

■ BY MOTHER MARTHA

For my “Food For Thought” column of October 2014, Heinz Beck, Rome’s only chef with three Michelin stars, told me: “During my 20 years at *La Pergola* my cuisine has passed through several styles: from traditional, to creative with imaginative side dishes, to technically cutting-edge, to attentive to health issues. Healthy menus are my top priority. I’ve lightened my dishes by removing non-essential ingredients so today my cuisine is modern, Mediterranean, and, above all, healthy. Since we live much longer, we must eat healthily so as not to develop pathologies like Type 2 diabetes, cholesterol, cirrhosis of the liver and high blood pressure, which derive from unhealthy nutrition. However, I’m not a doctor, dietician or nutritionist; I’m a chef who pays attention to the wellbeing of his guests.”

Since April 2014, Beck has collaborated with the Catholic University Hospital Agostino Gemelli — the hospital in which the Popes are treated when ill.

He creates healthy, yet enjoyable, menus for its in-house patients, as well as for those recently sent home and anyone interested in healthy eating habits (www.gemellifornelli.it).

Now, nearly ten years later, after publishing two science-based books in Italian about healthy nutrition, and opening several new restaurants in Italy and Dubai, London, Portugal, and Tokyo, besides his flagship *La Pergola*, Beck, still Rome’s only chef with three Michelin stars, took his nutritional philosophy out of the kitchen and begun to consider its impact on food production and on the environment.

On November 16, 2023, he participated in the panel discussion of the Symposium “Traditional Diets for Sustainable Wellbeing,” sponsored by the Missions of Argentina, Japan and Italy to the United Nations, the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), and UNESCO, and held at the world’s most international forum, the U.N., in New York.

Other members of the panel were Professors Francesco Zurlo and Matteo Oreste Ingaramo of Milan’s Polytechnic University; Professor Carlo Di Cristo, an expert in yeast and fermentation; Nicoletta Mantovani, opera singer Luciano Pavarotti’s widow and president of her late husband’s namesake foundation; Camilla Baresani, cultural and food journalist, and Antonella Bondi, olfactory designer.

TOP CHEF HEINZ BECK SPEAKS AT THE UNITED NATIONS



Portrait of Heinz Beck by Adriano Truscello, courtesy of Barbara Manto & Partners

In his opening remarks Beck indicated some of the elements essential for a healthy diet: **Bilancio Energetico** – to maintain a balance between caloric intake and energy expenditure to avoid obesity; **Alimenti Nutrienti** – to eat a diet rich in fruit, vegetables, and cereals, lean proteins and healthy fats; **Controllo delle Porzioni** – portions based on quality not quantity; **Assunzione di Sodio** – adding only small amounts of salt to avoid high blood pressure; **Idratazione Adequata** – drinking adequate amounts of water to keep hydrated; **Supporto Psicologico ed Emotivo** – if necessary getting psychological support to control emotivity, stress, and depression which can influence our eating habits negatively.

Lack of proper attention to nutritional rules and a balanced diet can have profoundly negative effects on society. He continued by saying that a healthy diet not only reduces the illnesses of an individual, but it’s important for public health because it reduces the cost of healthcare for all.

As for the environment, modern over-use of water, and harmful deforestation, usually in the Third World, cause enormous damage to the environment.

Thus, Beck emphasized: “Our choices of the foods we eat have an important impact on our health, but also on the environment around us.”

“Our awareness of the environmental impact of our food choices have stimulated discussion about the importance of ‘sustainable diets,’ those which keep us healthy as well as protecting the environment.

“To make responsible choices, learning about healthy nutrition must start at an early age, with school programs which teach young people about how to eat a balanced diet, to avoid eating too much food, especially food high in calories and low in nutrients.

“We chefs and other professionals in the food sector must emphasize not only the better quality of raw materials produced at ‘Km.0’ and thus their better nutritional value, but also warn against the dangers of damaging agricultural practices, raw material transformation and preservation...”

La Pergola closed on November 21, 2023 for a complete restyling and will reopen on April 30. On October 10, 2024, Beck will celebrate the restaurant’s 30th anniversary, as well as his own as Executive Chef.

Tanti auguri! ○