



A tenth generation farmer, Paul Wigsten now works with CIA as a bridge of between the chefs of tomorrow and the ingredients they will use.

Culinary Schools Grow Up

By Justin Koury

When I was in culinary school we learned three things: *Mise en Place*, *mirepoix*, and sanitizing buckets. What a difference eight years can make. Today it seems to be all about how can we buy more local? Is the fish sustainable? Can we heat using volcanoes? Really!



Students at Seattle Culinary Academy are required to take four field trips to the Skagit Valley. This group visit a corn field with instructor, Bob Hart.

Paul Wigsten, buyer/farm liaison at the Culinary Institute of America (CIA), has worked as a farmer all of his life and spouts a simple motto, “Buy local”. He goes on to explain that locally grown food is better for everyone because “it takes at less time and money to drive 30 miles than it does 3,000!”

A tenth generation farmer Wigsten now works with CIA as a bridge of between the chefs of tomorrow and the ingredients they will use. He also brings simplicity to the ordering process by offering “one invoice-one shipment” delivery through the Hudson Valley Farmer’s Alliance (HVFA).

Produce is only the beginning for CIA who in 2007, announced it would bring its student housing into the 21st century by using geothermal technology to heat and cool the six separate buildings. Aptly named Cinnamon, Nutmeg, Juniper, Clove, Ginger, and Cayenne, the residences will use what the EPA calls the “most energy efficient,

environmentally clean and cost effective systems.” This was a joint venture and grant program with the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority.

As Jeff Levine, spokesperson for CIA proclaims, “Our students are taught sustainability until it becomes second nature, using everything from recycling light bulbs to having trash composters in the CIA’s forty-one kitchens.” The chefs at CIA purchase more than \$500,000 in produce from Hudson Valley farms each year, and in 2006, Wigsten and Brad Matthews CIA’s Director of Purchasing were awarded the Glynwood Harvest Good Neighbor award.

Culinary school meets boy scouts

Across the country in Seattle, well-known for its eco-friendly lifestyle, sits a culinary school which takes sustainable farming to new heights. Joy Gulmon-Huri, manager of the Seattle Culinary Academy (SCA), offers the school’s mission, “We



envision a world where chefs equitably impact human and environmental wellness.” This is a fairly simple approach to an increasingly complex issue.

Students at the SCA not only cook with organic and locally grown foods but they take it a step further, by visiting the Skagit Valley’s nearly 700 farms. Attend the culinary arts program at the SCA and receive not just farm to plate theory but hands-on, fingernail-dirtying farming.

Every summer students are required to take four field trips to the Skagit Valley, only 100 miles out of Seattle. By utilizing retired farmers, known locally as “Geezers”, the faculty at SCA has developed a curriculum that teaches the students in a very hands-on way.

Students visit oyster farms, organic greenhouses, vegetable co-ops, as well as a grain and seed operation. They plant and harvest carrots, beets, and other vegetables, as well as hear lectures from the retired

farmers and other locals about what they do. By visiting four farms, students get a rich experience and learn firsthand the relationship between cooking and the environment. These courses and trips help teach future chefs about how their purchasing choices impact the environment.

But let’s not forget this is a culinary school. Classes that cover sustainability are part of the curriculum and topics include consumer awareness, and ecological issues as well as waste, and health issues in the food system.

For Paul Wigsten at the Culinary Institute of America, the future looks greener than ever. HVFA is currently building a central delivery building to supply the school and other restaurants from the network of farms. Individuals no longer need to visit each farm, thus reducing further the carbon footprint. “It’s very helpful to have the process streamlined and in one location,” Wigsten explains,

Students at Seattle Culinary Academy get “down and dirty” on the farm. The idea is to make the link between the environment and the kitchen.

adding that restaurants will need to begin developing relationships with farmers if they want to stay competitive in the future. The purchasing program will grow as the schools grow and their sustainability program expands.

According to Linda Chauncey dean of the Seattle Culinary Academy, human wellness is the future of the program. "Food is intrinsically linked to health" says Chauncey and goes on to explain that "chefs can play a role in making people healthy." SCA intends to train the students in new courses in nutrition, not necessarily turning them into dietitians but rather health conscious. Chefs can provide healthier options using sustainably produced food while focusing on nutrition, and organic farming principals.

CIA and SCA are not the only schools offering both courses and hands-on education for sustainable practices. Kendall College in Chicago, a winner of FCSI's Green Award, has been a leader in green education. Other schools such as Purdue,



Students at the CIA work with farm-fresh ingredients. The new focus is on local and sustainable.

Sullivan University, and The Art Institutes all have courses in sustainable farming or cooking classes, or are planning in the future to offer them.

Today's culinary schools are no longer focusing on the classical education most chefs received, but rather, thinking globally and at the same time locally to find inspiration for their students. This new generation of chefs in America will be well versed in the ways of sustainability and it will be ingrained in their attitude as they make their mark as the leaders of tomorrow's food operations.

Green kitchens

One aspect that culinary schools and hospitality programs are focusing on is design and feasibility. Going beyond the average business plan, Purdue University Calumet offers several courses ranging from lighting a hotel room, to the location and traffic studies for a potential restaurant. Students learn firsthand which laundry systems work best for mid-range hotels, and how to calculate the CVP (cost-volume-profit) ratio. The well-rounded education now favored by schools has replaced the one-track learning that once took place, and not a moment too soon. While only a few schools are teaching "green building" alongside meat

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preparation, it is mentioned from time to time in Hospitality Facilities Management at Purdue, a course this writer knows all too well. The course looks at the maintenance, design, and the equipment used in hospitality operations, as well as technical and managerial issues in upkeep, and operation.

What will the education of tomorrow hold? Will students be learning how to stay “green” before they learn the five mother sauces? How will the students of today impact the future of culinary and design education? Perhaps one day the Cornell schools of Hospitality or Purdue will have courses in foodservice consulting, taught by FCSI members to prepare students for the ever-changing world. 🌍

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Students from Seattle Culinary Academy visit Taylor Shellfish Farms to learn about sustainably harvested oysters.

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