



THIS PAGE: The pickle plate at Lantern, Andrea Reusing's Chapel Hill, North Carolina, restaurant, includes local persimmons, green tomatoes, turnips, and radishes.
OPPOSITE: Reusing has taken the Slow Food movement in North Carolina's Triangle area to a new level, linking farmers to chefs to customers. Here, Reusing at Lantern.

The Soul of Slow Food



North Carolina chef **Andrea Reusing** forms a delicious and ambitious partnership with area farmers

BY **Moreton Neal**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **Peter Frank Edwards**

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ANDREA REUSING'S MEMORIES OF VISITING THE CENTRAL MARKET in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, through the years are filled with sights of Lebanon bologna and piercing smells of horseradish freshly grated by a man operating an old machine with a foot pedal. Mostly, though, she says, "it was an amazing thing to follow my grandmother around and see all the relationships she had with every farmer and every purveyor there."

Her grandmother, a natural cook with no care for recipes or cookbooks, lived across the road from a farmer's cornfield; on summer nights she would boil a pot of water and run across the road to pick the corn. Everything was fresh and from a place she knew. "That was her style," says Reusing — and it's her style, too. "Yes, except I *pay* for the corn."

Reusing, who is on Grist's list of fifteen green chefs of the world and whose Chapel Hill restaurant, Lantern, is ranked among *Gourmet's* top fifty in the United States, heads up Slow Food International's burgeoning North Carolina Triangle convivium, one of the most active in the South, straddling Durham, Chapel Hill, and Raleigh. A self-described eater with a visceral relationship to food, she walks and talks the platform of this old-school yet hip food movement. "I have always loved to eat. I plan my next meal while I am eating. That is my thing. I love food that has a point of view, that is interesting, and I love to experience different flavors and talk to people about how they grow or make their food."

These days Reusing doesn't shop at the local farmers' markets as often as she would like. Her old red Mercedes, converted to run on Lantern's recycled vegetable oil, couldn't hold the volume of produce she needs for her restaurant. But when she does go to market, she reconnects to the essence of what food means to her: people, place, and community. She finds inspiration in the one farmer who comes to the market only when he has chestnuts, or the farmer with the winter honey or the wild berry, and when she visits the farms from which she buys meat and cheeses.

"That is everything to me," Reusing says. "When you consume food it is a very intimate act, and it is richer and more rewarding if you consume food grown by people you know and love. And the closer you can get to that, the better the experience is. The last thing we have tethering us to the earth is the food we eat. It is the last thing that connects us to being animals ourselves."

THE FIGHT FOR PLEASURE

The seeds for the birth of Slow Food International were planted in the mid-1980s, on the occasion of the opening of the first McDonald's in Italy, in an old palazzo near the Spanish Steps in Rome. Italian intellectual, journalist, and epicurean Carlo Petrini, who, in the face of the nefarious

epidemic of fast food, had long been a prominent and vocal defender of traditional local gastronomy, was so horrified by the fast food king's brazen move so close to home that he organized street protests with people brandishing plates of penne as weapons. From there came the concept for Slow Food, an oppositional movement to safeguard the leisurely enjoyment of food and the pleasures and riches of local culinary traditions. "Slow Food," says its Italian manifesto, "promotes the right to pleasure — at the table and beyond... [But it is] an association that has made of culinary pleasure a political act because behind every good plate there are choices made in fields, waterways, vineyards, in schools, and in governments. And every choice has a different taste."

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FARM TO TABLE

At the heart of Slow Food's Triangle chapter are dozens of farmers' markets, including the Carrboro Farmers' Market, one of the most successful in the United States. Started thirty years ago by a doctor-turned-farmer who thought that providing good food was the best way to affect people's health, Carrboro is a growers-controlled market that offers produce, meat, and flowers from more than eighty farms all located within a fifty-mile radius of town. Fed by a great interest in food and

local growers, local chefs and hundreds of home cooks come seeking the seasonal jewel — be it post-frost persimmons, fresh picked strawberries, or heirloom tomatoes. The strong farm and market presence in the area has spun an astonishing number of exceptional farm-to-table restaurants. In Chapel Hill and Carrboro, in addition to Reusing's Lantern, are Crook's Corner, Elaine's, Bonne Soiree, Sandwich, the Weaver Street Market, and Panzanella. Their chefs shop at the market, give cooking demonstrations with produce of the season, and visit with the farmers, each of whom has his or her specialty: German Johnson tomatoes from Ken Dawson's Maple Spring Gardens; bell peppers from Peregrine Farm; arugula

Since then, Slow Food International has become a worldwide movement of more than one hundred thousand members, with more than seven hundred chapters in one hundred and thirty countries and an increasingly broad set of principles: eco-gastronomy; the rejection of agribusinesses and the genetic manipulation of foods; and advocacy for economic and agricultural choices that support good, diverse, healthy local foods. These are the concepts that have found a wide and receptive audience in the South, particularly North Carolina.

