Slow Food Lombardy. A schedule of events was prepared and included activities like cooking demonstrations at a Food and Wine fair and a local cooperative café, a sustainable Slow Fish lecture and cooking demonstration for culinary students, TV and media interviews, a meeting with the mayor of Madison and a tour of area and the University.

The cooking demonstrations were open to the public, aside from the Slow Fish event, which was held at Madison Area Technical College and was only accessible to culinary students, staff and our members.

The visit was planned to coincide with the Madison Food and Wine Show, at which our convivium holds a booth. We organized two demonstrations and taste workshops during the Fair, featuring chefs and cooking instructors from Mantova and Wisconsin and traditional foods from both areas, combining Mantova products with our local artisan ingredients and vegetables. We were also able to showcase our Sister City Slow Food partnership, promote our mutual objectives of sharing food traditions, guiding taste education, promoting local and artisan products of our regions, continuing our visitor exchange program and introducing the new Slow Food model of agriculture to a broader public.

Host Convivia Participation

The Madison Convivium has around 100 members, many of whom are interested in the cultural aspects of the exchange and several who are very interested in the local artisan producer exchanges that have happened through our partnership. There are currently 10 members active in maintaining and developing our partnership with Mantova, with an additional 4 to 5 restaurant owners, also members, who become involved in events.

Members attended the special events that were offered throughout the week, and many assisted with the preparation needed at the various events. Interest among our members is increasing with each event, project and exchange, and in fact many of the member volunteers were helping for the first time.

A Drive for Success

One element that made the event successful was the commitment of people involved in this partnership and their desire to make this a meaningful experience for all involved. We had backing from private industry (Food and Wine Show), the technical college staff and students, restaurant professionals, the cooperative grocery store, our members, the media and of course Mantova convivium partners. We had a very ambitious schedule and were able to share their talents and love for Slow Food.

Slow Food Reaching Diverse Audiences

The week's spectrum of events meant we were able to reach a broad section of people interested in food: culinary students and staff, members of the grocery cooperative, Italian community members, wine enthusiasts, farmers' market vendors, natural resource professionals, the mayor and other local government staff. Slow Food principles were demonstrated through actual events, such as the Slow Fish event and the cooking demonstrations that highlighted regional and artisan products.

Highlighting Biodiversity

During the week, at our Food and Wine Show stall, we were able to feature the Ark product White Earth wild rice. In general, we try to exchange information on any regional specialties during the visits, especially presidium products: Salame Mantovani Casalin, and Mostarda di Mantovana in Mantova, and Heritage Turkey Breeds in Madison.

Mantova members are involved in lake restoration projects, and this encourages discussion within our own convivium regarding the sustainability of products related to the Great Lakes and water in general (fish, edible aquatic plants, the culture and customs of fishing).

Publicity

During this visit we worked with the local news media and got coverage in local newspapers, alternative newspapers, as well as a television interview with our guests and a

feature in a monthly Madison magazine. We try to use the same approach for all our Slow Food Sister City visitors, but being involved in the Food and Wine show allowed us easier access to media, a greater reach and exposure to a different segment of the general public.

The Food and Wine Show included us in their promotional material. For the other events we made simple one-page information sheets and distributed them through the host venues. We promoted the events to members by email, in our monthly or bi-monthly information bulletin, and with postings on our website.

The Planning Stages

Planning for the events and proceedings of the week began in late spring 2005, six months prior to the arrival of the visitors from Mantova. First, we coordinated with the Food and Wine Show organizers to determine the cooking demonstrations and our stall, and as soon as we knew that we could participate we started to contact our colleagues in Mantova.

The Madison Food and Wine Show covered the travel and accommodation costs, as our visitors were participating in this event. Normally, the individuals who visit cover their own travel costs, and the host convivium offers home stays for visitors who prefer that. The ingredient costs for the cooking demonstrations were provided by the grocery store cooperative.

We had a core team of 6 people who helped sketch out the week, making sure that our calendar worked, fitting in class schedules, securing ingredients, working out housing and transportation schedules, liaising with the Mantova visitors (in Italian), liaising with government, Madison Area Technical College staff, the Food and Wine Show, the American chefs, venues, the media, etc.

We relied on a schedule that listed the key tasks or events of each day, a description of what was involved, any costs, who was responsible and whether a translator was needed.

We originally envisioned carrying out taste education workshops, but given the nature of the exhibition hall venue it was more appropriate to deliver a more standard cookery demonstration, and we hope to offer taste education next time in a smaller room.

Outcomes and Future Plans

The whole week was an overwhelming success. We were able to introduce culinary students and instructors, university professors and local chefs to new ways of using local products and to Slow Food principals, while our members and others had the opportunity to learn techniques using local ingredients.

We are definitely continuing our exchanges and are focusing on artisan cheese during 2006-2007, as it is important to our regional communities in Wisconsin and Mantova. We have also just recently initiated our School Garden exchange.

Mar del Plata Convivium

Mar del Plata, Argentina

Activity: Linking Food and Culture/Film Screening

Convivium Leader: Maria Larsen, mdlarsen@hotmail.com

Thanks to the enthusiasm and personal involvement of Mar del Plata Convivium's leader Maria Larsen, a film festival based on Slow Food on Film was organized by the convivium.

