



Field Report

Critical food guidance from the Slow Food movement: The Relationship Barometer

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Abstract

The Slow Food movement embeds food guidance that encourages interaction with local food production and appreciation of local cuisine. It advocates critical thinking and actions that support the preservation of traditional food practices, as well as environmental considerations around food harvesting and processing. We begin by contextually situating Slow Food as a movement and a change agent. We then introduce a critical guidance tool called the Slow Food Relationship Barometer, developed by Fader and Mesmain from their experience in southern Vancouver Island, British Columbia. This tool is meant for use by advocacy groups and policy makers rather than individuals. It is based on the view that identifying and assessing the multiple relationships intrinsic to a local food product—from origins to the table—can reveal pathways toward its improved sustainability. We illustrate how the Relationship Barometer can be applied to the case of wild and farmed salmon, which also underlies the Slow Fish movement.

Keywords: Slow food; Slow fish; food movement; food guidance; food relationships; wild salmon local food systems

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DOI: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i1.509

ISSN: 2292-3071

Introduction

The Slow Food movement involves food guidance that encourages active engagement with robust, local food systems. This guidance can be seen as *critical* because it offers insights and tools to broaden food practices beyond dominant paradigms, and raises awareness about how we think, feel, and make decisions about food. Slow Food guidance is not about numbers or nutrients; rather, it is as diverse as its local chapters around the world. It encompasses a set of principles based on respect for and curiosity about food traditions, the protection of sustainable growing and harvesting methods, support for just working conditions, thoughtful meal preparation with locally grown or harvested ingredients, and pleasurable consumption in the company of others. These principles are strengthened by a strong belief that change is fostered by group dynamics more than individual consumer choices. Enabling and furthering those scenarios has led Slow Food to embrace a mix of gastronomic, social, ecological, economic, and political elements (Pietrykowi, 2004; Andrews, 2008; van Bommel & Spicer, 2015).

Building on an earlier history of gastronomic and political action, Slow Food emerged in Italy in the mid-1980s as an antidote to the phenomenon of fast food that was spreading rapidly worldwide. Founder Carlo Petrini saw fast food as a threat to one of the pillars of Italian identity: the leisurely enjoyment of wholesome foods derived from skilled farmers, fishers, producers, and chefs who enable unique and high-quality food environments—as well as the relationships that bind those food communities together. The *Slow Food Manifesto*, released in 1989, predicted dire consequences resulting from the consumption of pervasive, highly processed convenience foods, accompanied by fast-paced lifestyles. To attempt to reverse this trend, the *Manifesto* promoted international efforts to preserve and celebrate local food cultures. A snail symbolizes the movement.

The *Slow Food Manifesto for Quality*, written some years after the original *Manifesto*, focuses on the principles of “good, clean, and fair.” *Good* implies that “a food’s flavor and aroma, recognizable to educated, well trained senses, is the fruit of the competence of the producer and of [the] choice of raw materials and production methods, which should in no way alter its naturalness.” *Clean* signifies that “the environment has to be respected and sustainable practices of farming, animal husbandry, processing, marketing and consumption should be taken into serious consideration. Every stage in the agro-industrial production chain, consumption included, should protect ecosystems and biodiversity, safeguarding the health of the consumer and the producer.” *Fair* means that “social justice should be pursued through the creation of conditions of labor respectful of man [sic] and his rights and capable of generating adequate rewards; through the pursuit of balanced global economies; through the practice of sympathy and solidarity; through respect for cultural diversities and traditions” (Slow Food Manifesto for Quality). Although these principles were defined some time ago, and some aspects may appear elitist and outdated, their basic intent and simplicity remain applicable.

This field report begins by contextually situating Slow Food, first as a distinct food movement, and then as a change agent. It is notable that the organization has its early origins in

Italy, eventually growing internationally and taking a clear place among the many alternative food networks (AFNs) that have emerged over the three decades since Slow Food's formal inception. We ask: What activities have made Slow Food distinct among AFNs? What strategies have made Slow Food successful in recruiting members and promoting its philosophy? How does the Slow Food movement act as a change agent?

