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Enjoying the Slow Food Movement



By Gemma Alexander

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The term "slow food" seems like a self-explanatory antonym for fast food. So if fast food is quick, cheap, and easy, slow food must then be time-consuming, expensive, and complicated. That view is not quite accurate. But the values of the slow food movement are somewhat foreign to the Standard American Diet. Expensive ingredients and fancy restaurants give it the rich aroma of elitism, putting a lot of people off. And that's a shame, because slow food has a lot to offer to people who are used to eating SAD.

Origins of the Slow Food Movement

In the United States, the slow food movement is most closely associated with celebrity chef [Alice Waters](#). Waters founded Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California in 1971 and has been a constant advocate for seasonal farm-to-table cuisine and a culture of mindful appreciation for the processes behind the food we eat.

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However, the term “slow food” was not coined until 19^{CLOSE}89 when fast-food titan McDonald’s opened a store in an iconic Roman square. Italians **protested** this act of culinary imperialism by distributing pasta and shouting the slogan “We don’t want fast food. We want slow food!” Three years later, the Slow Food International organization was officially founded in Paris with the adoption of the **Slow Food Manifesto**.

Principles of Slow Food

There is an environmental aspect to slow food, but it is not primarily an environmental movement. The Slow Food Manifesto’s subtitle is “International Movement for the Defense of and the Right to Pleasure.” The single-page document points to fast food as a critical example of the way industrialization prioritizes speed to the detriment of culture, tradition, peace of mind, and the environment. It positions the Slow Food movement as a defense of quality of life.

Originally most interested in traditional food cultures and quality ingredients, Slow Food International began with **events** that celebrated sustainable and artisanal food products. Over time, they developed beyond simple epicureanism, to emphasize the impact of food systems on the environment, producers, and consumers. Slow Food International established a **foundation for biodiversity** that works with small scale food producers in more than 100 countries. They have developed educational resources that go beyond nutrition to instruction on combining culinary pleasure with social and environmental responsibility. There are now hundreds of projects around the world built on the assumption that everyone has the right to good, clean, and fair food.



Visit a farmers market for fresh, local, organic produce.

Slow Food Controversy

Alice Waters (who has been vice president of Slow Food Intl. since 2002) founded the Edible Schoolyard Project, which advocates for universal free school lunch and a sustainable food curriculum. But she is still most famous for Chez Panisse, where dinner **costs \$175 per person**. Few people can afford the “good, clean, and fair” prices at slow food restaurants. But slow food is not really about fine dining.

It grew out of Italy's home cooking culture and enshr^{CLOSE} egalitarian principles in Slow Food International's [2017 Chengdu Declaration](#). Even so, the slow food movement has gained a reputation for [self-righteous elitism](#), even from within. No movement is immune to dogmatism, and as the famous [Portlandia "Colin the Chicken" sketch](#) illustrates, people can get so carried away learning about their food's origin that they can no longer enjoy eating it. Don't let the perfect become the enemy of the good.

Eating Slow

There's nothing wrong with eating at a pricey farm-to-table restaurant if you can afford it. These meals can be educational experiences, both in expanding your palate and teaching you about the origins of your food. Wherever we eat, there are many [ways to act](#) in support of Slow Food International's values. Consider starting or joining a Slow Food convivium or [community](#) to work toward a healthier, more sustainable and sustaining food system. You don't have to ally yourself with an organization at all.

At its heart, the slow food movement is about mindfulness. It is more concerned with how fast we eat than how fast we cook:

“... we propose the vaccine of an adequate portion of sensual gourmandise pleasures, to be taken with slow and prolonged enjoyment.”

No snack is quicker to prepare than a piece of fresh fruit, but if we savor every bite, that snack qualifies as slow food. [Visit a farmers' market](#) for local, organic produce (they can be surprisingly affordable). Or grow a window box full of [edible flowers](#) to elevate your meals. When you have the time – or better yet, can make the time – dedicate it to learning how to cook a new healthy dish or a traditional one. Then share a leisurely meal with friends and family.

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By [Gemma Alexander](#)

Gemma Alexander has an M.S. in urban horticulture and a backyard filled with native plants. After working in a genetics laboratory and at a landfill, she now writes about the environment, the arts and family. See more of her writing [here](#).

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