

# FISH STICKS AND *Pizza Grandiosa*

*Food is one of our most important carriers of culture and a significant bridge-builder between generations and nations. We expect to have pasta in Italy or moussaka in Greece, but we don't think it is the least bit strange when the local inn serves lasagne out of the microwave using ingredients from totally foreign climates. In Norway, we still possess an ocean filled with fish, and land and wilderness that can feed the population. Still, the "Pizza Grandiosa" is at the top of the food list in Norway.*

of natural resources have gone without saying. They have been a necessary part of everyday life to most people – long before they became concepts within environmental protection. All seasons of the year were related to various activities that were closely connected and decisive in order to survive. Among the daily chores, food production stood at the centre. Today, the situation is quite different. Raw materials and their processing often take place far away from most people's lives. The freezer is often stuffed with "Pizza Grandiosa", while the local fish is absent. An ever-increasing use of ready-made food dominates among the many busy families with small children, both in the cities and the countryside. Even children growing up on farms want their milk out of a carton. The primary industries are not very attractive to young people, and valuable knowledge about the production of one's own food based on local, natural resources is deteriorating. Traditional knowledge is lost, and with it the direct attachment to nature and the resources around one's home.

## **Local resources and teaching sustainable homemaking**

Many of the projects in Steigen have been about using local resources and providing education on how to harvest from the pantry of nature. One of the first projects was a juice-extracting day, organised by the Homemaking Society in co-operation with the "sustainable local societies". Housewives and wives of fishermen possess a lot of knowledge about sustainable management and utilisation of the

resources and were therefore natural teachers. Juice recipes were exchanged while the juice boiled in the kettles. Hot topics were food, quality of life and teaching traditions. This kind of learning is difficult to pass on through lectures and articles. Many people asked themselves: "What has this got to do with environmental protection?" Well, the gardens and backcountry are full of berries that nobody bothers to harvest anymore – it is easier to buy ready-made juice and jam at the store. Taking a closer look at the environmental gain of self-production, the advantages are obvious: a product based on entirely pure raw materials, without artificial additives, and tapped into returnable bottles which save the environment from large amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> caused by their transportation. On top of that is the value of passing on traditional know-how regarding the use and management of natural resources. Is anyone still wrinkling their forehead?

## **Against the current**

Last spring, a "women's market" was arranged at the island Engeløya in Steigen. The Women's Farmer Society and "Sustainable Local Communities" joined forces selling self-produced, traditional food. Their main theme was products using milk as raw material. Engeløya has many milk-producing farms. However, only a few know the art of making butter or cheese. A "local expert" bringing knowledge from her childhood was once again the teacher, and the food inspection results indicated that home-made "kjesost" cheese from non-pasteurised milk was both bacteria-free and not hazardous to one's health. The sale took off, and everyone was inspired to

turning the "women's market" into an annual event. The interest was so great, that a cheese course has been scheduled to teach what is needed to get started on small-scale cheese production. The aim is to lay a foundation for getting farm-based dairies started, utilising the voluminous milk production in the municipality. These farm-based dairies became more of a necessity after the local dairy was closed at the end of last year.

## **Farmers' Markets**

In England, local food and ecologically-grown food experienced enormous demand when the mad cow disease and E.coli bacteria entered the scene. The connection between production and the finished product became apparent. At the same time, people became aware of the value of small-scale production and of food as a bearer of tradition. They demanded locally produced and possibly ecologically-grown food in their shops and farmers' markets. Markets selling goods directly from the farmers are now popping up in every little town. This is probably a result of having pushed nature to the brink for so long. The ocean has practically been raided of fish, and the cod for the national dish "fish and chips" is largely supplied from Norwegian waters. Large-scale corporate farming and unhappy farmers have resulted in soaring suicide statistics. England has stepped over the line, and people are realising that they, in the end, will have to pay the price. Perhaps we should learn from the British and get better at placing requirements on how our food is produced, where it comes from and what it contains. In Steigen, we have made the first move in this direction, and we hope to inspire other rural municipalities to let their natural resources be the beginning of a more sustainable society.

