

COIMBATORE

Learning to love the slow, locavore life



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UDHAGAMANDALAM:, JANUARY 10, 2017 01:34 IST

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Ancient cuisine: An Irula woman displays food at the festival.

Indigenous communities in Kotagiri show how locally sourced food is sustainable, healthy

More than 300 adivasis participated in a festival in the Nilgiris that celebrated traditional slow food with a ‘back to the roots’ message. The recipe: source local, stay healthy, spare the environment.

The ‘wild foods and slow foods’ on show provided a glimpse of the culinary traditions of indigenous communities at the Keystone Foundation campus in Kotagiri on Monday. Tubers, legumes, yams, fruits and other forest-sourced produce were sliced and diced by participants from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka, and activists from Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh to work up the visitors’ appetite.

Cuisine is closely linked to culture, and the festival was planned with the idea of reviving traditional, local diets and sustainable consumption practices

among indigenous tribes and populations, said Pratim Roy, Founder-Director of Keystone Foundation.

Local communities from the three southern States got to work on recipes that included sweets, salty snacks and other staples.

“Wild foods are closely linked to indigenous communities, and the urban population looks towards wild foods to both get in touch with their culture and also their local ecology,” said Mr. Pratim Roy.

Slow food, Mr. Pratim Roy said, is sourced locally, provides a fair price to producers and is sustainable. This is the guiding philosophy of locavores. Wild foods and the slow food movement have a common goal, which is mainly to get local communities and the general public to return to their older, more sustainable and healthy eating habits. They were urged to eat more locally grown vegetables and support such food.

The movement provides the added environmental benefit of protecting biodiversity, as traditional practices of communities that harvest wild foods are closely linked to the ecological well-being of their habitats.

K. Madhavi, an Irula woman from Achakarai in Masinagudi in the Nilgiris, says tubers were a staple diet of the community. Yet, their harvest from the forests was gradually on the decline. “We have become accustomed to eating rice and other staples given to us through the Public Distribution System (PDS),” she explains.

The food festival coincided with the international regional meeting of members of the Non-Timber Forest Products – Exchange Programme, with delegates coming from six Southeast Asian countries.