



Slow Food®

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ON CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**BIODIVERSITY AND CULTURE,  
THE SLOW FOOD APPROACH**

PRESENTATION BY CARLOTTA BAITONE,  
SLOW FOOD EAST ASIA DIRECTOR



女士们、先生们：

大家好！我是慢食协会的东亚区经理。很高兴受邀参加联合国教科文组织“国际文化大会”。感谢大会的组织方让我有这次宝贵的机会。由于我的中文不是很好，我接下来将用英语致词。

What I will try to do today with my presentation is to describe the Slow Food approach to biodiversity and culture.

For more than twenty-five years now, Slow Food has fought to preserve agricultural and food biodiversity as tool for ensuring a future for our planet and humanity as a whole because combined with climate change, the progressive loss of diversity of plant and animal species could prove a terrible scourge in the years to come.

Slow Food believes that it would be senseless to defend biodiversity without also defending the cultural diversity. This diversity is the greatest creative force on earth, the only condition possible for the maintenance and transmission of an outstanding heritage of knowledge to future generations.

But what does biodiversity have to do with food culture?

Biodiversity is a recent word. It was used for the first time in Washington in 1986 by an entomologist (Edward O. Wilson) and can be a misunderstood topic. In actual fact it should be a simple concept, because at its essence, it signifies nature, life itself, and the diversity of life on many levels - from the smallest and most basic (genes - the building blocks of life) to animal and plant species, up to the most complex levels (ecosystems). All these levels intersect and influence each other and each other's evolution.

Studies from the University of Stanford have compared the species and varieties of an ecosystem to rivets that hold an airplane together. If we remove the rivets, for a while nothing will happen and the airplane will continue to operate. But little by little the structure will weaken and, at a certain point, just removing one rivet will cause the plane to crash.

In the history of the planet, everything has a beginning and an end, and in every era, many species have become extinct. But never at the horrifying rate of recent years, one that is a thousand times greater than previous eras.

Last summer after a thorough study of many years, the prestigious University of Exeter in England declared that the earth is undergoing its sixth mass extinction (with the fifth, 65 million years ago, the dinosaurs disappeared).

Yet there is a substantial difference between this and the extinctions of the past: the cause. For the first time man is responsible. Man continues to destroy rainforests, cement the land, pollute waters and grounds with chemical pesticides and fertilizers, and accumulate plastic in the oceans. And he insists on excluding the earth's last custodians: those small-scale farmers, shepherds and fishers that know and respect the fragile equilibrium of nature.



# Slow Food®

Slow Food started its work with biodiversity in 1997 and our foot in the door - that since the beginning has given us a unique perspective - was food culture.

If biodiversity disappears what will happen to our food culture?

Together with the plants and wild animals, the plants domesticated by man, breeds selected (for milk or meat) will also disappear. According to the FAO, 75% of plant varieties have been irreversibly lost. In the USA the figure is 95%. Today 60% of the world's food is based on three cereals: wheat, rice and corn. Not on the thousands of rice varieties selected by farmers that once were cultivated in India and China, or on the thousands of varieties of corn that were grown in Mexico, but on the few hybrid varieties selected and sold to farmers by a handful of multinationals.

Slow Food's first intuition was this: look after domestic biodiversity. Meaning not just the panda or the seal, but also the Gascon chicken and the Alpago lamb; not just the edelweiss, but also the violet asparagus from Albenga.

But not just this. We became interested in taste and the knowledge connected to it, and traditional techniques of breeding, growing, and processing that are part of the traditional culture of the people. And this led us to our second intuition: on our Ark of Taste – a catalogue of products to save – we have also included transformed foods: breads, cheese, cured meats, sweets. Because this is also biodiversity.

Once we had identified our field of action, how did we work? We linked diverse worlds that normally didn't interact: farmers, cooks, veterinarians, journalists... In order to achieve two objectives:

1 – Help small-scale farmers:

To save a breed, we didn't start from genetic selection; to save an apple variety, we didn't start from a collection of varieties. Instead, we began by seeking out the shepherds that bred that certain breed, the farmers that still cultivated that apple, and we went and spoke to them. With this crucial step, the Presidia project was launched, that today is supporting producers in every corner of the world.

2 – Raise awareness about biodiversity:

We need to work with producers and experts, but also with schools, journalists, restaurant and so on. We need to write and tell these stories of producers with every tool at our disposal, because these themes transcend university lecture halls and scientific institutions, and become the heritage of us all.

Biodiversity can't be saved by scientists alone, nor by the powerful of the world, because it is of no interest to the market. And it's probable that Noah won't be arriving with his Ark.

This battle, therefore, is one that needs to be taken up by us, together with all the people we manage to involve, on our lands, every day - with our Ark of Taste, Presidia, Earth Markets, community and school gardens, and the thousands of other ideas still to come.

I would like to focus now on the Ark of Taste and Presidia projects in order to give a practical



example of how through the safeguard of culture and in particular in this case, food culture, Slow Food tries to promote environmental sustainability.

The Ark of Taste is a Slow Food project that has the objective to collect small-scale quality productions that belong to the cultures, history and traditions of the entire planet: an extraordinary heritage of fruits, vegetables, animal breeds, cheeses, breads, sweets and cured meats.

The Ark of Taste was created to **point out the existence** of these products, **draw attention** to the risk of their extinction within a few generations, **invite everyone to take action** to help protect them. In some cases this might be by buying and consuming them, in some by telling their story and supporting their producers, and in others, such as the case of endangered wild species, this might mean eating less or none of them in order to preserve them and favor their reproduction.

On the Ark of Taste there are now 1.151 products from all over the world, but during the Slow Food International Congress that was held in Turin in October 2012, the centrality of the biodiversity has been reaffirmed and the project has been relaunched and the objective of cataloguing 10.000 Ark of Taste products has been set.

Anyone can nominate a product through a nomination form that is available online on the website of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity: [www.slowfoodfoundation.com](http://www.slowfoodfoundation.com).

Slow Food Presidia are projects that take concrete action to protect a traditional product at risk of extinction (an Ark product) and are therefore the operational phase of the Ark of Taste project.

While the Ark of Taste is a catalogue of products, the essential feature of Presidia is the relationship with producers and the organization of concrete initiatives to support them. Setting up a Presidium means visiting farms, finding out how the producers do their work and what problems they have, studying their social and cultural context, and researching their market so initiatives to support them can be put in place.

Slow Food Presidia take concrete action to protect a traditional product at risk of extinction (an Ark product) and are therefore the operational phase of the Ark project. But this is not all. There are another two categories of Presidia, which do not involve defending a traditional product. These are projects to defend traditional techniques at risk of extinction (of fishing, livestock farming, processing, or cultivation) or projects taking action to protect an endangered rural landscape or ecosystem (for example ancient olive groves or citrus orchards).

The sociocultural, agri-environmental and economic results of the Presidia projects in Europe have been analyzed and the results show a general improvement on all the three scales of sustainability: sociocultural agri-environmental and economic.

We are therefore very proud of the work that we are doing, but we also realize that there is a lot yet to be done and we really hope that more and more people will be willing to join our battle because the battle to save biodiversity isn't like any other battle. It's the battle for the life of our planet.

Thank you. 谢谢大家！