

eat fit!



EAT UP!

A Brief Look at the Evolution of the Health Food Movement

Long before mass-produced heart-attacks-in-a bag and livestock with more growth hormones than a major-league ball player, farming has been an integral part of our lives. And although the farming techniques of our ancestors boasted of being Nature's way, there has always been some sort of organic pesticide used to promote the growth of crops and livestock.

The real base of today's organic and natural farming dates back to more than 3000 years ago. Ancient Romans used sulfur as a fumigant to control garden pests while the Chinese turned to arsenic. Similar practices were used for centuries in the United States. It wasn't until the Industrial Revolution that notable changes became to appear. Mass production affected the manufacture of food, while the research of men such as Sir Albert Howard pioneered a more organic form of agriculture. Today Howard is considered by many purists to be the father of the organic movement. Still, at that time, farming with any sort of petroleum-based chemical was an unheard of concept. However, World War II changed all this. Strong synthetic chemicals used in chemical and biological weapons were diluted and manufactured into pesticides and herbicides. From this developed the big kicker in the food industry -- the use of petroleum-based chemicals. Suddenly food was produced more economically, more efficiently and more quickly than ever before. The balance of nature was altered forever as livestock and crops no longer relied solely on the seasons or a natural length of time to grow and thus became available year round

Very little thought was put into the cause and effects from the use of these chemicals or from new farming methods that developed. Topsoil was stripped and chemicals were added to enhance the farmland in order to create better yields; the excessive use of harmful hormones, pesticides and other growth and defensive agents became common-practice. By manipulating the growth time of crops and animals, food became cheap to produce and cheap to buy. Suddenly, through the advancements of farming, processing and transportation, Aunt Betty could have corn year round.



Pat McElroy
HR St. Louis
Union Station



eat fit!



EAT UP!

Don't get me wrong. There have been some amazing up-grades to food that have changed the world in which we live; Birds Eye opened our eyes to culinary delights such as spinach compacted into a user-friendly frozen block. As chefs we can wander through our shelves and gaze at a bountiful display of veg de jour. Decision-making became easy: all the colors of the rainbow are neatly displayed in a row of #10 cans.

Then came the birth of today's health food movement, or did it? Cleverly marketed words like "organic," "free-range," and "all natural" sprang up and became a part of our everyday lives. However, although these terms were introduced in the '70's by a clever marketing agency to suggest a healthier style of life, the fact of the matter is that the organic farming seen today dates back to the farming of yesteryear. What is new is the growth in terminology that has been created to accommodate the growth in the petroleum-based chemicals used in our food, words like GMO, genetically modified organisms, synthetic fertilizers, growth hormones and food scientists. Big name companies such as Ben and Jerry's in the 70's and the Whole Food chain of the early 80's helped to put "natural living" back into the sub-culture.

Not surprisingly, many conscious consumers soon became resistant to the big food giants and a food revelation was re-born. People wanted real food that was tasty, yet wholesome and friendly to both their bodies and to the environment. They were concerned about what they were putting into their bodies. This demand for naturally grown products created a multi-billion dollar industry, as company's stocked shelves with healthier goods that were more costly than commodity foods. By the 1990's the government began to succumb to public outcry for better guidelines and regulations on this highly profitable business. The USDA began to regulate the definition of what is organic, all natural, and free range. Unfortunately, it took over seven years of red tape to lay the foundation for these and other guidelines, and in 2000 they were revised to make them even more defined and regulated for the farmer and the consumer today.

The process will not stop there. The future of the organic foods is predictable. The industry will continue to grow as consumers become more and concerned about their own health. We as chefs need to decipher fact from fiction about organic and all natural foods. Why does it cost more to produce organic foods and what environmental impact is it making on our children? Each month I'll did deep into the rebirth of the natural food movement and break down some of the misconceptions and thoughts. Next months article will be on defining what is organic and its sub-levels.



eat fresh!

B L O O D O R A N G E



EAT UP!

The Blood, Moro, or Maltese Oranges are very old orange varieties. There is some historical evidence that the blood orange hybrid first appeared in Southern Europe around 1850 and was then brought to North America many decades later by Spanish and Italian immigrants. Commonly known throughout most of the world as "blood," "blood-red" or "blush" oranges, they have a number of other common or regional names. In the United States, they are known as Rubies, Blush or Moro oranges.



In the former British Empire, blood oranges were called "Maltese" oranges. They are closely related to 'Jaffa' orange varieties. Some writers have theorized that Jaffa is a blood orange variant. In Sicily where blood oranges are a popular product and export commodity, the most popular blood orange varieties are Tarocco, Moro and Sanguigno, the latter cultivated extensively in the western part of the island as the Sanguinello of Paternò and Adernò.



The European Union has recognized a small region of Eastern Sicily near Mt. Etna as a special zone of production for the Tarocco variety (sold in the United States under the trade name Volcano Oranges®), the "Indicazione Geografica Protetta" (geographically protected variety). Some consider the blood orange to be particularly Sicilian, primarily because it is not as widely cultivated in Calabria, Spain or Greece. However, this is a distinctly European and euro-centric perspective, considering the Asian and Arabic heritage of the fruit and its widespread cultivation throughout the Middle East and Asia.

The red pigmentation varies with climate and can be intense when blood oranges are grown in regions with large diurnal temperature fluctuations (hot days, cold nights). The pigment in blood oranges is anthocyanin; it is not typically found in citrus and is usually associated with other red fruit and flowers. Anthocyanin is a powerful antioxidant that neutralizes the effects of free-radical chemicals within the bodies of living organisms..



eat seasonal!