

## Making the local global

LINDA GUPTON, Correspondent

When my husband and I received word last summer that we had been selected to travel to Turin, Italy, this past October with the Triangle delegation to Terra Madre, I couldn't stop grinning for days.

Terra Madre, Italian for "Mother Earth," was an unbelievable event that brought together small-scale sustainable farmers, traditional food producers, chefs and educators from 150 countries around the world to celebrate two of my greatest passions -- farming and food. And where could one find a better place to celebrate great food than Italy, the country that gives us Parmesan cheese, prosciutto and gelato? Did I mention balsamic vinegar? And olive oil?

For five days, Turin, the city that had hosted the 2006 Winter Olympics, was once again awash in representatives from around the world who had come together, this time for a different purpose: to seek markets for their indigenous food products and to educate and encourage one another in the quest to keep native foods and food customs alive.

I'm not usually an overtly emotional person, but I was surprised to feel tears welling up in my eyes as we stood for the beginning of the opening ceremonies for the conference. A representative from every country present entered down the center aisle of the assembly, holding high the flag of his or her respective nation.

Although the United States had more than 500 farmers, chefs and educators present at the conference, this is one venue where the countries of the Third World shone the brightest. For it is in these less industrialized countries that local food traditions are still strong and still integral to daily life. Clothed in native dress, these delegates from Africa, Asia, the Middle East and South America filled the hall to bursting with their exuberance and their pride.

In the workshops and seminars, I was humbled by the love of the land -- and what it produces -- that was so evident in all the speakers and participants. But it seemed that those who came from the poorest places were often the most inspiring, leaving me feeling that we Americans might be more appropriately labeled as impoverished when it comes to the subject of food cultures and traditions.

Running concurrent with the conference was an amazing event appropriately called Salone del Gusto, or "Great Hall of Taste." Imagine an event that has the crowds and the excitement of the State Fair, but that's dedicated to the celebration of locally produced foods from around the world!

This international trade show for food enthusiasts brought together native producers from all corners of the Earth to display their artisan food products in the hope of connecting with consumers and chefs who will embrace these traditional foods and provide a market to economically sustain the producers. Presented every two years, the event draws more than 150,000 people to Turin over its five-day span.

As I wandered the aisles, it was difficult to not suffer "taste overload." Meats, cheeses, breads, chocolates, honeys, liquors, spices, oils, wines and beers from around the globe beckoned at every corner. While most of the vendors represented Italian enterprises, Slow Food International also sponsored a large pavilion featuring endangered foods from around the world that the organization is working hard to save through its Ark of Taste initiative. The event offered unparalleled exposure for these more isolated food communities.

Stuffed figs, chocolate-covered peppercorns, cream limoncello liquor, lamb prosciutto -- every night on the bus trip back to the hotel, we'd share stories of who had tasted which delicacies. In one aisle alone, I must have tasted dozens of chocolates, each with its own distinct blend of flavors. It just reminded me over and over how diminished we'll be if we allow these endangered food traditions to die out in the wake of the industrially processed and homogenized fare that fills our grocery store shelves. For me, the most encouraging sight was the groups of students from area schools, decked out in matching ball caps, touring and tasting -- learning about real food.

More than 20 delegates from the Triangle attended Terra Madre, representing the farming and food communities of our area. As I talked with representatives at the conference from throughout the United States, I was reminded again about how fortunate we are in our area to have a large number of organic and sustainable farms along with a number of farmers markets that feature locally produced foods.

One of the goals we've had on our farm from the beginning has been to emphasize growing native, heirloom plants and heritage breeds of animals. It's one thing I can do to help hang on to the biodiversity that is distinctive to our part of the world. I came home from Terra Madre heartened to know I have brothers and sisters around the globe dedicated to doing the same thing.

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Over the past two years, Linda Gupton has written regularly about life on Shiloh Farm & Retreat near Louisburg as a regular contributor to the N&O's Our Lives column.