Slow Food on Film

Diverse Culinary Culture

I founded the convivium of Mar del Plata a year ago in this tourist city on the coast of Argentina. You can find fruit and vegetable production in the area, as well as fishing and cattle breeding. There is lots of agricultural activity, but also lots of tourist activity: the city grows from 600,000 inhabitants in winter to over a million during the summer season.

As a consequence of all the tourism, there are lots of restaurants in the city. The culinary culture is extremely diverse: Argentinean food culture revolves around meat traditionally, but throughout history, all of the Italian immigration has introduced pasta and fish. There are a very large number of Italian associations in the country, 70 of which are in Mar del Plata alone. The population is becoming increasingly aware of what it is being fed and is asking for higher quality.

The convivium has 20 members, some of whom I sought out personally. A few have called for information, but I've visited them all, trying to recreate the reaction I myself experienced when I first heard about Slow Food and thought, "Wow, these people think the same way I do!"

I produce honey. The other members of the convivium have very different professional profiles but are all somehow united by gastronomy. There is a hotel director, who also manages the Bristol film festival and produces pheasant pâté, a journalist, a producer of laurel liquor, a Greek restaurant owner, a chef, and a director of a gastronomic school, among others. They are between 40 and 50 years old and have all the passion in the world where food is concerned. Each member has a contribution to make to the convivium.

Offering Various Activities

Until now, we have organized different types of activities, from speeches to a short film festival dedicated to gastronomy and its social aspects. The convivium also tries to organize activities such as eco-gastronomic counseling to restaurants and visits to small producers.

One of the speeches was organized in a library, where we also created a "Slow Food corner", with the Slow magazines and related publications and books. The speeches can be on any subject, depending on who is listening (cooks, children, etc.), and they are very useful for spreading the Slow Food philosophy. In small villages, we usually get some help from the tourism offices. They pay for transportation, for example, or publicize the event.

Film Festival Argentinean Style

Slow Food on Film Mar de Plata, which we are currently organizing, is our most promising event. We have based it on the film contest that Slow Food organizes in Italy. We translated the materials and communicated them to all the cinematography schools of Argentina and to all media.

On October 6, in the hotel Presidente Perón, we will show food movies free of charge in a lounge that the hotel's manager has provided for us. At the same time, in another part of

the hotel, a small fair will be organized, with producers that work in social projects, such as “mujeres del abasto” (women providers), who collect, prepare and distribute food to people who have been run down by the country’s economic crisis. The association “pro-huerta” is also helping these people to cultivate small plots of land in order to survive and retain some dignity.

The festival was promoted in the whole area. I personally went to speak to several journalists, including radio journalists. Our own contacts were also asked to spread the word. The Movie Festival of Mar del Plata also helped publicize the event.

Patience and Motivation: Overcoming Difficulties

For the film festival, the costs were minimal and I paid them myself. However, many people put in a lot of time and effort, each person helping out in any way they could. The thing is, when you don’t have a treasury, you need much more time, patience and motivation. For example, when I started organizing the short film festival, I was negotiating for two months for a venue to show the movie before it finally became clear that they were not going to do it, mainly because there was a fast food place in the compound. By then, I had to start all over again.

Some things help a lot, though, such as City Hall’s support for some projects that they declare to be of cultural public interest. This doesn’t always translate into financial support, but it can help open some doors.

Building Networks and Never Giving Up

To all other convivia in the world, I wish to say, “Do not give up! Go on and on and on!” I’ve been working with the other convivia in Argentina of course (Patagonia, Rosario, etc.), and they are all different but all need a helping hand. We give each other support, information, ideas and advice and communicate on a regular basis. The incredibly nice thing about all these events is that, along the way, you pick up friends and build solidarity networks, solving problems as you go. We do not lack ideas. What is even more important is to have patience and start building networks between communities as you go on.

Quebec Convivium

Montreal, Canada

Activity: Promoting local products

Convivium Leader: Paul Caccia, caccia-paul@ithq.qc.ca

As SF Quebec expands in the province, the convivium in Montreal organizes dinners that bring together consumers, chefs and local producers. The producers present their products and the chefs their dishes during the dinner. The Montreal Convivium is also engaged in a campaign to bring attention to the Canadian cow, a heritage breed.

Highlighting the Use of Local Products in Montreal Restaurants

From Slow Food Quebec to the Montreal Convivium

The convivium of Slow Food Quebec was created in 2000 and represented the entire province of Quebec at the time. In the last year, though, we have supported the creation of 4 new convivia in the province, Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Charlevoix, Eastern Townships

and Batiscan. In the coming year, we would like to become Slow Food Montreal, as the majority of our members are concentrated in the Greater Montreal region.

The convivium has generated a lot of interest in its first year. We tend to recruit new members at events, but we have found it hard to retain and renew members over the years. This is a problem for all convivia, I think. We have highs and lows. At this time, with 200 members and a relatively constant growth, we have reached a plateau. We have also redistributed some of our members to the newly created convivia in Quebec.

