

NOTABLE EDIBLES

BY CAROL PENN-ROMINE

SLOW FOOD NATION:

Thought for Food and Food for Thought



Bread snail (photo courtesy of Carol Penn-Romine)

While perusing reader comments online during the week leading up to the *Slow Food Nation* event, I noted that many felt it would be little more than a love fest of rich, militant vegans. But during the event I found myself surrounded by people from across the spectrum, all bound by an appreciation for artisan-produced food and beverage of all kinds.

More than 60,000 of us convened at Fort Mason, overlooking San Francisco Bay, for the first nationwide gathering of Slow Food. The Labor Day weekend event attracted both food professionals and food lovers, all eager to sample the good stuff and learn more about it.

Speeches, panel discussions, author signings and book readings alternated with food demonstrations, and of course, tastings. This wasn't just indulgent behavior, however; many of the activities were geared towards heightening public awareness of the legislative, educational, agricultural and industrial issues relating to increasing the supply of quality food and making it available to all. The workshops were hands-on, featuring artisans, some with side-by-side comparisons of artisanal and mass-produced products. We sampled heritage pork from hogs raised in free-range, drug-free environments, alongside equivalent cuts of supermarket pork. The differences in taste, texture, color and aroma were striking.

Some producers explained how they cultivate their sustainable enterprises. For example, Ames Morrison of Sonoma County's *Alexander Valley Winery* enlists owls and bats to combat rodents and other de-

structive critters in his vineyards by installing houses for them. Alongside the grapes, he grows plants favored by insects that are beneficial to the grape-growing process and raises sheep and miniature cattle that act as nature's lawnmowers and fertilizers.

Visitors to the 50,000-square-foot Taste Pavilion sampled artisanally-created breads, cheeses, charcuterie, pickles, olive oils, chocolates, wine, beer, spirits, coffee, tea and ice cream, and responsibly-harvested honey and seafood. Producers were on hand to discuss their work. (Incidentally, halfway through the third of four plates of pickles I realized that you can get too much of a good thing!) Chefs in the Green Kitchen conducted demonstrations of simple, green-friendly recipes. All demos were videotaped for viewing on YouTube.

An urban victory garden planted in San Francisco's Civic Center Plaza afforded attendees the opportunity to learn how to grow produce themselves, while the marketplace alongside sold the goods to get them started as well as other artisanal products from throughout the country.

By the close of Slow Food Nation, we had a better grasp of responsible, sustainable food production and a greater appreciation for well-crafted food and beverage, pickles and all. 🍷

For more information about Slow Food USA, please visit:
<http://www.slowfoodusa.org/>