We then draw attention to a form of critical food guidance called the Slow Food Relationship Barometer, developed by the first two authors from their experience on southern Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada. The Barometer is based on their view that Slow Food is about relationships—the many connections that are inherent to any type of food in its path from origins to the table. An example of wild salmon is offered to show how the Barometer can facilitate awareness of various connections, historical and current, regarding a species or its product. The resulting analysis reveals the complexity inherent to any food, in its unprocessed and processed versions, and encourages assessment of relevant social, economic, political, and environmental factors.

Slow Food as a movement

Alternative food movements or networks currently exist with many diverse formats and agendas, but they generally have a set of goals that aim to achieve more sustainable, healthy, just, and democratic food systems. AFNs oppose, but work in parallel to, the dominant industrial, productionist food systems, rather than try to transform them (Andrée et al., 2019). As alternative movements, they tend to promote an *ecologically integrated paradigm* (Lang & Heasman, 2004) that values biodiversity, agro-ecological techniques, multidisciplinary knowledge, energy/waste reduction, and improved links between land and consumption. Strategically, AFNs engage a combination of actors who serve as warriors, builders or weavers (policy advocates, food initiative creators, and group connectors, respectively), who can complement and reinforce each other's work (Stevenson et al., 2007).

As an AFN, Slow Food has stood out from others due to its primary emphasis on the sensorial appreciation of food, which it has partnered with both ecological and social-justice principles (Pietrykowski, 2004; Sassatelli & Davolio, 2010). A related and emphasized component of the Slow Food philosophy is conviviality, through which people share their lives, food, and knowledge, and shape a collective vision. Additionally, Slow Food is distinctive in its support for creating economic markets for tradition-linked artisanal products (Sassatelli & Davolio, 2010; van Bommel & Spicer, 2015). Examples include cheeses, wines, coffee, artisan beef, Ugandan fruit, local honey, Canadian Red Fife wheat, and many more.

The artisan support process has been aided by the movement's active bridging of production and consumption by forming connections among farmers, fishers, chefs, and consumers (Labelle, 2007). The expectation is that when foods are sourced and sold locally, an

inherent feedback loop is created that enables not only high quality and good flavor, but also community cohesion and food security (Goodman et al., 2014). Such food security emerges, ideally, from the inherent capacity of the community to sustain local food production—both rural and urban—when both the food ecology and the livelihoods of local producers are respected. To encourage this development synergistically, Slow Food guidance nudges consumers to see themselves as “co-producers” (Slow Food, Responsible Consumption and Food Labelling, 2015). Taking this idea to an even deeper level, Carlo Petrini declared at Terra Madre in 2014 that planting a garden is a political act.

Through its food communities and local chapters, called *convivia* in most countries, Slow Food spread beyond Italy to 160 different countries by 2019. Notably, the movement’s presence is marked by international foundations, specific projects, events, and festivals. The Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity was instituted in 2003, and the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenzo, Italy, has been active since 2004. Key projects have included the Ark of Taste, which catalogues traditional foods at risk of extinction; the Chefs’ Alliance, which links restaurant cooks with local food producers; and the Presidia, which are community groups that help sustain traditional foods of small-scale producers.

A campaign called Slow Fish was initiated in 2005 to raise awareness about sustainable fishing, to preserve the traditional knowledge of fishing communities, and to build relationships with small-scale fishers to ensure their survival. The Slow Fish initiative has continued strongly across Canada, and campaigns have taken place in Italy, Denmark, Morocco, India, Australia, USA, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Slow Fish USA has hosted a series of webinars to address the “recovery potential of fishing communities and seafood eaters” after the COVID-19 pandemic, aiming to “turn the tide away from industrial seafood and toward seafood that is good, clean, and fair for all” (Slow Food USA/Slow Fish, 2021).