We have organized about 50 activities since our foundation, with 7 to 8 activities a year. We focus our activities on bringing together producers and chefs. We want to attract attention to restaurants that use local and small producers.

Bringing Chefs and Producers Together

To focus on the relationship between chefs and producers, we organize dinners that bring together these two parties. We select a chef and/or restaurant that uses local products, then ask the chef to identify 2 to 3 producers he works with, and we invite those producers as speakers for the evening. The first part of the evening is like a mini salon, where the producers sell their products while participants mingle and have a cocktail. The menu for the evening, which we develop in partnership with the chef, is based on the products featured that night. Then the producers explain their products during the meal, and the chef comes out and explains how he used the products in the dishes he made.

We usually select restaurants and chefs based on proposals from our members who have discovered a chef or restaurateur that works with artisan producers. We meet with this chef to discuss the menu and the price, then with the producers suggested by the chef to see his products. We organize the evening's proceedings with the producer (figuring out what products he will sell and what he will discuss). Then we sell the tickets for the dinner at a slightly higher price in order to make a bit of money, offering a member and a non-member price. The ticket price covers our expenses for the evening since the chef usually gives us good price for the menu he prepares.

Learning through Conviviality

We find our members and participants benefit from this type of convivial meal. They meet other people, they meet producers and they learn more about those producers. Our members have high expectations and they want to learn. The speakers therefore must be very good, outgoing and know their subject matter quite well. Our members want good content.

Raising Awareness for the Canadian Cow

We like to organize events that inform and raise awareness in a pleasant and friendly atmosphere. For example, we have been working on a campaign to protect the Canadian cow, a heritage breed. In particular, we would like to create a sponsoring scheme so that each convivium member could sponsor a cow. We are organizing press conferences to present the governmental difficulties impeding the survival of the Canadian cow. We need to continue our battle at the governmental level and change the laws on milk quotas in Canada. The costs are too high for the producers. The market is focused on production.

In Canada, convivia are dispersed over a large geographic territory. For this reason, it is sometimes difficult to coordinate events with other convivia. We are quite fragile still. With the 4 new local convivia in Quebec, we would like to encourage that type of sharing and networking. If we can establish a network in Quebec at least, that will be a big victory.

Styria Convivium
Styria, Graz, Austria
Event: Cooking with fathers
Manfred Flieser, m.flieser@aon.at

The Styria Convivium helps bring stay-at-home dads into the kitchen with their kids in this cooking workshop. Dads and kids learn how to make some nice dinners together, and then eat the results.

Cooking for Fathers on Paternity Leave in Austria

The Styria Convivium of Austria has its seat near Graz, a city of about 250,000 in Styria, which is the second-largest region in Austria. The convivium now has upwards of 180 members and continues to grow, attracting members both from Graz and the rural areas around it.

Paternity Leave

The event “Kochen für Väter in Karenz” (Cooking for Fathers on Paternity Leave) was inspired by the fact that more and more fathers are staying home with their newborn children while the mothers go back to work. There was even a government conference about the issue, and when the Austrian TV channel covering the conference interviewed kids as to what they would typically eat for lunch, the answers usually involved pizza or spaghetti. Noticing this, convivium leader Manfred Flieser proposed putting on a cooking course for kids and their fathers, that would instruct all of them in how to make food from the fresh, high-quality ingredients that Styria offers, encouraging them not to always use pre-made products. Six fathers, all upper-middle class academics with two children apiece, participated along with four other convivium members – they all spent six hours in a kitchen store learning how to cook under the guidance of Franz Schauer, who is a chef as well as a Slow Food member. After preparing the menu and then the food, everyone got to sit down and have the meal together. The local press, a national newspaper and the Austrian TV channel were all there covering the event.

For the Kids

The kids were all incredibly enthusiastic about cooking, eating, and drinking with their dads. Some took home the organic juice provided, and since this event took place in November, with Christmas around the corner, all the kids made little pouches of cookies to take home to their moms, and each were given Slow Food aprons as well. As an added bonus, both the Styria Convivium and Slow Food itself got some good press all over Austria, in print as well as on television.

We spent about five weeks planning this event, first contacting Franz, the chef, who was eager to participate, then getting together some menus and grocery lists – including all prices – and finding a venue. Then we mentioned it in the Slow Food newsletter and made some flyers as well. This event was not specifically designed for Slow Food members, however, so we also made an announcement in a newspaper, and because the convivium leader is a food and wine journalist himself, he has lots of connections.

The brewery Schlossgold at Graz paid for the food and the chef, and the juice producer Lehmbach provided the juices. Then the kitchen store offered the location, and we borrowed all the furniture we needed from a local kindergarten.

The concept of focusing on the kids has appeared in a few of our other events, as well, for example, when we bought food from local producers with the kids to show them how not everything has to come from the supermarket. We showed them how corn was milled to make flour and how to buy butter and milk from a farmer, and even gave them the chance to milk a cow.

