

Slow Food for a Healthy New Year

Winter is a time when we find comfort in warm fires and hearty food. But how much thought do we give to the quality of the food we eat?

From fine dining restaurants and gastro pubs to cafes and tearooms, many of the dining establishments featured in *Eat Out Norfolk* take pleasure in giving customers a slow food experience. But what is 'slow food' and why does it matter?

Founded in Italy in 1989, Slow Food is a global, grassroots movement that links the pleasure of food with a commitment to community and the environment. The Slow Food movement campaigns for an approach to food that "recognizes the strong connections between plate, planet, people, politics and culture." The movement isn't only concerned with promoting gastronomic pleasure and preserving regional foods and traditions. The way we grow, harvest and supply food affects whether we can all flourish on a healthy planet. Sustainability is key. Chefs committed to the Slow Food philosophy "take pride in promoting small-scale producers, and using good quality, locally-sourced, sustainable foods."

The slow food trend is a timely response to the fast-food craze that started in the US and led to the intensive food systems that are harming the natural world today. Intensive animal agriculture is a major contributor to rainforest destruction and climate change. Fisheries using deep-sea trawlers damage the seabed and gillnets kill dolphins, penguins and turtles. With a newfound environmental consciousness, we want to know where our food comes from.

We also want to know what's in our food. Fresh fruit and vegetables produced and supplied locally are likely to retain more vitamins and minerals. Certified organic food will be free from artificial pesticides and fertilisers. Likewise, when meat and dairy come from local farms, we can check that animals are raised healthily and humanely. By contrast, intensive farming may harm our health when it relies on indoor rearing, supplementary feed, growth hormones and antibiotics. And what about the fast-food culture that goes hand in hand with cheap meat and dairy? Highly processed food, whether it's deep-fried takeaway food washed down with sweet fizzy drinks or supermarket ready meals, has a high cost in the long run.

Highly processed foods are high in sugar, salt, saturated fat and trans-fat, which increase our risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, stroke and some cancers. To make matters worse, these foods are low in vitamins, minerals and antioxidants needed for our body to function properly. They are also low in fibre, which feeds 'good' gut bacteria, helps us feel

full and helps bowel function. For a long shelf life and appealing taste, highly processed foods contain artificial preservatives, colourings, and flavourings. The longer the ingredients list, the more removed the food is from nature.

In Norfolk, we are fortunate to have a wide choice of eateries offering fresh, home-made, locally sourced and seasonal produce with craft beverages to match. What are you waiting for? Let's support Norfolk's artisan food and drink producers and raise a glass to slow food.
Happy New Year!