



Cooking in the Slow Lane

COUNTERING HECTIC LIFESTYLES AND DEMANDS FOR INSTANT GRATIFICATION, CHEFS ARE TAKING TIME — AND PRIDE — TO DELIVER PRODUCTS THAT ARE MONTHS IN THE MAKING.

BY AMANDA BALTAZAR

Slow food is, in some ways, the antidote to the instant-gratification world we live in. And there's another very important, pragmatic reason chefs are becoming involved in slow cooking: finances. Be it cold cuts, pickles, or fermented foods, slow food can have a positive impact on the bottom line.

“Time has become the most valuable commodity in people’s lives,” says Arlene Spiegel, a New York City restaurant consultant. “Now, with the public’s awareness of quality ingredients that are often accompanied by a pedigree, attention is being paid to the care and handling of these ingredients. Chefs who create meals, often painstakingly slowly, add to the halo effect that consumers are willing to pay for. Slow-cooked foods can feel like a remedy for the time-starved, stressed-out lives we lead.”

Restaurants should also use these long, slow preparations as a marketing tactic to help bring in more money. It’s a primary way of adding value, it can constitute a point of differentiation, and it adds immensely to the culinary credibility of the operation.

Slow Successes

It’s about offering something people would never make at home. Communicating the effort and techniques behind the dishes enhances that appreciation. “There’s a hidden psychological lift when the diner understands the time, care, and love that was incorporated into food,” says restaurant consultant Spiegel.

Loyal Nine’s Sheehan makes his own sea salt. He collects seawater, filters it three or four times through coffee filters, and then reduces it as slowly as he can in the dehydrator or over the pilot light at night.

The slowness is essential, he explains. “We could do this in a day at a ripping boil, but that’s not what we’re looking for.”

The process is also one he enjoys. “It’s nice to have a project to check on every night—to see it’s how you wanted or it’s going through an interesting transition. It’s an evolution you get to partake of,” he concludes.