

## Restoring Food to Its Central Place

Food production is rising, the amount of **cultivated** land is increasing, and 22 percent of the world population (almost half of the total workforce) is engaged in agriculture, but the food produced for twelve billion people is in fact not enough to feed the six billion who actually live in the world. Moreover, this effort of production has not achieved  
5 its aims. It has subjected the Earth to such stress that the land either turns to desert or dies because of the excessive use of chemical products. Water resources are running out. Biodiversity is rapidly diminishing, especially agro-biodiversity, with a continual reduction in the number of animal breeds and vegetable varieties that have for centuries contributed to the sustenance of entire regions in a perfectly sustainable  
10 partnership between man and nature.

Something must have gone wrong, because if we consider the problem of satisfying the primal need for food and analyze it over the long term, the hunger for production has done more harm than good.

The contradiction in agro-industrial terms is clearly emerging: agro-industry has  
15 given us the illusion that it could solve the problem of feeding the human race. I would go even further: over the last fifty years, it has turned food production into both executioner and victim. Executioner, because the unsustainable methods of agro-industry have led to the disappearance of many sustainable production methods that were once part of the identity of the communities that practised them and were one  
20 of the highest pleasures for the gastronome in search of valuable knowledge and flavours. Victim, because the same unsustainable methods—originally necessary in order to feed a larger number of people—have since turned the **sphere** of food and agriculture into a neglected sector, completely detached from the lives of billions of people, as if **procuring** food ... required no effort at all. Politicians show little interest  
25 in it, except when pressured to do so by the most powerful international corporations of agro-industry, while the average consumer either does not reflect on what he or she is eating or has to make a **titanic** effort to obtain the information that will explain it.

**titanic** (adj.): big, strong, and impressive

Food and its production must regain the central place that they deserve among human activities, and we must re-examine the criteria that guide our actions. The crucial  
30 point now is no longer, as it has been for all too long, the quality of food that is produced, but its complex quality, a concept that ranges from the question of taste to that of variety, from respect for the environment, ecosystems, and the rhythms of nature to respect for human dignity. The aim is to make a significant improvement to everybody's quality of life without having to submit, as we have done until now,  
35 to a model of development that is incompatible with the needs of the planet.

### Agro-Industry?

It should be stated at the beginning that if food is to regain its central place, we will have to concern ourselves with agriculture. It is impossible to discuss food without discussing agriculture. Every gastronome should be aware of this because the present  
40 situation in the world is the result of the history of Western agriculture (and the damage it has done to nature), an agriculture that has lost sight of some of the aims that are most important to anyone who cares about the quality of food ...

The formulas of chemical fertilizers were first developed in the 1840s, and they have been the **crucial factor** in the escalation of modern industrial agriculture and its  
45 unnaturalness (Bevilacqua, 2002). The trend toward chemistry did not just carry on