

Moroni: “Let’s rediscover the hidden treasure in our territory”

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“We need to restore the value of food, because behind it there are people working.”

When **Claudio Moroni** talks about food, he sees clearly which direction to take. In fact, even if people become more aware of the importance of the issue, on the other hand cuisine and chefs risk to be swallowed up by the endless show business. This is a mass media seasoning which captivates the public and relentlessly turns food into simple consumer goods.

– **Mr Moroni, what happened in the last few years inside the food “universe”?**

“We’ve been talking a lot about it without much knowledge, but drawing a strong interest on the subject. Organisations such as Slow Food brought to people’s attention its own contents. Among these, the most important theme is responsible and conscious consumption, guiding consumers towards tasty, good and healthy food. On the contrary, the show business relied, as expected, on scenic effects which turned the chefs (once plain and barely known) into a huge TV phenomenon and food into ordinary wares.”

– **Slow Food does not have a commercial connotation, but today many food-related issues do. How can you give value to a product without considering business?**

“Carlo Petrini challenged us to make people aware of food, distancing it from purely commercial reasons. There are people working behind it, but if the prices are too low there’s something wrong: you either exploit workers or pollute or both. That’s why reiterating taste, goodness and health benefits of food is so important. These qualities help protecting territories, values and culture: the 450 slow food

units gather more than 13,000 producers inspired by them. If they grow and come a long way , it means that part of the community shares these values.”

– In recent times buying local products has been considered a very good strategy, up to the point that tasty, good and healthy food is associated with that. Is it correct?

“Local products are interesting because you can visit producers and then verify the food quality, since they are close to where you live. However, this isn’t enough to reassure consumers.”

– In Varese there is a niche, almost elite, agriculture far from industrial production. Which is its future?

“I don’t consider it an elite, on the contrary about 80% of the global agricultural production is run by families. I’ve got a different point of view on networks, since the real problem isn’t the quantity of production but its quality. This can also be applied to other phases of the supply chain, such as restaurants. “Guida alle Osterie d’Italia” is a network made of 1,300 restaurant owners working in different areas who personally choose their suppliers according to qualitative and ethical standards. This is not an elite but the path to follow.”

– Among the new farmers in the Varese area there are many young people who show a greater awareness of organic production. Is this also a sign that times are changing?

“It’s normal to work in a different way from the others, especially those who belong to the industrial agriculture field. Their awareness doesn’t surprise me, because when you deal with young producers they generally talk about territory and values before their own business. There are interesting projects such as organic hop crops to produce beer; this is just one example, but it’s significant.”

– Which local foods, in your opinion, should be given more value?

“There’s a hidden treasure we should rediscover starting from lake fish, like lavaret, perch and pike, which restaurants should serve more frequently. However, it’s up to the owners to offer menus to the clients and not the opposite. Giving value to this resource might also encourage the young to become fishermen, especially in the Verbania area. Moreover, all restaurateurs should have Varese’s wine list, a TGI often required by foreign tourists while eating. We have few but excellent producers: some of them are even recommended by Slow Wine. Also the saffron from Gerezano, the “formaggella” cheese from Luino and many other products should be taken into consideration. It’s a real treasure.”

– Why did you become fiduciary for Slow Food?

“I’ve always been a sales agent in the clothing industry and I’ve gradually become a gourmet. For work-related reasons I used to eat in restaurants and I was saved by my own gluttony, while my co-workers got bored during lunch.”

di Michele Mancino Translated by Carcano, Colombo & Franzosi (Reviewed by Prof. Robert Clarke)