Tashkent Convivium

Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Activity: Festival/Promoting local products/Linking food and culture

Convivium leader: Yuriy Tsoy, nature@albatros.uz

In the culturally diverse Republic of Uzbekistan, the Tashkent Convivium organizes a festival featuring Tajik, Uzbek and Kazakh cuisines and cultures. Finding support locally and nationally, this convivium is able to draw attention to particular areas where their events are held, as with this festival, held in a mountain village called Brichmulla.

Featuring local producers in Uzbekistan

Our convivium comes from the Republic of Uzbekistan, which is rich in ethnographic and geographic peculiarities. The population is more than 20 million people of more than 100 nationalities that live in the mountains, in the highlands, on the fertile valleys and in the deserts. Such a variety of nationalities and landscapes lead to a rich diversity in tastes and recipes that require clean and natural ingredients. Our convivium is based in Tashkent, the capital and administrative center of Uzbekistan.

Small Convivium with Plenty of Local Support

The convivium counts six permanent members and more than a 100 volunteers who usually help organize events. The members of our organization are of all different ages and occupations. They are united by a common goal to protect high-quality natural products. The majority of the members are producers and professionals who tend to help organize the events and solve some of the challenges our convivium meets. We also involve a significant number of local youth volunteers, mainly 15- to 16-year-olds. The responsibility for cooking and presenting the dishes belongs to the professional adult volunteers who are in their 40s and for whom cooking traditional dishes plays a very important role in their lives.

The events are usually organized by local producers with the involvement of many volunteers from local villages. The participation of local volunteers draws attention to the area where the event is held. Thanks to the efforts of the Tashkent Convivium the events usually attract the attention of local authorities, non-governmental and foreign organizations, mass media and foreign representatives.

Highlighting Our Cuisines and Cultures

One of the events organized by our convivium recently featured the Tajik, Uzbek and Kazakh local cuisines but also the cultures and traditions of these nations (dances, music and traditional games). This event attracted more than 100 participants. About 3,000 peasants from nearby villages, local authorities, members of NGOs, international and foreign organizations, the representatives of national mass media and embassies attended the festival.

The event took place in a mountain village called Brichmulla. The natural venue of the event gave visitors a wonderful opportunity to witness the cooking process and to taste the local dishes in their place of their origin. The guests could enjoy the views of nature and feel the hospitality of the amazing local people.

Seven villages and the Tashkent Convivium were responsible for organizing the event. The fruitful collaboration of both rural and city activists resulted in a great number of visitors. This experience showed a growing public interest for this kind of activity in the area.

Collaboration Is Key

The organization of this event played a great role in the development of our convivium as it showed a beneficial way of collaborating with the local population as well as with other organizations. Great attention was drawn to the region itself, to its population, their customs and traditions, to their cuisine and unique dishes prepared with natural products. The activities of the local producers were promoted and their customer base has increased as a result of this event.

The preparation for the event included a meeting where all the organizational matters were discussed. We then worked out the plan for the activities and the program of the event. After that we discussed and approved the budget. Convivium members covered all the expenses.

A black and white event program was printed and distributed to the different organizations that showed some interest. We also advertised the event on radio and the Internet and there were reports regarding the festival on national news programs, radio broadcasted and the Internet.

Seeking Support from Local Leaders

The leaders of the local communities helped a lot in organizing the meeting. The principal of the local school, Rahimova Riski Junusovna, turned out to be the key coordinator of the event. She prepared the children's performance, supervised and assisted during the cooking process, and cordially welcomed the guests to the activity. Rejepov Bahtior coordinated the festival preparation in the village Chingan. The participants from this village later joined the rest of the guests in Brichmulla. I was in charge of the general coordination of all the activities, of the fundraising, the promoting and the advertising of the event.

A Positive First Experience

Taking into consideration the fact that it was our first experience in organizing such a large event, it is difficult to predict whether the same people will organize future events. For now we keep in touch with all those who contributed to organizing the event.

Among the contributors of the festival was the Italian Embassy, which provided the local school with various educational materials, the US Embassy, which offered books and other materials in English for the children participating in the event, the Bulgarian Embassy and the World Bank.

Communications was organized through telephone calls and meetings involving the participants and the coordinators of the event. Organizations that were guests at the festival were communicated with mainly by telephone, e-mail and ordinary post. Only one or two general meetings were held.

This first experience of the Tashkent Convivium in organizing such a large event showed several aspects to work on in the future. Some difficulties in the organization made us understand that the preparation for the event should begin three to four months in advance. Next time we will also pay more attention to the choice of the venue and will try to involve more organizations. It is also very important to collaborate with organizations that share the philosophy of the convivium and Slow Food. The event in fact did not need much improvement; however, it could cover a longer period next time (two or three days instead of one) and we could try to invite more participants and guests.

Superior Convivium

Thunder Bay, Canada

Activity: Taste education/School breakfast program

Convivium leader. Jordan Kennie, jrkennie@shaw.ca

The northern Canada convivium of Superior has recently started a breakfast program at a local school. They provide healthy choices and are taking baby steps towards changing the palates of the children. The convivium is already looking towards ambitious plans of offering workshops to set up such programs all over town.

