



*in conversation with*  
**ALICE WATERS**

ALECIA WOOD CHATS WITH ALICE WATERS, CHEF, SLOW FOOD PIONEER  
AND FOUNDER OF THE EDIBLE SCHOOLYARD PROJECT.

PHOTO: AMANDA MARSAUS

**H**er produce-driven restaurant, Chez Panisse, sparked a food philosophy focused on quality and seasonality in California and beyond. Chef and slow-food advocate Alice Waters discusses some lessons learnt during her lengthy, impassioned career in food.

**Q: YOUR RESTAURANT, CHEZ PANISSE, HAS BEEN GOING STRONG FOR 45 YEARS. DID YOU EVER EXPECT TO HAVE SUCH AN INFLUENCE ON THE WAY PEOPLE THINK ABOUT FOOD?**

**A:** I never expected this. At the beginning – we were not professional cooks, we were doing only one menu a day, we were looking for food that tasted like the food we'd eaten in France, we didn't care about making money, we just were interested in winning people over by a delicious meal and creating a place for conversation to happen. I suppose it was its uniqueness at that time that brought acclaim to what we were doing. And it tasted good because we were buying from local, organic farms.

**Q: WHAT LEAD YOU TO BECOME AN ADVOCATE FOR LOCAL, SUSTAINABLY PRODUCED FOOD?**

**A:** We really became dependent on the farmer and celebrated that person who was giving us the food that created that taste [in the restaurant's meals]. About five years into the restaurant, we became very vocal and political about that.

**Q: DO YOU THINK YOUR ACTIONS HAVE ENCOURAGED OTHERS TO SUPPORT LOCAL FOOD?**

**A:** I'd like to believe that, as there has been such a proliferation of farmer's markets around the whole Bay Area [in California, where Chez Panisse is located], around the whole country. In every state, there are people buying food the way we do. I hope the Slow Food movement can really pull us all together, as a real political force.

**Q: YOU'VE BEEN VICE PRESIDENT OF SLOW FOOD INTERNATIONAL SINCE 2002. ITS MESSAGE MUST HAVE RESONATED WITH YOU?**

**A:** It has. I didn't know that Chez Panisse was a Slow Food restaurant until I met [founder] Carlo Petrini! I thought,

oh my God, I'm part of an international movement. What I loved was the idea of acting locally and thinking globally. I felt validated by what Slow Food International was doing, and that gave me a kind of empowerment I had not had before that.

**Q: OVER THE LAST TWO DECADES YOU'VE ALSO STARTED UP AND EXPANDED THE EDIBLE SCHOOLYARD PROJECT, WHICH PIONEERED FOOD AND AGRICULTURE EDUCATION FOR KIDS. WHY?**

**A:** When one in two kids is going to have diabetes, it should be a moral imperative that we reach children when they're young and bring them into a new relationship with food. We cannot do it by just upgrading food in a cafeteria; we know from 21 years of the Edible Schoolyard Project that food and agriculture need to be integrated into the academic curriculum. You need to be studying math in the garden and the history of a particular culture in the kitchen and making food [from that culture].

We're mapping all the schools that have a [food] curriculum, gardens and cafeterias serving slow food, with about 5500 right now in all the states and internationally, so I feel it's gaining a lot of momentum.

**Q: DO YOU DO ANY GARDENING YOURSELF?**

**A:** I have a little garden in my backyard. I'm much more of a picker than a planter, so I always have lettuce, all the herbs and a big bay tree. I'm dependent on it, it's very important to my life.

**Q: WHAT ARE SOME SIMPLE STEPS PEOPLE CAN TAKE TO HELP CREATE POSITIVE CHANGE IN THE FOOD SYSTEM?**

**A:** Going to the farmer's market and supporting the people who take care of the land, buying your food there, and eating with determination.

Wherever you can, plant an organic garden, it doesn't matter what it is – it could be all rosemary!

Cook together with your family or friends. It's terribly important that we gather again at the table – and without our cellphones.

I call it a delicious revolution. 