

Terra Madre 2010

In October 2010, I was lucky to be one of seven Yukoners nominated to attend Terra Madre, the world meeting of food communities in Turin, Italy.

The opening ceremonies took place on Thursday afternoon with a procession of representatives from each of the countries attending. What an amazing sight to see all those flags and know that so many people all over the world share our concerns about global food systems and care enough to come together to talk about alternatives.



Terra Madre 2010 opening ceremonies - flag bearers from each of the countries represented.

After registering, we were told where to find the bus that would take us to and from our lodgings in Oulx, near the French border, for the duration of the conference. Organizers for this conference arrange transportation, meals and accommodation for all 6000+ delegates in the area surrounding Turin. Our group consisted of about half of the Canadian delegates along with three young Italian volunteers. The 1.5 hour morning and evening bus ride provided a great opportunity to network with other farmers, chefs, and food activists from across Canada as well as find out more about the local food movement in Italy – Km Zero – which focuses on sourcing food from as close as possible. I love the name, because to me, that sounds like starting right in your own backyard.

I'd like to take you on a guided tour of just our first day at Terra Madre. On Friday, the morning sessions focused on policy. Since Slow Food is a whole philosophy for a **good, clean, and fair** life, it is important to share information on all aspects of the movement. To ensure everyone is working towards a common goal, it is helpful to talk about what each member or convivium believes is the role of the organization and what networks are possible and desirable with others working towards similar ends. The issues were separated into eight main topic ideas focusing on social systems, energy, biodiversity, shared resources, rights, education, traditional knowledge, and well-being.

Some of the insights gained at these policy meetings were presented at the closing ceremonies. The philosophy of Slow Food is that it stands at the crossroads of ecology and gastronomy, ethics and pleasure. It opposes the standardization of taste and culture, and the unrestrained power of the food industry multinationals and industrial agriculture. The Slow Food association believes in the concept of neo-gastronomy – recognition of the strong connections between plate, planet, people and culture.

The Terra Madre conference is held next to and in conjunction with Salone del Gusto. Instead of joining the other delegates for lunch today, we spent the lunch hour touring and sampling at Salone del Gusto. This amazing (and HUGE) trade show of food producers from across Italy and around the world provided an opportunity to talk with farmers, vintners, brewers and distillers,

bee keepers, cheese makers, butchers, and food processors as well as to taste (and buy) their products.



A small sampling of the many cheeses on display in the Salone del Gusto.

Upper left: carved and braided (some smoked) mozzarella

Upper right: burrini – a mild cheese wrapped around fresh butter (*burro* in Italian)

Bottom: French goat cheeses

Taste education is an important part of the Slow Food movement. Outside the session rooms, workshops were set up to share information and educate delegates between sessions. There was opportunity to taste many of the heritage apples of Italy as well as honey from around the world. An experienced apiarist guided participants through the varieties starting with the mildest clover honey and working up to the strongly flavoured Castagna (chestnut) honey well known across Italy.



Exercises in taste education included identifying samples of salty, sweet, umami, bitter, and sour; identifying aromas and intensity of aroma; touch sensitivity and textures; sounds; and even ordering blended colour tones. Participants were able to work through the materials in a workshop setting and copies of the text were available for those who might want to least workshops when they get back home.

In the afternoon, we joined the sessions going on in the “Youth” area. The youth contingent was particularly active and energizing (and very welcoming of us older farmers). We spoke with members of a world wide youth food movement working from the ground up to educate and share the politics of good, clean, fair food. Facilitators were really encouraging people to become active in supporting each other by sharing food sources as well as sharing ideas for opportunities for sharing food.



Many have been working with local farmers or chefs. They discussed creative ways of complying with health regulations while hosting potluck events “eat-ins” as well as ideas for supporting individual food production “guerrilla gardening”, local food production “farm mobs” and “sell-ins”. In many ways the activism and enthusiasm was reminiscent of the 60s hippie movement but with this current movement focused on the politics of food. The workshop facilitators had some really practical advice about waste management for big food events as well as clever ideas using dinner theatre to educate about food issues.

After our busy first day, it was great to get back to our lodgings and share in a typical Italian meal. Over the next three days, we look forward to attending sessions on social programs in agriculture and food; on fair pricing; the role of research in supporting the use of sustainable practices; less meat/better meat – focusing on grass-fed meat and humane slaughter; continuing to make connections with other farmers, producers, and food activists, and, of course, more Salone del Gusto.