Making Healthy Breakfast Choices Available in Schools

The Superior Convivium, founded in November 2004, covers a large area in quite a remote and isolated area of Ontario. Thunder Bay, a city of 115,000 people, is the biggest center within seven hours of driving. The surrounding areas are fairly rural. We have some members that live far away, and consequently, we have never met them.

Relationship Between Children and Food

Our convivium has grown gradually. We have 29 members from all sorts of professions. Many members work in the medical or health sector, for example one of our co-leaders is a physician and the other co-leader's partner is also a physician. There are many teachers and nurses, but also food producers such as bakers, cheesemakers and a chef. Many members have children so we are trying to organize more and more activities that focus on the relation between children and food.

The idea of the breakfast program at Agnew H. Johnson school started out with our convivium's desire to get involved in taste education. Everything we do up here has a component of taste education. In our area, we are working with some people who eat instant macaroni at least three times a week. We are working from such a basic level. We also knew we wanted to do something with a school. We had a small school garden where only the potatoes worked. It's hard because we are so north here nothing gets planted before June.

No More Doughnuts

The idea came because I am a teacher and I had worked on a breakfast program before my involvement with Slow Food. I had found that a lot of the food served was white bread, instant oatmeal, that sort of thing. I wanted to change the way children eat. Some of these kids have no taste memory. Their dinner can be six doughnut holes and a soft drink. I decided to contact my old principal who is now at Agnew H. Johnson school. They had just

gotten a grant for \$24,000 from the Red Cross and had never had a breakfast program, so she was thrilled about the project.

In the school, the breakfast program is just like any other activity in school. A teacher is in charge, just like the cross-country running program or whatever. The teacher and I met and I gave her ideas for the menu. The menu reflects our convivium's philosophy and goals: healthy, varied, home-baked foods with a diversity of tastes.

Getting Help Locally

Since our convivium has been on board, it has given the breakfast program a lot of credibility with businesses and the parents' council. They know who we are. Through the Slow Food connection we have also received many donations. We have meat producers donating meat so we can do hot breakfasts with eggs and sausages for example. An interesting thing is that we aren't allowed to use farmers' eggs because of health regulations. We have a local restaurant donating eggs that are local instead. We have a stone oven bread workshop donating bread as well.

If we were in France, we would be using fresh cream and milk. In Canada, there is such a strange food culture. In general, businesses donate their extras for these types of programs. For example, we got big supermarket muffins. The older kids who were helping set up went straight to those muffins when they opened the freezer. I had to tell them to put them back and choose homemade baking whenever possible, unless we had nothing else left. We are working with a different food culture here.

A Project People Can Identify With

In our convivium, when a member is really interested in a project, they take it on, like me with the breakfast program. We've asked our members to bake extra muffins for the program and things like that. This is something that has gotten a lot of community response. It's something people can identify with and hold onto. They like that it is concrete, that it's feeding the kids. They feel they are doing something and they like that. It's a way for us to get people that have always been interested in Slow Food to get something concrete to do.

Special needs

This school is situated near a poorer neighborhood. Traditionally, it is a French Immersion school. Since there are no private schools in Thunder Bay, French Immersion has been treated that way. With many school closures in the area, more and more children from underprivileged neighborhoods started going to that school. The school has a lot of native children. They live in the city, so they are not eating traditional foods. The Type 2 Diabetes rates are through the roof with these kids. Their parents were taken away and put into schools, so they have no conception of healthy cooking and eating. Other ethnic groups in the area are Finns and Italians. We could serve wild game like moose sausage as long as it was processed commercially. We could also serve Finn pancakes. Adding things like that would be something to think about.

Our first breakfast was last Thursday and it went very well. You would never have guessed that there was flax seed in the muffins the way they were scarfing them down! We also served smoothies. I was afraid we were going to have this Jamie Oliver thing with kids throwing up and saying, "What is this?" We don't want to overwhelm them, so we're taking baby steps. We're going to start by introducing brown bread, then we'll see about other breads. We don't want them gagging.

The Difference We Make

We're kind of a big fish in a small pond, so the amount of things we can get done here is amazing. People asked us, "How can you put on a local dinner in April in Thunder Bay?" And we did it and it was all local. People were amazed. Chefs in town didn't know they could buy local produce. All of a sudden they realized they could buy so much locally. We have a captive audience here, as we are such an isolated community. We are an 18-hour drive from Toronto and about the same distance from Edmonton, which is two provinces away.

We have these pipe dreams of running all breakfast programs in this way. We want to talk to other schools and propose workshops for people so they can implement this program in their schools as well. Our convivium is a good example of what you can do in small places. We are working a bit from scratch. Here people are like, "We have farming?". They don't realize that it exists up north. People buy Atlantic salmon when there is local salmon available. We can see so much growth around here. It's really nice to see what a difference we are making.

Turin Convivium

Turin, Piedmont, Italy

Activity: Community program/Taste Workshop

Convivium leader: Andrea Pezzana, andrea.pezzana@unito.it

Turin's community-focused program brings better food to hospitals for both patients and staff.

Why Shouldn't Hospital Food Taste Good?