Terra Madre festivals are a hallmark of Slow Food, bringing together thousands of people to taste, network, and learn. These festivals are held in Torino, Italy, every other year, and also internationally. Several of them are Indigenous Terra Madre festivals, where representatives of Indigenous communities meet to share and preserve their food cultures. In Canada, national Slow Food summits are held in different provinces every year (Slow Food, History).

Slow Food’s worldwide growth is evident from the yearly increase in the number of websites, film screenings, lectures, news releases, reports, handbooks, fact sheets, position papers, and posters in multiple languages and on multiple topics. Messages are “multi-storeyed and multi-storied” (Frost & Laing, 2013). Arguably, however, Slow Food guidance takes root most effectively by actual sensory experience—through tasting workshops, cooking groups, collective meals, and learning opportunities with food producers.

A critique of the Slow Food movement, and of AFNs in general, is that they tend to be elitist and dominated by people of white, European heritage. Donati (2015) contends that Slow Food’s efforts to create distinct “ethics of taste,” locally and internationally, also result in cultural othering. She suggests that the movement needs to “recognize its own heritage of privilege derived from an economic system shaped by imperialism and to actively resist

nostalgic renderings of the ‘other,’ however well intentioned, which run the risk of fetishizing cultural diversity and sentimentalizing struggles for cultural or economic survival. This requires more meaningful dialogue between Slow Food and those it seeks to support in order to create a space of mutual respect and recognition of difference.” (p. 227)

Similarly, in their edited volume about food justice, Alkon and Agyeman (2011) have typecast the alternative food movement, including Slow Food, as being in denial of the experience of people of colour. Mostly from the vantage point of the American agri-food system, their message to AFN activists is that they must recognize their privileged positionality and “invisible whiteness” (Guthman, 2011, p. 263) as they promote fresh, sustainably grown foods that are unaffordable, unavailable, and unacceptable to most poor people and people of colour. They argue that, in order to stimulate true food justice, AFNs should aim to be “polycultural” (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011, p. 1) by incorporating cultural food meanings and practices that are inclusive of all societal subgroups into any strategies or strategic alliances that counter the industrial food system.

In another vein, Lotti (2010) has critiqued Slow Food’s “commoditization of products and taste,” noting that this process emerged from its rejection of agricultural homogenization, but has ironically come to resemble aspects of that same system (p.72). She argues that while Slow Food promotes agrobiodiversity, it also seeks to protect local food products and the traditions embodied in them, thereby contradicting its own claim to alternativeness.

While this critique may be valid in certain contexts, Slow Food’s efforts to revive and protect local food experience and history can be understood as alternative—because these traditions, together with the valuable skills and knowledge they harbour, are in danger of being lost. The presidium guidelines introduced by Slow Food are not meant to minimize food system diversity, but to enhance it globally (Slow Food Presidium Guidelines). In this sense, the guidelines also serve to enhance the sustainability of endangered foods like wild salmon.

In this paper, we introduce the Relationship Barometer as a tool that in some ways responds to the aforementioned critiques of the Slow Food movement. Rather than imposing guidance from a singular source or ideal, it supports contextually relevant valorization by revealing the multiple, relational dimensions embedded in food and food products. Participation of knowledge keepers who share their cultural practices is key to this guidance.

Slow Food as a change agent

The authors have noted from their own experience that many people engaged with Slow Food say they feel more grounded through a shared sense of purpose and greater capacity to situate themselves in a complex, shifting world.

Slow Food's structure aims to enhance engagement

Historically, membership in Slow Food's convivia was based on an annual membership fee structure, set by the international office in Italy (Petrini & Padovani, 2006). The movement has recognized, however, that this model was missing avenues to engagement for many people. Consequently, Slow Food is redesigning the convivia structure in favour of *communities*—ones that are based on cohesive factors such as location (e.g., southern Vancouver Island), a food production method (e.g., cheesemakers), or a current issue (e.g., saving wild salmon). This fits with Slow Food's underlying principle to let nature guide food choices, which means that these choices are flexible, fair, inclusive, respectful of the environment, adaptable to harvests and seasons, and supportive of local food customs. As more people engage with Slow Food values, the goal is to expand the reach of the organisation beyond membership or structure, thus encouraging genuine and lasting change.

