

US and Australia chefs tackle global obesity at Italy fair

October 28 2012, by Ella Ide

As the world struggles with a growing obesity epidemic, Slow Food gurus from the US and Australia are urging international campaigners gathered in Italy to join a revolution in the way children eat.

"Australia has exactly the same problem as almost any other developed country: a very large obesity rate. Something must be done, globally," Melbourne chef Stephanie Alexander said at the world's largest food fair in Turin.

Alexander, who worked as a top chef for forty years before setting up the not-for-profit Kitchen Garden Foundation in 2004 to tackle poor [eating habits](#), has come to talk to activists from India, Africa and Brazil about her project.

While the United States, Mexico and New Zealand and Australia are the four most obese countries in the world, growing numbers of people are being affected across the globe, from South Africa to India, China, Russia and [Saudi Arabia](#).

"It's all about education, teaching children the difference between good and bad food," said Alexander, who owes her passion for Slow Food to her mother and gardener grandfather, who made eating fresh home-grown vegetables a pleasure.

Her programme, currently active in 265 schools, gets children aged eight to 11 involved in growing seasonal food in school allotments, then

preparing it in special training kitchens and sharing it with their classmates at lunchtime.

It has been such a hit that the [Australian government](#), keen to find ways to tackle obesity, has invested 20 million dollars (\$25 million) into the project, which currently influences about 30,000 children—a number set soon to double.

"Within a very short time those who are not the habit of eating a wide range of fresh food open up to new experiences. They are very proud of what they've achieved and we have empty plates and a great deal of enthusiasm," she said.

Among others, her project has inspired celebrity chef Jamie Oliver in Britain, where over a third of children aged 11 are considered overweight or obese, "though he's creeping very slowly at the moment, with just two schools."

Alexander is in Turin with US chef Alice Waters, founder of Berkeley's famed Chez Panisse restaurant and vice president of the Slow Food movement, which was founded in Italy in 1986 to combat the rise of fast food and unhealthy eating.

Waters is best known as the woman who inspired US first lady Michelle Obama to open a kitchen garden at the White House, but has also dedicated much of her time to the Edible Schoolyard project, which she founded in California in 1995.

"I'm terribly worried about the indoctrination of fast food around the world and the culture that comes with it. Slow food values need to be taught in all schools around the globe," Waters said in the fair's bustling food hall.

"We've been working in California to try to gather the best practices, and map the movement across the country and ultimately around the world," she said.

One of the projects inspired by Waters is the Edible Sac High garden and kitchen in a school in Sacramento, which is particularly interesting because "in high school it's much more difficult to get kids interested in good food."

"I've imagined having the kids run the whole cafeteria themselves, cooking all the meals for their classmates: they learn the budgets, they do the outreach, they find the farmers, they cook the food together," she said.

"One thing we know is that when kids cook food and grow it, they all want to eat it. It's questionable whether they will want to eat it if they don't participate, but it really works with a hands on approach," she added.

For Waters, the Turin gathering is an invaluable chance to spread the word about [fresh food](#)—and draw inspiration from the Italian culture.

"The Italians have a very deep-seated food culture. Many, many people still have backyard gardens, which are very important. They know about seasonality, and still have the idea of eating together as a family," she said.

"This fair not only reaffirms those ideas but it is also a way to spread the good news, and in the face of [obesity](#) that's what we need: hopeful, good news."

(c) 2012 AFP

Citation: US and Australia chefs tackle global obesity at Italy fair (2012, October 28) retrieved 23 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-10-australia-chefs-tackle-global-obesity.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.