

Slow Food in a Fast City

By Astrea Ravenstar

Cultivating relationships through the human being's innate capacities for reverence, love, and understanding is a cornerstone of Waldorf education. Those relationships extend to the human beings we encounter daily, with the subject matter learned in the classroom and in the world, with our home the Earth, and with the food we eat. Honoring the slow food movement allows the students at Rudolf Steiner School New York City (Steiner) to develop a healthy relationship with the land, with one another, and to develop agency over their own well-being.

We hear the term farm-to-table used in many restaurants these days, and it is important to see locally sourced foods making a comeback in the modern American diet. Likewise, the increasingly popular Slow Food movement is its own organization attempting to "defend biological and cultural diversity; educate, inspire, and mobilize the world around us; [and] influence public decision-makers and the private sector," from their website: www.slowfood.com. To bring the concept into broader and more general terms, Slow Living LDN states in its article "Slow Food Movement: History, Principles and Reasons to Embrace It," (which I highly recommend reading!) that slow food can be a useful word to describe a way of eating and type of conscious consumerism that encourages respecting seasonality; reducing environmental impact within food production, encouraging better education around the food system, and supporting local producers and their heritage.

With a slow food program at Steiner, we are taking a step beyond locally sourced foods to highlight the quality of the farming methods which include soil health, biodynamic, organic, or natural growing methods, as well as the farming and fishing techniques that promote quality of life and sustainability practices.

These practices form a foundation for community values and conscious consumerism.

Vegetarian and vegan options are available every day, while meats are sourced from farms that use grass-fed, free-range, or organic diets for the animals that live under the sun and in the field. There are no highly processed carbs, no refined sugar, no hydrogenated oils, and no empty calories. In a recent conversation with a colleague about our school lunches, she said, "How could I not be happy? I eat flowers every single day," referencing the daily salad bar that abounds with edible flowers!

"What I feed somebody becomes them, especially in the case of developing bodies," says Chef Alexander



Chef Alex and the kitchen crew

Oefell. Chef Alex joined Steiner in 2022 with over 30 years of experience in the restaurant, catering, and food industries.

In doing so, he became part of a community enthusiastic about a healthy and slow food program that aligned with his own Swiss background and cooking for his family. Instead of hiding the flavors of the foods as is often the case in modern manufactured cooking, using quality ingredients and simple methods he developed a menu that enhances flavors and meets a wide variety of palates from gluten free to vegan. The dining hall renovation, a multi-year project, had just been completed, and with an experienced team in the kitchen the food magic was underway. "One of the main components of the renovation was to open up the cooking space so the students could see the team and have a relationship with the people making the food for them

every day," says Gabriela Cordo, executive director at Steiner, and chief project manager of the dining hall

"The dining hall has the potential to play a big role in instilling values, an analog experience, and re-teaching a lost art of community."

refurbishment. Teachers, students, and parents utilize the dining hall for a variety of events including baking classes, morning coffees, and parent crafting events, and to host fundraising events such as the ever-popular Mock Sleepover complete with pizza making and pajamas (after school of course!). Creating the right space for eating healthy meals and communing together is as important as the food itself.

"In society, there's a lot of phone and fork," says Chef Alex, referring to the modern phenomenon of people sitting side by side at a table eating, yet isolated while

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scrolling on their phones. Steiner is looking at how to create something different and to untether kids from society's addiction. Ever conscious of the remedies needed in our time, the school is grateful to Chef Alex and his simple yet lofty mission: "The dining hall has the potential to play a big role in instilling values, an analog experience, and re-teaching a lost art of community."

Pulling from years of research and experience, Chef Alex works with a carbon-neutral supply company to source many of the organic dry ingredients which come from small local farms. He also works with a co-op of farmers in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, whom he knows personally and who use methods that are, according to Alex, "as pure as it gets."



Knowing what it takes to produce food in a way that respects the land, the animals, and the people who work there is a core value at Steiner, especially since most of our students do not have this direct experience while living in an urban environment. Starting in the spring of third grade, our students visit Hawthorne Valley Farm, as do many third-grade classes in the Mid Atlantic region, where they

learn about the planting process and often have many encounters with young farm animals, and if lucky, birth itself. Steiner students happily return in grade school to experience the harvest, and to study botany, geology or soil health. In the 10th grade, they return to see the farm through the auspices of human relationships, which include the management of the farm and running the business of the farm store. These practices then live with the students in a new way when they return to city life and are reawakened in the respite of mealtime.



Grade 6 student, Rudolf Steiner School New York City.

The importance of engaging students in a family-style meal experience can set habits that will stay with them for life, which cultivates respect and reverence for what sustains us—in all its forms. A slow food experience in a big fast city brings a new level of purpose to one of our most important experiences of the day - breaking bread together.

Steiner Dressing

Yield: 600gr

Garlic 15gr

Toasted pumpkin seeds 125gr

Cilantro 40gr

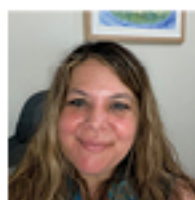
Champagne vinegar 60gr

Salt 16gr

Cold water 150gr

Sunflower seed oil 220gr

Place everything in a blender except the oil. Blend until smooth, then slowly pour in oil to emulsify. Let the dressing sit overnight before serving.



Astrea Ravenstar lives in New York City and Saratoga Springs, New York. She currently works at Rudolf Steiner School New York City as the lower school chair, and also serves on the AWSNA Leadership Council as the Mid Atlantic region member. Astrea is the mother of two Waldorf alum and is a former class teacher.