Structurally, therefore, Slow Food now recognises that its potential as a change agent lies within the smaller local communities of the global network. That is, each community creates their own mandate for what is important locally, using Slow Food values and resources as a guide. The functional, influential elements within these food communities are the residents themselves. For example, the act of visiting farms and becoming familiar with the land guides food choices at the individual level, such as eating in season, and cooking from scratch from what is in abundance locally. Peer-to-peer interaction results in information sharing among friends and family, such as co-workers who share recipes and preserve food together, or a neighbour who introduces others to a new market or restaurant. This direct, producer-consumer food guidance is seen as locally adaptable to the specific needs of each community. It should transcend socioeconomic status and highlight ethnic or cultural food practices through diverse social engagement within the local food community.

Furthermore, at the local level, Slow Food guidance calls for respect for traditional or land-based knowledge. From this comes the strong sense of responsibility, among Slow Food members, of publicizing the current food-related issues affecting people in thousands of rural and urban communities on six continents. The essential follow-up to understanding those issues is the development of local, sustainable solutions that encourage investing in the natural biodiversity of each unique food region.

Initially Slow Food's promotional images focussed on people enjoying meals together based on high-quality foods from small-scale producers—all to “celebrate the rich varieties and aromas of local cuisines,” according to the *Slow Food Manifesto* (Portinari, 1987). Over the next few decades, while the spotlight on pleasure and taste remained strong, attention shifted significantly to environmental issues: climate change, reduced fish species and stocks, loss of biodiversity, land grabbing, food waste, genetic engineering, greenhouse gas emissions from farm animals, and reduced bee populations. Animal welfare also became a concern related to food choices. These problems were seen as industrial and political barriers to the availability of,

and control over, local food sources by citizens. From here the term *eco-gastronomy* became a key term within the Slow Food movement. The potential tension between the two seemingly distinct goals of sensorial pleasure and environmental activism has been seen as complementary among Slow Food members (Pietrykowski, 2004; Sassatelli & Davolio, 2010).

Digging a bit deeper into the effectiveness of Slow Food's experiential focus to influence behaviour change, Gaytán (2007) has pointed to the multiple "imaginaries" with which people can understand and process the complex local and global efforts towards good, clean, and fair food. With these understandings of food, he argues, consumers can and do go beyond the triad of price, (familiar) taste, and convenience that is commonly believed to drive most food choices. Similarly, Hayes-Conroy (2010) explored the sensory, "visceral" experience of people who were involved with Slow Food projects. The language of her research participants suggested that "cognition and taste merge...inside the body to create their lived eco-political preferences of food" (2010, p. 738). Eating mindfully regarding the human and environmental relationships of food, in other words, can become enjoyable in and of itself.

Hayes-Conroy noted that for Steve, a Nova Scotian chef who bought food for his restaurant at a farm market and a fish monger, "the acts of seeing, smelling, and sampling fresh, local, unique, artisanal, ecological, and/or fairly produced foods were what Slow Food (SF) was all about, and these experiences generated vigor for continued association with the movement" (2010, p. 738). Furthermore, "Steve demonstrated that SF was not simply about encouraging bodily experience of these foods, but also about finding and feeling many kinds of human connection forged through food. His relations with the farmers from whom he sources, with his customers, with other SF business owners, and with us as researchers interested in food, tends to affect his minded-body in a way that energizes him" (Hayes-Conroy, 2010, p. 738).

This insight leads us to the next section, in which we discuss a guidance tool around the relational nature of Slow Food.

The Slow Food Relationship Barometer

The Slow Food values of good, clean, and fair serve as basic principles, but are not helpful to evaluate individual products or production methods that are inherently complex in nature. This is especially true when the multiple embedded relationships are examined, which are often contradictory and sometimes surprising. The relational approach rarely leads to a simple, clear appraisal, but it is always informative.

