

Taste, Memory: Forgotten Foods, Lost Flavors, and Why They Matter

David Buchanan

Chelsea Green Publishing (Nov 5, 2012)

Softcover \$17.95 (224pp)

978-1-60358-440-1

As debate rages about genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and their impact on seeds and farming, there's another issue that deserves to be widely visited: the dearth of diversity in our current food system.

Because of changes in our agricultural model, scores of once-common fruits, grains, and vegetables have been phased out by the need for food that's more easily shipped across long distances and stored for days, if not weeks, before getting to market.

What have we lost as a result of these farming changes and distribution demands, and what can be gained by preserving the diversity that's left? Author David Buchanan's answer, in the form of *Taste, Memory*, is compelling and important.

As a pioneer in the heirloom seed movement and agricultural conservation effort, Buchanan is well-versed in the types of changes that have dismantled our food system. He combines personal stories as well as encounters with leaders in biodiversity to present a glimpse of what a healthy food system might look like, one in which plants and animals are matched to the land and the climate, not to consumer demand or agribusiness bottom lines.

Exploring the question of how we can create a stronger food system that also includes room for new types of fruits, vegetables, and grains, Buchanan artfully describes his own journey through farming and gardening. The story wends from a shift into heritage food production in the early '90s, through disillusionment, and into his current venture, a small acreage suffused with rare fruits and vegetables.

Throughout, Buchanan's writing style is lyrical but straightforward, perfect for observations about food and growing. "My farm project isn't about just saving seeds or old fruit varieties," he writes, "but searching for a creative connection with land and plants that, until the last few generations, was at the heart of most people's lives."

There's enormous value in preserving the agrarian diversity that humans have enjoyed for centuries, he believes, and that we've only recently lost. Buchanan makes an excellent case for waking up to the issues of crop diversity and how we need to continue exploring how our foods can evolve along with our methods for cooking, preserving, and treasuring them. Buchanan's work is a savory treat, full of fresh insight and delicious inspiration.

ELIZABETH MILLARD (December 5, 2012)

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