

Terra Madre

In October, three professionals from Cooperative Extension experienced a global look at the issue of local food by attending Terra Madre, the worldwide conference of Slow Food International in Turin, Italy. Slow Food is an organization founded by Italian Carlo Petrini in response to a plan to open a McDonald's restaurant in a historic area of Rome. Petrini, who still leads Slow Food, spoke at N.C. State University in 2007 as the Sustainable Agriculture lecturer.

Extension participants were Leah Chester-Davis, coordinator of communications and community outreach with Cooperative Extension's program for Value-Added and Alternative Agriculture in Kannapolis; David Kendall, Extension agent from Madison County; and Natalie Hampton, news editor and media specialist in N.C. State's Communication Services. With nearly 40 members, North Carolina had one of the larger delegations from the United States. More than 700 delegates represented the U.S., making it the largest visiting delegation.

The Slow Food promotes the idea that food should be "good, clean and fair," through a partnership of producers, consumers and chefs. The 2,000 delegates attending the 2008 conference included producers, chefs, educators and students. The three Extension employees were among the educators' group of the U.S. delegation.

The five-day conference provided delegates opportunities to interact with others around the globe involved in work related to food. Where else can you talk with a vanilla bean grower from Madagascar while waiting in line for dinner? And since waiting in line with the other delegates was a regular activity, many interesting conversations took place.

"What impressed me was the genius and the wherewithal to pull off such a diverse global gathering of people who share a common interest: local foods and sustainability. The opportunity to meet and talk with people from around the world was quite inspirational," Chester-Davis said.

Before the conference, Hampton had seen the documentary *Black Gold*, about a fair trade coffee cooperative in Ethiopia. Waiting in line one day, she recognized Tadesse Meskela, the head of the cooperative featured in the documentary, who was among the Ethiopian delegation.

"So many encounters like this one at Terra Madre reminded me of what a small world it really is," she said. "It was a great opportunity to meet people from around the globe who shared a passion for food."

Kendall said that he learned new ways that North Carolina's small farmers can use to develop niche market products and marketing strategies. "Associative marketing is becoming almost mandatory to compete with industrial farming and large-scale production," he said. "I am already planning how I can re-invent all my programs in the context of sustainable agriculture principles learned at Terra Madre."

"Terra Madre's commitment to small, sustainable farming cannot be described in words or captured images: You had to be there," Kendall said.

CALS Perspectives article [here](#)

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