

Plate and planet

Native Americans, New Zealand Maori people and the Sami of northern Europe, share something important. They are small groups of indigenous people who have lived off their local environment for hundreds of years, in a way which is 'sustainable'.

Native Americans such as the Ojibwe people rely heavily for their food on wild rice. This grows naturally in their lakes, and is harvested from small boats. For centuries, the Maori communities have depended on the shellfish abalone, which tastes rather like a snail. Sami reindeer herders travel with their animals across hundreds of kilometres; the meat is central to their diet, whether fresh or dried. These communities *use yet respect* the local environment and their food source; their traditions are in harmony with where they live.

Such food is sometimes called 'slow food'. The slow food movement started in Italy in the late 1980s and is growing in popularity. Nowadays most people shop in large supermarkets, buying food without thinking of its source or the effect on the planet. Modern diets are also typically high in energy but low in variety and this can cause serious health problems. In contrast, recent studies of indigenous people's diets have found them to be healthy, as well as sustainable.

Modern food production generally shows little respect for nature and for smaller communities. An example of this is the planting of single crops (or 'mono' crops) covering huge areas of land which was traditionally used in a wide variety of ways by farmers. Mono crop planting often destroys local cultures and communities, damaging the environment through the use of chemicals.

Very recently, two separate conferences have taken place in different cities in Italy. The first was the *Terra Madre* (Mother Earth) conference in Turin and the second, held in Rome, was the *Biodiversity and Sustainable Diets*, run by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation. Both events discussed the related issues of people and food, of plate and planet.

The Turin conference was attended by representatives from 160 different countries across the globe. Many of these were indigenous people, often ignored in the past. Today, it seems that their way of life and in particular their diets can teach us a great deal. With the world population expected to reach nine billion by 2050 and one billion people hungry, it seems we may have little choice.

1 Without reading the text, match the food (1–3) to the group of people (a–c).

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1 wild rice | a Sami people (northern Norway, Sweden and Finland) |
| 2 reindeer | b Maori people (New Zealand) |
| 3 shellfish (abalone) | c Ojibwe Indians (North America) |

2 Read the first paragraph of the text to find out what is similar about these ancient peoples' diets.

3 Now read the text and select the best paragraph heading in each case.

- Paragraph 2: a The diet of North American Indians
 b Strange food that indigenous people eat
 c How indigenous people live with nature
- Paragraph 3: a The popularity of fast food
 b Why slow food is a good thing
 c Slow food versus the modern diet
- Paragraph 4: a The negative effects of modern farming techniques
 b How to produce a mono crop
 c How chemicals damage the land

- Paragraph 5:
- a Traditional food of Turin and Rome
 - b Recent events related to the topic
 - c The importance of conferences

- Paragraph 6:
- a The need to use the knowledge of indigenous people
 - b Details of talks at the Turin conference
 - c The growth in world population

4 Complete the sentences, underlining the best choice by referring back to the text.

- 1 The Ojibwe Indians collect their rice from the *water / fields*.
- 2 The Maori people have used abalone as a key part of their diet *in the last hundred years / for many hundreds of years*.
- 3 The local communities know how to *respect / improve* their environment.
- 4 Modern diets often provide little *energy / variety* and can lead to health problems.
- 5 Indigenous people's diets are healthy *and also / but not* sustainable.
- 6 Modern crop growing techniques harm the land *and / or* local communities.
- 7 It's *important / interesting* to listen to indigenous people.

5 Put the words in these sentences in the correct order. The first word is in bold. Then identify the collocations.

- 1 their / **Indigenous** / harmony / live / local / in / with / people / environment

- 2 can / are / diets / health / **Modern** / not / cause / problems / varied / and / serious

- 3 modern / shown / nature / respect / **Little** / is / for / in / farming

- 4 single / areas / to / grow / land / **Huge** / of / are / taken / crops

- 5 variety / traditionally / a / crops / wide / farmers / **Small-scale** / plant / of

- 6 destroyed / communities / industrial / often / **Local** / and / farming / are / cultures / by

- 7 issues / the / discussed / people / and / were / related / **At** / the / food / conferences / of

6 Choose one of the following topics which you find interesting and prepare to talk about it in groups.

- fast food and convenience food
- diet and health
- the advantages of supermarkets
- supporting local farmers
- changing diets
- organic food

Glossary

- crop** (*noun*) - a plant grown for food, usually on a farm, for example a potato crop
- harmony** (*noun*) - a situation in which people live and work well with other people or things, or in a way that does not damage things around them: *social harmony*
- herder** (*noun*) - someone who looks after a group of large animals as their job
- ignore** (*verb*) - to not consider someone or something: *the government ignored the advice*
- indigenous** (*adj*) - indigenous people lived in a place for a very long time before other people came to live there
- issue** (*noun*) - a subject that people discuss or argue about, especially relating to society, politics, etc: *education is always a difficult issue.*
- source** (*noun*) - where something comes from or begins
- sustainable** (*adj*) - using methods which do not harm the environment
- variety** (*noun*) - the fact that something consists of different things, usually in a way that makes it interesting or enjoyable.