

# Isn't it time we all took part in a go-slow?

Charles Campion gets involved as, one year on, Slow Food moves up a gear

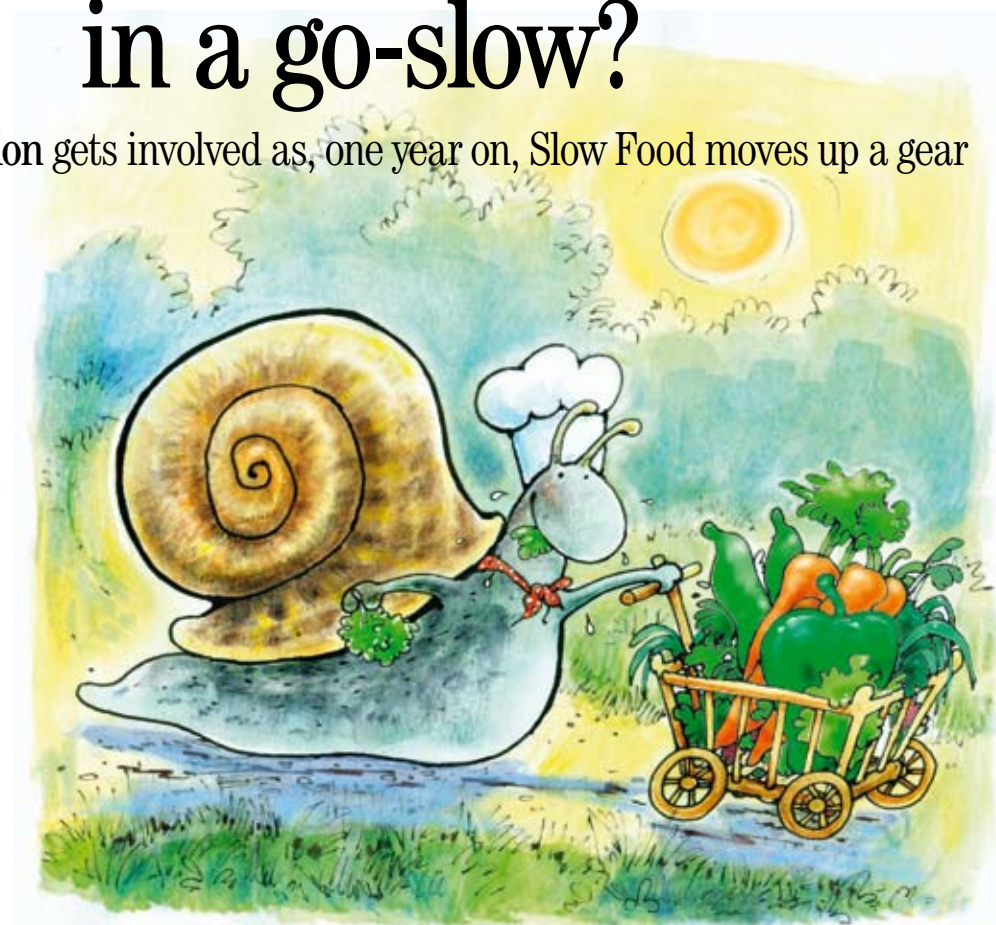
**I**N Britain, we're more accustomed to exporting our own ideas, campaigns and philosophies than wholeheartedly welcoming those of our Continental neighbours. Can you think of a single French, German or Spanish initiative that's secured a foothold with the sceptical British? Which makes it understandable that, despite being established in more than 132 countries, the Slow Food movement has found it really difficult to get going in Britain.

Slow Food was founded in 1986 by a charismatic Italian called Carlo Petrini, who was stung into action by the seemingly unstoppable march of the fast-food companies, and set up an organisation to support and defend good food, gastronomic pleasure and the slow pace of life.

Slow Food started as an 'eco-gastronomic' association, turning its attention to both wine and food, but it's always been aware of the bigger picture. Like ripples on a pond, the starting-point pebble of gastronomic pleasure has broadened to embrace quality of life and the survival of our imperilled planet. The Slow Food movement has both a corporate conscience and a stubborn desire to make a difference.

There's a good deal of rhetoric involved, but also an underpinning passion. Slow Food seeks to protect traditional and sustainable quality foods, to conserve methods of cultivation and processing, and to defend the biodiversity of cultivated and wild varieties. All of which sounds sensible enough, but is a hard sell to a cynical British audience. We aren't used to the idea that our actions, however worthy, will change anything.

Slow Foodies, on the other hand, see a direct connection between our personal choices and positive benefits. Their 'new gastronomy' encompasses freedom of choice,



**Slow is the way to go: support small producers, embrace quality and save the planet with Slow Food UK**

education and a multi-disciplinary approach to food that enables us to live our lives as well as possible, while husbanding the resources available to us. Slow Food supports small producers, defends bio-diversity and refuses to admit that even the major problems facing the planet are insurmountable. As the Americans would put it, what's not to like?


Partly due to the unfamiliar way that Slow Food organises itself worldwide—it's broken down into local 'convivia', which can be any size and can conduct their affairs pretty much as they please—the movement got off to a faltering start in Britain. At the beginning of 2009, and after several years' hard work, there were only 45 convivia and about 2,000 members. It was time for change. Slow Food head office intervened and appointed a new Chief Executive, Catherine Gazzoli, a young and feisty American, with a background that included working for the UN Food and

Agriculture Organisation. She approached the job of revitalising Slow Food UK with all the delicacy of a Force-10 gale.

Within her first year, Miss Gazzoli has set in motion the complex business of registering the Slow Food UK Trust as a charity, done away with the word *convivia* and replaced it with the more intelligible member groups (incidentally, these are springing up like mushrooms, with new groups in Derbyshire, Cambridgeshire, west Kent/East Sussex, Warwickshire, Whitstable, Dumfries, Suffolk and Solent). As well as a number of Slow Food markets and food festivals, the hit of the summer was the Taste Adventure—a practical taste workshop for children.

Following discussions with The Prince of Wales in Rome and Wales, HRH has invited Slow Food UK to organise a UK Terra Madre event at Highgrove in 2010. Terra Madre is one of Carlo Petrini's Slow Food

initiatives and he defines it as 'a project and a network and an event'. It aims to bring together a world meeting of food producers, cooks and academics.

It's a testing time for Slow Food UK: we all know that we should be more 'eco-aware', we all know that the decisions we make when buying, cooking and eating food have some bearing on the wider world, and from time to time, we all suffer a twinge of conscience as we open a packet or succumb to the allure of junk food. The dilemma lies in deciding what we can do that will genuinely make a difference. Slow Food may have been born in Italy, and it may have been through a bit of a false start here in Britain, but its heart is in the right place and it's quickly growing more effective. It deserves our support. 

*The Slow Food UK Trust, 6, Neal's Yard, London WC2 (020-7099 1132; [www.slowfood.org.uk](http://www.slowfood.org.uk))*