The Triangle chapter of Slow Food, founded by North Carolina State University professor and food writer David Auerbach in the late 1990s, was one of the first in the country, primarily concerned with promoting the small organic farmers in the area. Fueled by a long agricultural tradition and a wealth of old, small farms, the philosophy of Slow Food has seeped into the local consciousness and become, for many, a way of life. At a time when discussions of food provenance and purity are nearly unavoidable, Reusing has watched the chapter grow into one of the most active in the country.

"Slow Food is an extension of what we do at the restaurant but with a more understandable community component," says Reusing. "To me it's really all about

Fickle Creek Farm

EFLAND, NORTH CAROLINA

★ Ben Bergmann and Noah Ranells taught and researched agro-forestry and soil science at North Carolina State, then "decided to do rather than just teach," says Bergmann. Fickle Creek is a sixty-one-acre mosaic of ecosystems using as little mechanical input as possible (all farm vehicles are bio-diesel), and the animals, all bought within thirteen miles of the farm (the farthest the farm sells is twenty-three miles), are part of the work team. The pastures, which are grazed rotationally, are cleared by Boer cross goats, fertilized by a variety of chicken breeds, tilled by farmer's hybrid and Ossabaw pigs, and mowed by Katahdin sheep and Jersey steers, all guarded by Great Pyrenees dogs. "Hopefully this is good for the environment, not just the bottom line," Bergmann says.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Lantern, a popular scene in Chapel Hill, serves dishes made almost entirely from local foods; quark panna cotta with strawberry sauce and candied pistachios. The quark is from Chapel Hill Creamery.

BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Ben Bergmann pulls carrots on his land at Fickle Creek Farm in Efland, a model in sustainable farming; fresh eggs from free-ranging chickens at Fickle Creek.





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from Eco Farm; radicchio and fennel from Bill Dow's Ayrshire Farm; speckled butterbeans and lady peas from Brinkley Farms; and turnips and celeriac from Perry-winkle Farm.

In Durham, just ten miles down the road, the burgeoning restaurant scene, also fueled by the local growers-controlled farmers' market, includes Piedmont, Rue Cler, and Alicia's, as well as Four Square and Magnolia Grill, a regular on national best restaurant lists. Hillsborough also has its own small market that serves its new downtown, chef-owned bistros Panciuto and Gulf Rim Café.

Around them, food obsession has become something akin to religious fervor, and discussions on the subject are lively and sometimes contentious. An appearance by Michael Pollan, author of *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, the bible of sustainable agriculture, rivaled a rock star's, and Alice Waters' cookbooks sell as well as Julia Child's. And now the movement has anointed Reusing, a passionate, driven food enthusiast recognized for good works as chef, farmers' friend, and organizational leader.

"She has certainly raised the profile of the Slow Food movement in our area," says Ben Bergmann, owner, with Noah Ranells, of Fickle Creek Farm, in nearby Efland. "She seeks us out, she comes to the farm ... She has been a tireless force, constantly supporting the cause."

A FORTUITOUS MOVE

A native of the North, Reusing moved to North Carolina a decade ago from New York after falling in love with rock musician and Merge Records owner Mac

McCaughan, who grew up in Durham. With no formal training, she was recruited to open a new eatery owned by a Raleigh architect and a wine retailer. The venture, Enoteca Vin, quickly became the toast of the town and Reusing was soon ready

to open her own place. Homesick for the foods of Chinatown, the redheaded chef envisioned a restaurant that offered authentic Asian flavors cooked with care. The result, Lantern, was an instant hit.

IN AND OUT OF THE RESTAURANT,

Reusing, thirty-nine, a mother of two young children, is an idealist who lives and breathes her principles — concern for consumption, energy, the distance food travels from field to table — which happen to coincide with the Slow Food creed: "To promote food and growing practices that are good, clean and fair."

"It was really until recently that people's food was local and organic. Pesticides did not exist; food could not be transported

Cane Creek Farm

MEBANE, NORTH CAROLINA

★ Eliza MacLean, after earning a master's degree in environmental toxicology from Duke, fell in love with pigs while volunteering with the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy at North Carolina State. She now raises Ossabaw hogs, a very rare breed from a small island off the Georgia coast, descended from the Iberian swine brought to the Southeast by the Spanish in the sixteenth century. Never confined, the pigs graze and forage freely on the twenty-acre farm in Snow Camp. Like their world-famous ancestors, Ossabaws are known for their creamy fat and tender, flavorful meat, now in high demand by several New York chefs. But MacLean, a devoted practitioner and advocate of local sustainable farming, holds some back for Reusing and customers at the local farmers' market. MacLean also raises other breeds of pigs, Nigerian dwarf goats, Saxony ducks, and heirloom breed chickens.

