

One of the most fundamental aspects of the “green” lifestyle involves caring deeply about the food that sustains us. In Birmingham we are fortunate to have a blossoming movement in sustainable local agriculture. Farmers, producers, and restaurateurs have an abiding commitment to making the food in our world something we can feel good about.

Take It Slow

Make a u-turn at the drive thru and savor the “slow foods” of Alabama.

The Slow Food Movement sprouted the Birmingham convivium (chapter) in 2007. Frank and Pardis Stitt began the local movement in an effort to champion the Southern foods and food traditions of Alabama. In a “pecan shell,” Slow Food is the opposite of fast food. Fast food fills. Slow food fulfills. Rather than placing orders through a microphone to a faceless menu board, Slow Food is grown or produced locally and arrives fresh and full of flavor. It is produced in a manner that does not harm the environment, animal welfare or one’s health. And the food producers receive fair compensation for their work and their product.

The movement originated in Italy in 1986, when founding father Carlo Petrini recognized that the industrialization of food was standardizing taste and leading to the annihilation of thousands of food varieties and flavors. This movement has spread across the world and throughout the United States since that time, protecting regional tastes, cultures and the environments. Today the movement—active in 50 countries—has a worldwide membership of more than 80,000, promotes a sustainable food system and regional food traditions, pleasures of the table and a slower, harmonious lifestyle.

The movement also strives to protect traditional grains, vegetables, fruits, animal breeds and food products that are disappearing as a result of convenience food and industrial agribusiness. And local members help protect the heritage of food, tradition and culture that they enjoy. The Birmingham convivium carries out the Slow Food mission on a local level by advocating sustainability and bio-diversity through educational events and public outreach. It also promotes the

appreciation and consumption of seasonal and local foods and support of those who produce them. True to

the philosophy of the movement, local members are “co-producers,” not consumers, because members support those who produce it and thus become partners in the production process.

Being a co-producer is also fulfilling. Throughout 2008 Birmingham members enjoyed local foods and fellowship at the convivium’s roster of events. In February a reception at The Gardens Cafe gave members the opportunity to meet local food producers and learn more about their products with a trade show style display at the café. Nibbles and wine were served by Kathy G. and Company, and a speech followed by Slow Food Regional Governor Tom Montague. Birmingham’s convivium partnered with the Alabama Environmental Council in April at the 12th Annual Green Tie Affair, held at Flower Stems Loft, where local foods were cooked by local chefs. During the summer the second annual Slow Food Sunday Supper was held at Jones Valley Urban Farm, and the group took a field trip to Petals from the Past for a blueberry picking and orchard visit, which included a peach varietal tasting. In September Kathy G’s Terrace Café held a luncheon with local food producers discussing the movement. The same evening brought a visit to the Red Mountain Garden for Slow Food-inspired hors d’oeuvres while the Red Mountain Chamber Orchestra performed. And at press time, Slow Food events for fall were planned at Birmingham Museum of Art and Indian Springs.

The convivium also launched a website in 2008. For more information on the Birmingham convivium Slow Food, including membership, visit slowfoodbirmingham.com or email info@slowfoodbirmingham.com.