As a Slow Food convivium leader on southern Vancouver Island and international coordinator of Slow Fish, we (Fader and Mesmain) have developed the Slow Food Relationship Barometer, a tool that identifies a spectrum of options to consider when assessing a particular food item, production method, or outlet. It is based on our assertion that:

Slow Food IS relationships! The relationships we create or destroy, nurture or neglect are the foundation of our work. By qualifying the relationships we have with our food, we are able to discern whether the product is good, clean, and fair. In recognizing these relationships, we are able to honour and improve the way we impact our community, our environment, and our lives. This relationship gauge will help each of us to discover whether we want to actively promote, quietly support, gently ignore, or rally against a food product or food production method or entity. The Slow Food Relationship Barometer is a tool; use it and improve upon it (Fader & Mesmain, 2019, Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Slow Food Relationship Barometer



To highlight the various types of relationships associated with a food product, the barometer names eight dimensions: nature, community, history and identity, economy, Indigenous tradition, producer connections, politics, and unintentional outcomes (Figure 1). The factors that populate each of these relationship categories for a specific food or food product in a certain place and time can be assessed as enhancing, creating, neglecting, or destroying. The information for this assessment is based on local experience and knowledge.

The resultant analysis yields a broad, complex picture—more complex than the graphic in Figure 1 suggests—one that is useful to help determine sustainable solutions that also respect traditions. It reminds us that the choices made around harvesting,

processing, and purchasing food can have different effects on the food source, its ecology, and people involved in it. In this way it fits with the Slow Food philosophy and, most importantly, it can guide businesses (small and large), advocacy groups, and policy makers towards informed choices.

The overall outcome resulting from the Relationship Barometer approach is not linear or axial, but relational. Murdoch (2006) has described relational spaces as products of multiple interrelations, meaning they are “cross-cut by differing processes and practices, some that emanate from within, some that emanate from without” (p. 18). Relations, in this perspective, are “inevitably double-edged: they can facilitate movement and access; equally they can entrench confinement and exclusion” (pp. 22–23). Applying relationality to the concept of Slow Food, Murdoch contends “Slow Food also has spatial significance: the movement is concerned by the rupture that has been affected between spaces of production and spaces of consumption, and it seeks to close the gap between the two by bringing consumers to spatially embedded foods. It also wishes to reassert the natural bases of food production (seasonality, ecological content, etc.) and the role of cultural context (tacit knowledge, culinary skills, etc.)” (2006, p. 170).

To illustrate this relational approach, Table 1 shows the types of questions that can be asked to unpack each of the eight dimensions in the Barometer. Table 2 applies these questions to a specific case, a comparison of wild and farmed salmon on the west coast of British Columbia. The findings become an information spectrum about the product, revealing the multiplicity of relationships that exist simultaneously for a food. The overall aim is for the more destructive or neglectful relationships to be minimized or avoided, and the more creative or enhancing ones to be encouraged. Such analysis of a food product can serve to guide stakeholders who normally hold more limited perspectives, but may be willing to be introduced to more diverse understandings. Moreover, it can be influential at the levels of community action or broader policy making.

Table 1: Questions that can help elucidate the dominant direction of a food product’s relationships, for each dimension

