

more taste, less waste

At a time when we are all feeling the credit crunch, **Lisa Moore-Wilson** of Berwick Slow Food Convivium gives us a few tips on getting back to basics.

The world's original foodies, the French have a saying "Plus ça Change, plus c'est la même chose" - the more things change, the more they stay the same. It seems particularly apt when the best way of fighting the current credit crunch seems to be a return to more traditional methods of cooking and producing food.

Learning how to stretch a tight budget is really a matter of adopting a different mind set, doing your research and undertaking a different way of doing things. Ironically the Slow Food Movement, which supports a return to more traditional values is rapidly gaining popularity. First founded in Italy by Carlo Petrini, its ideas of learning from the past have a lot of significance for us today. What many people are realising is that buying real food that tastes the way it used too means that a little goes a long way and you don't need huge portions of meat, for example, to get real satisfaction and flavour. While a free range chicken can seem expensive, learning how to use it to make several meals like a roast, a risotto or a tasty soup means the actual cost per meal is not too dissimilar from buying the same number of ready meals from the supermarket. These skills of stretching out ingredients and never wasting leftovers came as second nature to our mothers and grandmothers along with understanding the best cooking methods for cheaper cuts of meat. More traditional dishes and cheaper foods such as mutton are seeing a resurgence especially among the more forward thinking celebrity chefs. Many of us however have become so accustomed to pre-packaged supermarket meat that we don't know where to begin.



Luckily for us in the North East, there is a wealth of resources to help us revive these lost arts. The best people to talk to are the people who produce the food and we are lucky in this region to have a huge range of farmers markets and food festivals as well as excellent traditional family butchers. Events provide an ideal chance to ask for advice and recipes on how to use local food – the producers are all passionate about their products and are only too happy to pass on their hints and tips. A good butcher will think nothing of taking the time to explain different cuts of meat and how to cook them.

The next obvious step for fighting the credit crunch is growing your own. A friend's son told me recently that "urban gardening is the future" and it's reflective of a burgeoning trend. Whilst the average city garden may not guarantee absolute self-sufficiency it's surprising how much a

small patch or group of containers can yield. I know from experience as I spent a recent summer eating delicious home-grown beans practically every night from one small row of canes! Home-grown or bought vegetables can bulk out meals and taking the opportunity to have a couple of meat free dishes a week to will have a positive effect on both your health and your bank balance.

My Great Aunt recently told me how she used to pad out stews with all sorts of cereals and beans to feed her large family with a tiny bit of meat. Sadly she added "people don't want to know any more" but as the economy slows should we really ignore what the past can teach us now? ■

The Berwick Food Festival takes place 12-14 September, 2008.
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