The Project

The project Taste for Health was born at Salone del Gusto 2004, when the Piedmont Regional Authority's Agriculture Council, the San Giovanni Antica Sede Hospital and Slow Food wrote the project's protocol, outlining our intent to promote "the right to pleasure, conviviality, and quality hospital food," according to the principles stipulated in Slow Food's paper on the right of sick people to nutrition.

The philosophy outlined constitutes the motivating idea behind our new approach to the subject of hospital food, both what's fed to the patients and to the hospital staff. The objective is to administer healthy meals that showcase the products and the cuisine of our region, and in this way to provide a time for patients to meet with each other, with family, and with health professionals. It is a happy, convivial time that becomes an integral part of the therapeutic process. The Taste Workshops for Health represent the first phase in the realization of this project. In the future we are also planning some training sessions for the hospital's internal personnel, aimed at sharing the contents of the paper on the rights of the sick, making a cafeteria, and managing meal preparation.

It Happens in the Hospital

San Giovanni Antica Sede Hospital is located in the heart of Turin, and it is a famous center for the practice of oncology – the treatment of cancer patients – in Piedmont. It's a small hospital with 80 beds for ordinary patients, which also performs the activities of day hospitals as well as radiotherapy and support for oncology patients.

Adjusting the Workshop to Fit the Hospital

The Taste Workshops for Health were borrowed from the Master of Food program and adjusted to fit the environment, that is, the hospital, and the type of consumer, the patients (people still in hospital care or in follow-up treatment at the hospital), and their families and dependents.

Every month since 2004 we have presented food that is representative of the region and the season; every workshop is carried out in one or two monthly editions, for 25 to 35 people (half patients and their families, half caregivers). The workshops focus on health, and they deal with Presidium products or products with ties to the Master of Food.

A Devoted Following

The meetings take place in the crypt of the 17th-century church that dominates the baroque hospital complex.

There are about 20 people who have been coming since the first edition of the workshop and 150-200 who have participated in two or three workshops; we have decided to award people who have been to more than 10 workshops with a ticket to Salone del Gusto 2006.

The workshops begin with a technical introduction from a dietician doctor or a nutritionist on the role, in sickness and in health, of a good diet. Then we stick to the classic format of a Taste Workshop, with the history of the food, the technique of its preparation, and tastings to conclude. Farmers, breeders, artisans, or Master of Food teachers illustrate the phases of food production. A workshop lasts about two hours.

Support

The Agriculture Council shares the philosophy that motivated this project and has financed it economically. The staff of Slow Food and of the hospital, in particular the nutrition personnel, have contributed with their work.

The Piedmont Regional Authority is also involved in researching the products and the producers that participate in the workshops.

Reactions

Initially, people were surprised by this idea, and there was a lot of debate. Oncological cures have a strong impact on a sick person's ability to eat. During the workshop the pleasure is in the sensory game and in the comparative tasting, when a person rediscovers the pleasure of foods they had previously considered "forbidden."

For Those Who Want to Try It

Sensitize the hospital personnel that work in clinical nutrition and hospital food. In hospitals where patients are there for a long time, thinking of food as pleasure has an especially high value.

Treviso Convivium
Treviso, Veneto, Italy
Activity: Festival
Convivium leader: Gino Bortolotti, info@slowfoodtv.com

The Treviso Convivium, which is almost 20 years old, has a wealth of experience drawn from its experimental spirit and its tight-knit core. Gino Bortolotti shares some thoughts on the evolution of the convivium and on organizing one of its signature events.

The Treviso Experience

Always Evolving

The Treviso Convivium was founded in 1988 and its members come from the city of Treviso (pop. 90,000). The convivium's membership at this time is between 170 and 190, and it has gone through two main phases of organization, reflecting the different leaders that have guided it.

The first phase was marked by high-quality local activities primarily for small groups of members only. The second phase, which began in 1992 and continues today, is characterized by a dynamic and open organization style, both in terms of the themes selected and the participants.

Choosing to involve not only members, but also everyone who can understand and experience Slow Food, has enabled our convivium to grow in terms of members and be recognized as a social actor.

Three Times the Convivium

After a few years, the convivium, which had grown to more than 300 members, was disbanded to create five smaller convivia in the province of Treviso, and this has enhanced Slow Food's presence in the region. Today, we can count around 600 members in the province. The choice to break up the convivium was definitely a positive one as it permitted not only a significant increase in members, but also allowed many qualified people to become leaders. These new leaders were then able to organize their own initiatives within their convivia and establish a direct relationship with their members.

Master of Food

Our convivium has focused primarily on the Master of Food. Since so many of our members have obtained the Master of Food diploma for completing more than 15 courses, we want to be sure to offer courses that will continue to be interesting and engage them, especially in the ever popular wine sector. This year, in addition to offering the courses Vino 1 and Vino 2, we will offer Vino 3 for the first time, as well as a monthly "Meet the Author" event. We will host either a Venetian winemaker or a winemaker from another part of the world, alternating by the month, to offer their stories and their wines.

One of the challenges for us has always been with communications outside the convivium. Having a good relationship with the local press is of fundamental importance for us; and it is because of this relationship that information on all our activities is presented to readers in various sections of the paper.