RBD	Questions to help determine the dominant direction for each Barometer dimension (for any food product)			
	Enhance	Create	Neglect	Destroy
Nature	How does production enhance knowledge of the environment?	Describe the relationships that occur between the food system and the eco-system	How does this food interact with its environment through its life span?	What are the pre-production inputs and the post-production waste factors?
Community	In what ways does this food contribute to building and developing a sense of community?	What role does production of this food have within the community?	How does this production involve or impact other, neighbouring communities?	How does the production of this food impact the community, now and in the future?
History & Identity	What is the link to the land’s past and culture? Will this history be sustained by supporting production?	Does this food have a history and cultural identity?	How does history influence production, and what impacts might this have on the region’s future?	Why is this product necessary? What is at risk of being lost if we lose this food?
Economy	How is the production process and business model addressing a larger picture of <i>good, clean & fair</i> food?	Is the primary goal of this production to create high quality, healthy food?	In what ways is the production process and business model designed to create a local economy?	Is the primary goal of this production to maximize profit?
Indigenous Tradition	What cooperation and relationships are the indigenous communities asking for?	How is this food production honouring the traditional knowledge and current needs of indigenous communities?	In what ways are assumptions being made about what the indigenous community needs or wants?	In what ways will this food production perpetuate stereotypes and cultural appropriation?
Producer Connections	How is the producer’s connection to their food production enhancing their life & those close to them?	What is the relationship and story between the producer and the product?	Could the producer be more connected, or better supported, by production?	What barriers prevent the producer from being deeply connected to the production of the product?
Unintended Outcomes	How will you be held accountable and responsible for any unintentional risks that emerge?	In what ways can the risks of the product and production process be mitigated?	What risks are being overlooked considering you are responsible for growing/raising/harvesting a living species?	What are the risks of the product and production process?
Politics/ Democratic Principles	How do you hope your food product or production impacts the political climate?	In what ways is the product political?	How is the product influenced by local/national/international politics?	What advocacy needs to be done on a political level to ensure the product is protected?

Table 2: Food product relationships and dominant directions for each Relationship Barometer Dimension (RBD): The example of wild and farmed salmon in Canada

RBD	What is the relationship of wild and farmed salmon in each Dimension?	Dominant Direction
Nature	Wild salmon are a keystone species in the creation of the ancient forests and waterways of British Columbia.	enhance
	Farmed salmon require unnatural inputs in salmon feed and have been linked to environmental and wild salmon stock degradation.	destroy
Community	For many generations First Nations and other Canadians have enjoyed wild salmon , from a sacred ceremony to a neighbourhood barbeque. Often, families fish together.	enhance
	Farmed salmon is disconnected from the community, the facilities are closed to the public, and the majority is not consumed locally.	neglect
History & Identity	Wild salmon are a link to First Nations culture and identity, presently and in the past.	create and enhance
	The history of farmed salmon is a corporate story for profit. It's detached from cultural identity and threatens the existence of wild salmon.	neglect and destroy
Economy	Wild salmon have historically been fished by First Nations peoples for their communities, but have been kept out of commercial licenses, so there is a contentious relationship around the economy of wild salmon and who owns the quota to catch it. Still, wild salmon is caught for local consumption and usually shared between the members of the band.	relationship could be enhanced
	Fishers who control their fishing quota will retain a larger portion of the landed value than those who have to lease quota. The DFO operates different quota systems on the east and west coasts of Canada. There is no wild salmon left on the East Coast.	neglect
	The primary goal of farmed salmon is to create profit through aquaculture. Salmon farms are owned by large corporations and employ fewer people than wild fisheries, so their connection to their local economy is neglected.	destroy and neglect
Indigenous Tradition	Wild salmon are considered sacred by all First Nations peoples of the West coast, but some bands have invested in farmed salmon in their community. Traditional knowledge around fishing, smoking, preparing and sharing of wild salmon has helped to create a cultural heritage.	enhance
Producer Connections	The Okanagan wild salmon connected all First Nations from the mouth of the Columbia river up to the Okanagan lake, which shared information, stories, prayers and the harvest to ensure the salmon would come back year after year. After almost losing the salmon, the bands came together again to restore the waterways and culture for the salmon to return.	enhance
	Farmed salmon are secluded production facilities from which the fish is shipped elsewhere, so connections with local communities are limited to low paying jobs. Higher paying jobs tend to go outside the community. The larger the scale of the farm, the weaker the relationship between the owner of the company and the locals. Often several corporate entities control different aspects of the farming industry: hatcheries, forage fisheries and feed producers, and the salmon farmers.	neglect
Unintended Outcomes	The Okanagan initiative to get the wild salmon back was a hugely restorative initiative which addressed all fronts. Of course, bringing a fish back into waterways from which is has been absent for over 60 years conveys risks to the ecosystem which has developed during that time, but the local ONA research center observed and collected data on wild fishes for years to understand if they could be carriers of "new" viruses before reintroducing them into their natural habitat by freeing the waterways from manmade obstacles.	enhance and create
	Farmed salmon raised in open ocean nets do little to mitigate huge potential risks, from viruses to escapes, nor the toxicity of entrants and waste products on the whole aquatic ecosystem.	destroy
Politics/ Democratic Principles	The Okanagan initiative has helped recreate a dialogue and restore wild salmon relationships at different political levels, within First Nations bands themselves, from both Canada and USA, with the water authorities and DFO's inland water department, as well as regional authorities. It covers what had become a governance gap by accumulating knowledge and healthy environmental practices along the waterways.	create and enhance
	In BC, the DFO withheld critical information from the Cohen commission which was given the task to investigate the harm caused by the salmon farms to the wild stocks to understand how much democratic principles have been eroded over this sector.	neglect and destroy

