

Communicating environmental performance along the food chain

Slow Food response

We appreciate the efforts that Working Group 2 “Environmental Information Tools” of the Food SCP Roundtable put in the elaboration of the paper “Communicating environmental performance along the food chain”. Since we became aware of the consultation recently, we can only provide limited comments but since the subject of consumer information and consumer education are key issues to our organisation, we are happy to provide our input and, in particular, to present our best practices.

Comments on the setting the context

The role of environmental awareness raising and consumer education

Slow Food believes in the value of an holistic approach. This means joining together aspects of food production and consumption that are generally kept separate: social aspects (such as the relationship between producers and consumers), environmental aspects (concerning the protection of biodiversity, water resources and soil fertility, the distribution of products, the sustainability of packaging, waste reduction and the reuse of resources) and cultural resources (the protection of traditional knowledge). This reflects the close interconnection among communities, their way of producing and consuming, and their culture and the environment in which they live. This means food provision must instead be aimed at both environmental sustainability goals and social sustainability and development goals – fulfilling the right to food, improved health and nutrition, reduced poverty, enhanced livelihoods and greater equity – realizing food sovereignty.

Slow Food’s environmental focus is grounded both in theory and in practice. As to the the theoretical underpinnings, the environmental element in Slow Food’s leading slogan “good, clean, and fair” is almost self-evident. “Clean” describes food production and consumption that does not harm the environment, animal welfare or human health. A product is “clean” if it respects the planet, it does not pollute, it it does not waste or overuse natural resources during its journey from the field to the table. Food is clean to the extent that its production process meets certain criteria of “naturalness”, or if it is sustainable.

Slow Food thinks it is fundamental to recreate a profitable link between producer and consumer, while promoting a more informed responsible attitude on either side. We believe that collectively our consumer choices can bring great change to how food is cultivated and produced. To highlight this, Slow Food coined the term co-producer- a consumer who goes beyond the passive role of a consumer and takes an interest in those that produce our food, how they produce it and the problems they face in doing so. In actively supporting food producers, we become part of the production process.

Slow Food strives to get consumers to assume a more responsible, informed attitude, and to achieve that it promotes the diffusion of knowledge of the effects that food choices have on health, the environment and the productive system.

“Business-to-Consumer” chapter

3.1.1. Information concerning consumption and post-consumption phase

Our approach is to inform the consumer not only on the environmental characteristics of the product but also on its “social” aspects: traditional breeds and varieties linked to a specific territory and its culture with a fair compensation for producers. These characteristics are part of our holistic approach and are taken into consideration when the consumer makes his/her choice.

3.1.2. Product-related information

For small-scale producers it could be an unbearable burden to apply and use external certification schemes. We developed and largely support small-scale producers in the use of a voluntary quality scheme within our Presidia. See description under Best Practices section hereunder.

"Business-to-Business" chapter

No comment

Comments on the recommendations

Conclusions

We do appreciate the idea of calling for “a targeted effort by public bodies at EU level and Member States' level, research institutes, and the different partners of the food chain - to lead a practical consumer research across several European countries to better understand consumer perception, understanding and action on environmental product information.”

We definitely share the position of the need of a “broader public education strategy, led by national governments and civil society, to raise awareness on the need to preserve the environment, why this is relevant to the consumer and which concrete actions he can take to help reduce society’s impacts” There is a pressing social need of expanding environmental education policies and programmes starting with children to ensure future environmental sustainability, we believe that change can be achieved only through individual behaviour that produces a collective change.

Terminology in the glossary

We agree

Best practices in different chapters

Short project fiches – more information and data are available upon request

Slow Food Presidia

The Presidia sustain quality production at risk of extinction, protect unique regions and ecosystems, recover traditional processing methods, safeguard native breeds and local plant varieties. The first Presidia were created in Italy in 1999. After cataloguing hundreds of products at risk of extinction through the Ark of Taste, Slow Food decided to take a step forward by engaging concretely with the world of production, getting to

know the places, meet the producers and promote their products, their work and their wisdom. These projects help groups of small producers to preserve traditional growing methods and products. Sometimes it is simply necessary to unite producers, help coordinate marketing and promotion, and establish quality and authenticity standards for their products.

The Presidia are projects specific to local geographic areas. They may involve a single cheese-maker — perhaps the last custodian of a cheese-making method — or a group of thousands of small farmers, but the goal remains the same: to promote artisan products, stabilize food production techniques, establish stringent production standards and, most importantly, to ensure a viable future for traditional foods.

To create and run a Presidium it is necessary to:

I. Look for relevant producers, technicians and institutions to define the objectives of the Presidium and to create a work group.