We have all kinds of members from all lifestyles and professions. We are starting to attract more retirees, and most of our other members work in the health sector, with many teachers as well. We have difficulty recruiting young people, which may demonstrate an

inability to interact with that part of the population. It is also possible that many young people do not feel drawn to gastronomy, and restaurants are unable to allocate much money to these types of activities.

Some Observations on Experimentation

We continue to experiment and try to avoid prepackaged ideas. A healthy combination of experience, curiosity and light-heartedness has led to a “never say never” philosophy in our convivium, even when we are involved in very diverse initiatives. Even so, we do not take unnecessary risks, but strive to plan ahead on management and promotion.

Slow Food is a unique platform to educate people and promote events, products, territory and culture. Slow Food is not a way to increase capital or to pack as many people as possible into events. It is difficult to maintain this balance because partners, members and the public have great expectations when it comes to Slow Food.

Since last year, when we engage in new collaborations, we have begun asking for a financial contribution or, preferably, that the collaborator commit to recruiting 20 new members prior to the event. As of today, we’ve had success with three such initiatives.

The Main Event

Out of all of our activities, the Redentore festival stands out as an activity we enjoy particularly. This is a celebration that has been going on in Venice since 1576; it marks the end of a plague of insects that killed 50,000 in the city of Venice over the course of one year. It was established in the Republic of Venice in 1576 and occurs every year.

For this event, we decorate a motorboat to host 200 invited members and get one of the best restaurants in Veneto to prepare the traditional dishes of the Redentore. At midnight, there are spectacular fireworks over the San Marco Basin.

This event is a complicated one that requires much preparation, both logistically and financially. For this reason, we start announcing it to Veneto members and to members all over the world seven months before the event will take place. We take reservations immediately from this point onward, and get payments through bank transfer. Members from all over the world sign up. The objective is to break even financially. To ensure a bit of surplus, we also organize a lottery on the motorboat for the participants.

The cost of participation for every event we organize incorporates a small amount in excess to ensure a bit of profit that will allow us to finance future activities. This also allows the convivium to build up some modest savings to use for future or unexpected expenses.

Some Challenges

Many of the same people always show up for our events. On the one hand, this is helpful for organizing events, as we can always count on those people. But we would also like to see new faces, have new experiences and new needs expressed.

The people that collaborate also tend to be the same, with some new additions. It is not only necessary to divide up the load of work; you must also strive to become a tight-knit group that enjoys being together and collaborating because then you’ll have fun and will always have interesting experiences that are otherwise unachievable.

Yokohama Convivium
Yokohama, Japan
Activity: Fair
Convivium leader: Yoshiyuki Mouri, hal@best.tbs.co.jp

Slow Food Yokohama teams up with its home city to put on a Japanese version of Salone del Gusto.

Yokohama Fair, a Japanese Salone del Gusto

A Big City Convivium

The Yokohama Convivium was founded in May 2003 in a large Japanese city with a population of about 3.6 million. It started with 10 members and now has about 40, but every event garners around 50 volunteers, some of whom then join the convivium.

The City of Yokohama wanted to support a Slow Food event in the city for the 150th anniversary of the opening of the Yokohama port, which will occur in 2009. The city council feels that Slow Food is ideal to take on this event.

What It Takes

The point of reference for the Yokohama food festival is Salone del Gusto; we're basically trying to put together a Japanese version of Salone. The Yokohama Fair of 2006 took place in April with the participation of both Slow Food Japan and Slow Food Yokohama, and the theme was the Renaissance of Japanese soy.

There are three elements required to pull this off, in my opinion, which are:

- Exhibitors
- Publicity
- Financial assistance

As far as the first element goes, we had been organizing visits to producers for a year before we put on the first Yokohama Fair, and so we had already gathered a lot of information on these producers, who then became the fair's exhibitors. With respect to advertising, we were able to get the event announcement into a public affairs magazine in the Yokohama Council, which serves all 1.5 million families in Yokohama. COOP Kanagawa gave us some further publicity help by putting the announcement in their magazine, which goes out to its 1.1 million members. On the financial front, we found two sources of support for the first event: the gas company Tokyo Gas, and Mitsubishi Josh, a real estate agency with ties to Yokohama. Financial backing is vital for an event this size, but it's also important not to link the event too closely to its important sponsors.

5,000 Visitors

For the 2006 installment of the Yokohama Fair, we had 86 producers displaying their wares, half of whom were from the prefecture of Kanagawa, where Yokohama is located. Around 5,000 people showed up over the two days, over half of them from Yokohama. The event allowed the visitors to discover the products of their own region, nearby but unknown.

In planning the event, we first booked the exhibition hall, because you need to do that at least six months in advance. After that, we continued to look for financial help, which fortunately we eventually found.

Advertising and Sponsors

We made posters, flyers and brochures, and put the posters in public places, like elementary schools, libraries and culture centers. We gave information to a press agency that distributed it to various dailies. Additionally, we have contacts at newspapers and radio stations near us. We distributed the brochures during the two days of the event.