Summary of the Relationship Barometer assessment of wild and farmed salmon

Table 2 is an example of the Relationship Barometer applied to farmed versus wild salmon. It becomes clear that wild salmon—especially given their link with First Nations traditions and positive environmental impacts—foster mostly creative and enhancing relationships, while farming salmon tends towards neglectful and destructive relationships.

As evidenced by this analysis, the Relationship Barometer is not simple or straightforward to use. It requires considerable research and knowledge gathering, with emphasis on both pros and cons surrounding a food product and its production method. While most consumers, producers, and distributors may not be able to commit to the time involved, the tool can guide groups who seek in-depth understanding of a food product's multiple dimensions.

Discussion

The Relationship Barometer is conceived as a dynamic tool because food webs are themselves dynamic. Seasons change, animals and plants go through annual cycles, ocean and river systems vary, and human communities shift in their choices and activities. Government policies, which also change over time, have consequences that may favour one group over another. A broad-based, relational assessment of relevant factors can serve to inform advocates for local growers or harvesters with insights and persuasive arguments beyond the more obvious economic factors.

An application of this relational paradigm is the *Wild Salmon Manifesto* (Slow Food in Canada, 2014), adopted by Slow Food in Canada, with guidelines pertaining to both east and west coasts of the country. Such guidelines are meant to inspire advocacy and action. An example of this is illustrated by recent activism related to seafood harvesting in British Columbia (Slow Food in Canada, Save Our BC Fisheries, 2018). While almost 90 percent of landed seafood from coastal BC is shipped to international markets, local supply lines that benefit coastal communities—from fishing families to small seafood stores and restaurants—were facing collapse in 2020. This was exacerbated by COVID-19 restrictions. To address this inequality, Slow Fish Canada organized under the banner of Fisheries for Communities. Made up of fishers, harvesters, First Nations fisheries, purveyors, chefs, and fishing advocacy and environmental groups, they actively engaged with fisheries politicians, both provincially and federally. They succeeded in convincing (through a multi-pronged array of information as would be derived from the Relationship Barometer) and pressuring Fisheries and Oceans Canada with a social media campaign to reverse some policy decisions that were harmful to local seafood stocks and harvesters (Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2018). Fisheries for Communities and Slow Fish Canada continue to advocate, motivated by a core belief that relationships among local fishing

communities are an integral part of their cultural heritage and local food shed, and must be preserved.

Conclusion

In this field report we have described the basic principles, structure, and strategies of Slow Food. We have argued that those elements, taken as a whole, serve as a form of critical food guidance for those who wish to form communities of action to sustain and celebrate local, traditional foods and food products. Knowledge and awareness about particular food ecologies and economies are a key part of the development and growth of such communities. A tool such as the Relationship Barometer is meant to facilitate more in-depth understanding of the existing complexities of food relationships. It is intended to provide critical food guidance by highlighting:

- the development of sensory investment (derived from local knowledge, awareness, and experience) to guide food-related practices and choices;
- support for the livelihoods of local fishers, farmers, processors, retailers, and chefs;
- strengthened environmental sustainability; and
- enhanced food-related cultural/social context of community residents.