OPPOSITE: Cane Creek Farm in Mebane supplies the meat for this braised pork belly cooked with miso and sake, served with baby carrots.

BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Turkeys roaming at Cane Creek Farm; Eliza MacLean, left, and Reusing at Cane Creek Farm. MacLean found her passion for hogs after volunteering for the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy.





THIS PAGE MacLean's daughter Enid rides one of her mom's pigs at her farm in Mebane.
OPPOSITE Livestock roam and feed freely at Cane Creek Farm.



far. There was a holistic way of communities feeding themselves. It was a given,” says Reusing. “It’s really about local to me — mindfully, sustainably raised and connected to the community.”

In her cooking Reusing relies on local farmers’ exceptional products, and in exchange is committed to supporting their endeavors. Her regular purveyors include Bergmann and Ranells of Fickle Creek Farm, who provide Lantern’s kitchen with eggs and old-breed chickens; Portia McKnight and Flo Hawley of Chapel Hill Creamery, who contribute artisanal cheeses and whey-fed pork; and Eliza MacLean, whose farm, Cane Creek Farm, specializes in rare Ossabaw hogs.

These farmers, whose fields are rotationally grazed and whose animals are free roaming and pasture fed, embody a spirit of cooperation and teamwork that Reusing admires, and she has featured them in her now legendary farm dinners, which connect farmers to customers. McKnight recalls, “For our dinner, Andrea used the whole pig, from head to tail, and each course was incredibly delicious. But the best part was getting to know the people who chose to come. Many are now my best customers.”

As leader of the Slow Food Triangle chapter, Reusing organizes events that connect people in the community to those who grow and make their food: tastings

of local produce — recently of heirloom apples and field peas; potluucks featuring all local ingredients; the yearly Eat Local Triangle, in which every restaurant features a dish made entirely from local products. In November 2006, Reusing was a featured speaker at Slow Food’s international conference, Terra Madre, in Torino, Italy, along with Pollan and Waters. “To realize that you are a part of a worldwide movement of food producers who are dedicating their lives to producing real food is powerful,” says Reusing. “It was great to hang out with those people from all over the planet who live and breathe the food-oriented world that we live in every day of our lives.”

When Reusing was invited to speak at the conference, she arranged for fifteen farmers to go with her. The Triangle delegation was second in numbers only to California’s. “We have something really exciting and rare going on here, which is active collaboration between farmers and cooks, which goes to why the Triangle is different,” says Reusing.

A few months after her trip to Italy, Carlo Petrini paid a visit to the Triangle to speak at the Center for Environmental Farming Systems, which carries out long-term interdisciplinary experiments to rebuild sustainable local food systems. Reusing organized a “farm-to-fork” picnic in his honor, pairing the farming alumni of Terra Madre with local chefs, and offering people the unlikely chance to talk to farmers and chefs side by side.

The next day almost a thousand of the faithful and the curious thronged to Raleigh to hear Petrini speak about America’s role in promoting Slow Food values. Exuding the charisma of a Billy Graham, he spoke to a rapt audience, finishing with this exhortation: “We *must* save our health, our small local economies, our way of life, and our good food.”

While in town, Petrini dined at Lantern. “How nervous was I when he came to Lantern? I was shaking,” Reusing recalls, laughing. “He walked into the kitchen and kissed me. I almost dropped dead. It was great. He is kind of awesome, you know?”

Chapel Hill Creamery

CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA

★ Portia McKnight’s self-reinvention began when she managed the Whole Foods Markets in Durham and Chapel Hill, two of the first in the country. Noticing the dearth of local cheeses among the imported Gorgonzolas and Camemberts, she decided to study cheese making, a craft in which she had dabbled over the years. That eventually led, with her partner, Flo Hawley, to buying thirty-seven acres of farmland for Jersey cattle (soon they will be milking twenty-four pasture-fed cows) and, well, making some cheeses. Among the products of these farmer/artisans are Carolina Moon, their version of Camembert; Hickory Grove, a Trappist-style cheese named after the old church near the farm; and the Calvander, a strong cheese named for a nearby crossroads hamlet. These and her amazing smoked mozzarella have beaten out their European competition and are now the pride of Whole Foods Market stores, farmers’ markets, restaurants, and cheese trays all over the Triangle.

BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Portia McKnight holding cheese she makes at Chapel Hill Creamery with her partner, Flo Hawley; Jersey cattle at their farm are pasture-fed and

free-ranging. OPPOSITE: Artisanal cheese being salted at Chapel Hill Creamery.

