

SLOW FOOD FOR FAST TIMES

By Mary Ann Castronovo Fusco



FARM TO TABLE: Chefs Chris Albrecht (inset, left) and David Felton held forth at a benefit for Slow Food.

The Slow Food movement has an alternative to the traditional Labor Day cook-out: the eat-in, a foodie version of the civil-rights era sit-in. Eat-ins organized by the South Jersey and North Jersey chapters of Slow Food USA (slowfoodusa.org) are among the expected 150 or more eat-ins the movement will hold in 41 states on Labor Day.

Slow Food bills this as a "national day of action to get real food in schools." People will come together to share a pot-luck meal outside schools, at playgrounds, on the steps of legislative buildings, and in backyards. With the national Child Nutrition Act up for re-authorization this fall, Slow Food hopes to influence Congress to eliminate junk food from schools, encourage schools to buy local produce, and increase USDA school lunch reimbursement by \$1 to \$3.57 per meal. (Only \$1 of the current reimbursement goes for food.)

Though most people have heard of

PHOTOS: ERIC LEVIN

Slow Food, "often people think you're talking about Crock-Pots," says Robert Moffatt, a veterinarian from Cape May Point and president of Slow Food of South Jersey (slowfood.cape-may.net). The movement's ideal, he explains, is "local and seasonal consumption—whether you eat it fast or slow."

New Jersey Slow Food programs include wine festivals; cooking lessons; foraging; and dinners such as South Jersey's lobster and clam bake, Sunday, September 13, 4-7 PM (\$50 per person, limited to 80 people; slowfoodpres@cape-may.net).

Slow Food lists endangered foods on its Ark of Taste (think Noah and the flood). One of the first of more than 200 American foods to make the roster was New Jersey's Delaware Bay oyster.

At Princeton University, sociology major Yuanbo Liu, 21 (yuanbol@princeton.edu), head of the campus chapter, says, "Our mission is to promote good, clean, and fair food that is good for the environment, good for the producer, and good for us to eat."

At the Rutgers chapter, members "are aware of their food and interested in purveyors and farmers," says the group's president, Paul Valetutti (paulietutti@hotmail.com), 26, a junior from Palisades Park studying culinology. "We are young, we don't have a lot of money, but we care about what we put in our bodies," he says. "We're in the Garden State. We should have good food."

Slow Food was founded in Italy in 1986 in response to the opening of the first McDonald's in Rome. It has attracted 100,000 members in 132 countries to its mission of safeguarding traditional victuals while countering the effects of industrial, fast-food culture.

"People are disconnected," says Jim Weaver, 46, chef/owner of Tre Piani in Princeton and president of the Central Jersey chapter (slowfoodcentralnj.org), the state's first and seventh in the nation. "They don't know what's in season or where it comes from." Since fast food is unlikely to disappear, "we've got to change people's minds one palate at a time."

EAT WELL, DO GOOD: The fundraiser, held at the Griggstown Quail Farm, was put on by Margaret Noon's Sustenance Events company.



"You vote with your fork every time you buy something at the supermarket," says Margaret Noon, 49, of Scotch Plains, who heads the Northern New Jersey chapter (slowfoodnnj.org) and runs Sustenance Events (sustenanceevents.com), which organized two fund-raisers for Slow Food this summer. "You're choosing who's growing it, how it's grown. Ultimate food security is knowing your farmer and where your food is coming from—not the government making sure a factory is clean."