The Slow Food Relationship Barometer can help assess any food product by the members of a local community—whether defined by geography (rural or urban), foods (e.g., fish, fruit, grains, beef), or processing practice (e.g., dairy, honey, bread, wine, olive oil). Based on the results of the assessment, a community or group might choose to take collective action. It may also instigate research projects to fill gaps in information, or consult with key actors such as Indigenous residents who can offer unique social and agronomic perspectives on the natural foods of an area.

It is notable that the critical guidance of Slow Food does not focus on a goal of improving human health or preventing chronic disease, unlike most official, national food guides. Similarly, the eight dimensions of the Slow Food Relationship Barometer do not include health. According to the Slow Food philosophy, it is assumed that food is “healthy” when it is free of artificial chemicals and pesticides and is as natural as possible; such food is then chosen mostly because of its sensory qualities, cultural value, and its relationships to local economies and sustainable ecologies (Petrini & Padovani, 2006). No research has been conducted to date that compares indicators of health among participants who eat according to a national food guide as opposed to those who follow the critical guidance of Slow Food.

A challenge to the Slow Food movement internationally is the disconnect between the growth aspirations of the original Slow Food leaders based in Italy, and the reality of different food communities in distant countries who do not always cherish Italian oversight. While Slow

Food positions itself as a global network of local communities, meeting this goal requires a concerted effort by a multitude of dedicated volunteers—ones who are flexible enough to embrace diversity and change.

Overall, however, the influence of Slow Food guidance has been to continuously support local food producers and harvesters around the world who operate justly and sustainably. It has encouraged environmental improvements, cultural rejuvenation, and an identity and food culture entrenched in Slow Food values. The cascading effects—from a simple bite of food to a change agent affecting economies, environments, and cultures—is what drives Slow Food, not only as an organisation, but as a movement. When empowered by critical food guidance, including that of the Slow Food Relationship Barometer and the many other forms of guidance that are described in this journal issue, people can arrive at decisions and advocacy efforts on their own.

Acknowledgements: The authors would like to acknowledge the relationships that contributed to the inspiration and creation of the Slow Food Relationship Barometer. Dan Edwards in Ucluelet, BC, is a multi-generational fisher and dedicated fishing communities' advocate. The meal the authors shared with his family and chef Oliver Kienast was the first spark of inspiration for the Relationship Barometer. Tawney Lem in Port Alberni, BC, is the Executive Director at West Coast Aquatic. Her ability to navigate and articulate complex relationships while maintaining a Slow Fish ethos was inspiring. Dr. John Volpe from the School of Environmental Studies at the University of Victoria, BC, made the initial presentation of the Relationship Barometer at the 2015 Slow Food in Canada national meeting in Montreal, QC. We value his continued collaboration and guidance. Howie Wright, of the Syilx Nation and Fisheries Manager of the Okanagan Nation Alliance, continues to be a source of valuable recommendations and advocacy.

Michèle Mesmain has worked for 10 years at the Slow Food International headquarters, mainly as the international coordinator of the Slow Fish network. She has taken her love of food culture a step further and is currently learning to cultivate vineyards, olive groves, and fruit trees in southern Tuscany.

Brooke Fader is a founding member of Slow Fish Canada and Community Leader of Slow Food Vancouver Island & Gulf Islands. Her restaurant, Wild Mountain Food & Drink in Sooke, BC, is certified by the Slow Food Chef's Alliance. Brook continues her advocacy work to revitalize BC fishing communities at <http://www.slowisland.ca/2018/01/campaign-to-save-our-bc-fisheries.html>

Ellen Desjardins has retired from a career in public health nutrition as well as teaching, program development, writing, and advocacy in the area of sustainable food systems in Ontario. She is a

co-founder and the former editor-in-chief of *Canadian Food Studies*, and now lives on Vancouver Island.

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