II. Survey the production area to collect data and information necessary to establish a production protocol: an important tool to grant traceability and high quality of the product. The protocol should follow the guidelines that exist for every product category. For example, the guidelines state the obligation to use raw milk for cheese-making; ban the use of chemical flavours, preservatives and additives; require farming and fishing to be sustainable; obligate the safeguarding of traditional production techniques and locations. The guidelines are drawn up by the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity, in collaboration with experts and producers. They are regularly updated on the basis of suggestions from local coordinators and producers. Slow Food chose not to use an external control or certification body, but to rely on a self-checking system.

Each year, the producers report how much they have produced, how many animals they raised or how much land was planted with a specific variety, in a completely transparent way. The producers' association collects this information into a document called "catastino". Additionally, they must be willing to provide supplementary economic data for any research or evaluations of the Presidium's results conducted by Slow Food. The catastino is the essential document for the first and most important phase of checking the Presidium's production.

III. Assist producers in the construction and constitution of a producers association with its own name and brand.

IV. Promote Presidia products by telling consumers all over the world that these are extraordinary products and that discovering, buying and tasting them means learning history and traditions of a territory and safeguarding its cultural heritage.

In 2008 Slow Food Italy created a brand for Presidia producers. Placed on the packaging, it protects and adds value to the product, helps consumers identify authentic Presidia products and guards against the increasing number of falsely labelled products. Only products featuring the "Presidio Slow Food®" logo are truly part of the project.

In Italy there are 194 Presidia involving more than 1600 small-scale producers that

protect the most endangered products. With the addition of 150 international presidia, the Slow Food network has expanded to include examples of biodiversity from around the world, such as Bario Rice from Borneo in Malaysia, Mananara Vanilla from Madagascar, Huehuetenango Highland Coffee from Guatemala and Oscypek cheese made in the Tatra Mountains in Poland.

More info at:

http://slowfoodfoundation.com/pagine/eng/presidi/cerca_presidi.lasso?-id_pg=11

Master of Food

By understanding where our food comes from, how it was produced and by whom, adults and children can learn how to combine pleasure and responsibility in daily choices and appreciate the cultural and social importance of food.

The Master of Food now includes 24 courses, available only to Slow Food members in Italy. On completion of 15 courses, participants are awarded the Master of Food. The idea is not to train professionals, but to bring comparative knowledge to consumers, stimulating their curiosity and promoting responsible choices.

Master of Food is a complex project run by a central office which provides training, course schedules, educational material, products and links with instructors around the country.

The Master of Food programme can also be organised by individual convivia according to their members' interests. Each course is divided into three, four or six lessons, each lasting about two and a half hours. Lessons include a theoretical component to develop an understanding of the cultural context and the production process, followed by a tasting of the particular product. Each participant is given a booklet summarising the lesson with a card for recording tasting notes and a suggested bibliography, as well as a book published by Slow Food Editore on the course subject.

Between 2001 to 2008, over 2,400 courses were organised for around 43,000 participants. In 2009 in Italy alone, 5,600 people participated in the 300 courses organised around the country.

More info at:

<http://www.slowfood.com/education/>

School gardens

Slow Food USA led the first national project promoting School Gardens in 2001. Members built vegetable gardens on school grounds where children could grow their own food, develop horticultural skills and stimulate their senses.

An Educational Committee was set up to launch the project nationwide, and in just two years 30 school gardens sprang up around the US. Entitled 'Garden-to-Table', the project has since expanded to include after-school cooking programs and farm tours.

Soon after the initiative became popular in Europe as well. Today in Italy more than 125 school gardens are part of the national program "Garden in Convivium" that includes a 3-year curriculum on sensory, consumer, environmental education, as well as lessons on food culture and knowledge of the territory. Schoolteachers are trained

to carry out the program and they work with parents and grandparents to support the children's project. Today there are more than 180 school gardens around the world.

The educational themes of the school gardens are similar, however they are adapted to the culture and territory of each country. Slow Food views all schools with gardens as part of the same large network of learning communities. School Gardens follow the three fundamental principles of 'Good, Clean and Fair'.

Good because they are accompanied by workshops that train children and parents to appreciate the sensory qualities of food and to demand quality in school canteens.

Clean because young people learn to use organic and biodynamic production methods, to search for the seeds of local fruit and vegetable varieties, and to reduce food miles by favoring local produce.

Fair because they encourage the passing on of knowledge from one generation to the next, acknowledge the social role of the elderly and of volunteers, valorize the work of farmers, and lead to partnerships with similar projects in developing countries.

More info at:

<http://www.slowfood.com/education/>