Getting Outside Help

We try to maintain contact with the Yokohama Council, COOP Kangawa, etc. We made our connection with Tokyo Gas by chance, when a convivium member met an employee of Tokyo Gas at an event called “Network for Taste Education.” After that, we tried asking for help, and we succeeded.

Assessing and Reflecting

After every event we have a meeting for reflection and exchanging ideas. Part of what we learned from the last edition of the Fair was to have the workshops in quieter, more separate rooms. Since 2006, the event has grown to a national level, and is held jointly by the Yokohama Convivium and by Slow Food Japan. The task now is to absorb and unite the contributions of the 45 Japanese convivia.

Zaragoza Convivium

Zaragoza, Spain

Activity: Classes/Teacher training courses

Convivium leader: Jorge Hernandez Esteruelas, yurkoo1@telefonica.net

Zaragoza Convivium has focused on young people by offering horticulture training to young adults. This rewarding activity has led to plans for working with city-run school gardens, among other activities.

Finding ways to engage young people: Training young instructors in Zaragoza

Aragon

Our area, Aragon, located next to the Pyrenees, represents a tenth of the whole national territory. The geography and climate show a lot of diversity, as does the culinary heritage, due to the historical isolation of the populations. It is not densely populated. Many of our culinary traditions have been lost – and there is a lot of concern about this, but also a great lack of information.

Difficulty of Reaching Younger People

We founded our convivium in 2004. It now counts 151 members with an average age of 45. The youngest are in their 30s. There are renowned chefs, health workers, farmers, etc. Somehow, the demographics show the current limitations of Slow Food and the convivia: the difficulty of getting to younger people. Even if the Slow Food philosophy extends much further, its image of gastronomic elitism is seldom attractive to young people. We have been trying to reach out to younger people and we have realized that there is a great

sensitivity towards ethical and political issues. Problems of rural areas, for example, are interesting to young people, while older members focus more on the culinary heritage. We are trying to find ways to unite these two faces of the same coin.

The convivium's activities find a big echo in local news. Some members are journalists, and we are also lucky to count the editor of the magazine *Sabores de Aragona* as a member.

We organize activities that vary from theme dinners to excursions in production areas, to yearly activities with local groups. Some cultural activities, linking local food to territory, culture and history, have taken place in the Roman amphitheater in Zaragoza.

Training Young People in Ecological Horticulture

We are currently organizing what might be our most rewarding activity: training young instructors. It is a course of 100 hours, aimed at young people, in which the fundamentals of ecological horticulture are taught. The newly trained instructors will be able to train other young people. We want to build a nucleus of young experts, capable of creating a network.

This activity has allowed us to get involved with young people, and the way in which the message was received gives us much hope. To see how a bunch of them are working on the vegetable garden at 6am united by a special camaraderie is something hard to describe. It is nice to see that there are many ways to reach out within society.

Stronger Ways to Spread the Slow Food Message

This has led us to think that there must be stronger, more efficient, more professional ways to spread the Slow Food message in all its depth. Indeed, the full implications and strength of that message are more visible in the result of some activities, or in the way the press is eager to publish these stories, than in the message itself and the image Slow Food carries. We are currently debating this subject and trying to find ideas and strategies to communicate Slow Food ideas.

To develop this activity, four institutions agreed to collaborate: the Ecological Agriculture Committee of Aragon, the Study and Nutritional Technology Center, the Center for Rural Studies and International Agriculture, and the convivium. The Center for Rural Studies provided the teachers. The classes were taught in a cultural center facilitated by a financial institution. The practical aspects were taught in a vegetable garden provided by the Center for Rural Studies, and we are trying to find funds for a more accessible vegetable garden.

This project also counts on the support of the environment department called Ecoalmunia.

Working with City-run School Gardens

The network we are creating somehow runs parallel to a project organized by the city, which involves 50 school gardens. At one point these projects should meet. Today, we help one of these schools with subjects such as cooking and biodiversity. The city is organizing a big fair with all these schools and has given us a space to promote our own educational project.

One rewarding aspect of our project is that we didn't even have to promote it to get enough students. 32 young people came forward spontaneously and filled the 30 spaces we had. After this course, some of them even had actual job offers.

We have also started producing a film that we would like to show at the Slow Food on Film festival and at an international exhibition on water. We have the crew and the subject and we are currently looking for sponsors to finance the production.

Until now, we have found sponsors for some activities in a very informal way. We are starting a more systematic approach to reach new sponsors, sending them mail and visiting them. It is a difficult activity.

Working with Other Convivia near and far

We would like to tell other convivia to push their imagination and work with them to build networks. We work with other convivia in Spain and also with the Po Convivium. We are currently working on a mobile, trans-Pyrenees pastry event and we would like to be twinned with the Bologna Convivium, which has very similar characteristics to ours. We also wish to build a center for Mediterranean cuisine with the convivia of the coast, to promote “our version” of Mediterranean culinary culture.

We want to do anything that will shape people’s critical sense where food is concerned, so that we don’t let food “super powers” lead us wherever they want. That is something that has to start at an early age because taste can, and must, be cultivated.