



A NEW ERA FOR SLOW FOOD

by Lucy Gordan | Food



Petrini and Mukiibi

The International Slowfood Movement was founded in 1986 by Carlo Petrini, political activist, journalist, author, and publisher, as a protest against the newly-opened McDonald's near Rome's elegant Piazza di Spagna, the first fastfood restaurant in Italy. Today the International Slowfood Movement boasts millions of members from more than 1,500 conviva (local chapters) in more than 160 countries. Its members are typically chefs, farmers, fishermen, activists, academics, and producers, but anyone including me with a passion for food can join. Members enjoy seminars and special 0-miles meals, and can buy food products and books at discounted prices, so look for the chapter closest to you. Slowfood's primary missions are to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, counteract the rise of fast food and a fast life style, combat people's dwindling interest in the quality of the food they eat or in its provenance and in how our food choices affect the world around us. In short, slow food must be fresh, seasonal, and locally produced, as well as part of the local culture. Food production and consumption must not harm the environment or animal and human health. Producers must work in safe sanitary conditions and receive fair pay for their products and consumer prices must be accessible. On July 16th, at its 8th Slow Food International Congress in Pollenzo, Italy, held at the campus of the University of Gastronomic Sciences Petrini founded in October 2004, Petrini told its delegates, who represented conviva worldwide: "the role of food as the main culprit in environmental disaster is emerging ever more loudly and clearly...We need governance that leaves space for new generations. We must be able to combine the new with our history. The path taken so far has allowed us to achieve goals that once seemed unattainable

and has made us what we are. However, today's world is profoundly different from the one that saw the beginnings of our movement. We must therefore welcome and allow ourselves to be directed by the creativity and intuition of new individuals capable of interpreting the present and outlining the trajectory that will allow the achievement of future goals."

At the end of this speech Petrini, aged 73, announced his retirement so Slowfood's Executive Committee, the organization's highest decision-making body, elected Edward "Edie" Mukiibi, Petrini's successor. He was born in Kisoga in Uganda's Mukono district to a family of poor farmers the same year that Petrini founded Slowfood.

A tropical agronomist with a Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture and land use management from Makerere University in Kampala as well as a Master of Gastronomy from the University of Gastronomic Sciences, after graduation Mukiibi returned to Uganda to teach and work with local farmers and set up DISC (Developing Innovations in School Cultivation), which fights crop loss and food waste.

As executive director of Slowfood Uganda since 2012 and Vice President of International Slowfood since 2014, Mukiibi has been instrumental in the development of Slowfood Gardens, a project that has created thousands of green spaces to preserve African food biodiversity and help communities access nutritious food. His aim was to recast the farming profession as a dignified and profitable career option offering a solution to youth unemployment in Uganda.

In 2008 Mukiibi was invited to Terra Madre, Salone del Gusto, the largest international event, open to the public, dedicated to food politics, sustainable agriculture and the environment, to share his story. It too was launched by Petrini in 2004. Mukiibi describes it as a life-changing visit.

As President of Slowfood International, he will continue to collaborate with the organization Food Wise, which helps young people reconnect with local and traditional foods and cuisines to protect African cultures, gastronomy and biodiversity. Another of Mukiibi's projects is to transform his family's farm into a 360-degree ecological food and social enterprise. "When we reconnect young people to reduce rural migration," Mukiibi said in his acceptance speech, "we build a community that understands the real value of growing our own food and using the land we have...The world is getting younger...In Africa alone 70% of the population is under 40."

"Staying together as a network and a global food movement is critical for making a lasting impact on a food system that has become a burden for the planet to bear," continued Mukiibi, who added that he was looking forward to presiding over Terra Madre to be held in Turin from September 22-26.

Other important recognitions that Mukiibi has received include the Ray Charles "Black Hand in the Pot" Sustainability Award from Dillard University in New Orleans and a Testimonial Resolution from the City of Detroit. Last year he was listed in the Empowering Educators category of the British-based 50 Next Awards as one of the young people under 35 shaping the future of gastronomy.