

Food Communities

What Are Food Communities

Food communities are the nodes of the international Terra Madre network. The term “food community” refers to a group of people who carry out an active role in their local food system. Food communities share the problems generated by an intensive agriculture that harms natural resources and a food industry and a distribution model that aim at standardizing tastes and threaten the existence of small-scale production. They represent a valid alternative to these flawed systems.

Communities can be made up of farmers, fishers, herders, animal breeders, bakers, butchers, cooks, educators, teachers, students, journalists, experts, co-producers, local retailers, etc. The community might be producing food on a small scale, following artisanal methods and criteria inspired by the good, clean and fair principles, or it might be working to construct more sustainable models for food production, distribution and consumption.

The first international meeting of food communities—**Terra Madre**—was held in Turin in 2004 and brought together 1,200 food communities from 130 countries. Apart from the biennial gathering in Turin, around the world the communities are regularly involved in activities and meetings at a local and national scale.

The communities also get involved in **Terra Madre Day**, a celebration held around the world every year on December 10 to promote local food. On this day, food communities, along with other members of the Slow Food network, organize events, markets, conferences, meetings, communal meals and parties to raise funds to support the network’s projects and to affirm and celebrate the values of Terra Madre.

With their activities, the communities become vectors of the Slow Food philosophy in their local areas. Together with the local association network, they are spokespeople for the campaigns that Slow Food promotes internationally.

All of the Slow Food Presidia, the Slow Food gardens (community, urban or school) and the Earth Markets are food communities and belong to the Terra Madre network.

Food Community Objectives

The community is working to improve the local food system, based on the promotion of local food production, with a particular focus on the preservation of food biodiversity and ecosystems, in order to guarantee local economic, cultural, social and environmental development in harmony with and respectful of natural equilibriums.

With their vision and their knowledge, they work to promote a new gastronomy, founded on biodiversity protection, environmental preservation and respect for local cultures and traditions.

Food communities promote the Slow Food philosophy around the world.

Food Community Products

The products of a food community are made following the principles of:

- **good**: they must be of good quality, a concept that varies based on different local cultures. This element is what distinguishes Slow Food in particular from other organizations. The products supported by our projects must be good, because only in this way is it possible to develop the pleasure of taste and for producers to aspire to a fair and profitable return for their work.
- **clean**: in other words the production techniques must, as much as possible, respect the environment. They must not necessarily be certified organic, but they must be made following the principles of agroecology and with respect for animal welfare and consumer health. Synthetic ingredients must be used only when there is no other option, and in as small a quantity as possible.
- **fair**: producers must receive a fair return, appropriate for the work carried out and the quality of the product and, in turn, they must sell their products for a fair and transparent price. There must be no gender, nationality, ethnic, political or religious discrimination within the production chain, and child labor is not allowed.

In some cases the community's activity is focused around a single traditional product, representative of local biodiversity, often anticipating the establishment of a Slow Food Presidium.

Learning Communities

In some cases, the community's focus is education. Learning communities are made up of students of various ages, teachers, parents, grandparents, cooks and local producers who work together to pass on to the younger generations knowledge linked to food culture, sustainable production and environmental protection.

Often they are involved in cultivating food gardens (like the Orto in Condotta project in Italy, urban food gardens in the United States and family, school and community gardens in Africa), but also in educational activities aimed at developing taste education and sharing skills and knowledge that enable conscious consumption choices. Learning community projects might include training sessions for teachers; food, taste or environmental education activities for students and seminars for parents and grandparents.

Connection with the Local Area

Communities are linked to a specific area, not just geographically but also socially, culturally and historically. The link between food and place is a core element of identity and the quality of the products made and/or distributed and promoted by the community.

A sense of belonging to a place allows for constant interaction and collaboration, another cornerstone of the community.

Relationships Between Community Members

The members of a food community must interact, collaborate and develop shared projects. The community members can have different functions and roles, and they might be connected by personal or even professional ties.

For example, a community could gather all the key players in a production chain around a collective project, including producers and the experts who assist, train and support them as well as chefs, retailers and even the educators and

administrators in a community, plus the final link in the chain, those who truly have the ability to bring about concrete change: consumers, also known as co-producers.

Relationship Between Food Communities and the Slow Food Association

A food community can exist in and of itself, regardless of Slow Food's activities, or it can be created thanks to the aggregation work carried out directly by Slow Food convivia in the local area.

Food communities can be proposed by the local network or national associations, by coordinators at Slow Food headquarters or by the network of members, experts and academics present in the local area, or they can autonomously request to join the network.

Each food community must officially request to join the Terra Madre network, promising to embrace the Slow Food philosophy and collaborate on spreading and supporting Slow Food's message, campaigns and projects.

While it is not obligatory for a food community to have pre-existing links with any local Slow Food convivia in the area, it is essential that its members are willing to forge collaborations and links, as well as spreading the word about Slow Food's projects and campaigns.

In turn, Slow Food convivia must undertake to involve the food communities in their local area and consider them members of the network in every respect.

The 2012 Slow Food International Congress began the process of political recognition for the food communities, similarly to the convivia, and already that year some communities sent delegates to the International Council. For the next congress, in 2017, the food communities that over the years have actively participated in association life and the implementation of Slow Food projects will be recognized as nodes of the Slow Food network to all intents and purposes, and their delegates will be able to contribute more vigorously to making the future decisions that will shape our association.

Food Community Names

The name of the food community must reflect few main aspects: **what it does** (fishers, farmers, producers), **what it produces** (for example, "XXX Sweet Potato Producers") and **where it works**. **Community names that include abbreviations or names of organizations are not allowed.**

NB

- businesses, however virtuous, are not food communities, because they lack the community aspect. This is true even in the case of a large farm with many employees;
- already-formed associations of producers or cooperatives cannot automatically become food communities, unless they promote networking or educational projects (for example, an association of organic food growers who work together with representatives of food-buying groups or a cooperative of fruit growers who regularly organize educational activities in schools, farm visits, etc.).