

FARM GATE ROUNDUP Saturday 15th March 2008

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What's happening on the FGT this weekend?

Today is the opening of the nut season. Both Nutwood Farm and Kookootonga Walnut and Chestnut farm will be open for business for around six weeks. Also Shields orchard at Bilpin will be open for pick your own this weekend.

That will be good news for many people

Indeed and next weekend being the Easter weekend the Rouse Hill Markets kick off on Easter Saturday with over 40+ stalls of fresh local and regional produce and value added product.

Easter Saturday is a huge shopping day with shops being closed on Good Friday and Easter Sunday

Pine Crest Orchard will reopen with mid-season apples, on the 21st March (Good Friday)

We can ad lib the following

On the 27th March the Blue Mountain Slow Food Movement is co-sponsoring a talk and show a movie by a Cuban by the name of Roberto Pereze on how Cuba survived Peak Oil, using permaculture and organic food production. The title of the movie is "The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil".

Once, Cuba's economy was virtually dependent on the Soviet Union. Its agriculture was focused with one aim in mind -- namely to produce as much sugar cane as possible, which the Soviets bought at more than five times the market price, in addition to purchasing 95 percent of Cuba's citrus crop and 73 percent of its nickel. In exchange, the Soviets provided Cuba with 63 percent of its food imports and 90 percent of its petrol. Such a relationship made Cuba extraordinarily vulnerable. They also provided tractors and other farm machinery.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, those subsidies halted almost overnight and suddenly, the future looked bleak.

Nowhere was the effect felt more strongly than in the stomachs of the ordinary people. Figures produced by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization suggest that the daily calorie intake of the average Cuban fell from about 2,600 calories a day in the late 1980s to between 1,000 and 1,500 by 1993. Essentially, people had to get by on about half the food they had been eating.

With no subsidies and limited resources, the Cuban regime took the decision to look inward. It decided to maximize food production by ceasing to organize its economy around the export of agricultural products and the import of food. By necessity, this meant a back-

to-basics approach; with no Soviet oil for tractors or fertilizer it turned to oxen, with no Soviet oil for its fertilizer and pesticide, it turned to natural compost and the production of natural pesticides and beneficial insects.

Today Cuba is filled with more than 7,000 urban allotments which fill perhaps as many as 81,000 acres. These have been established on tiny plots of land in the center of tower-block estates or between the crumbling colonial homes that fill Havana.

Remarkably, this organic revolution has worked. Annual calorie intake now stands at about 2,600 a day, while UNFAO estimates that the percentage of the population considered undernourished fell from 8 percent in 1990-92 to about 3 percent in 2000-02. Cuba's infant mortality rate is lower than that of the U.S., while at 77 years, life expectancy is the same.

So what is the population of Cuba?

About 11.5 million.

You mentioned the Slow Food Movement. What does that mean and how did it start?

The Slow Food movement began in 1986 when Carlo Petrini, an Italian journalist visited Rome and saw a new branch of McDonalds at the foot of the Spanish Steps. He saw this as a global takeover of traditional regional Italian food and its associated family oriented culture by industrialised, standardised food. Outraged, he established the Slow Food movement that since spread throughout the world. The following words are from the Slow Food Manifesto 1989: "Our defence should start at the table with Slow Food. Let us rediscover the flavours and savours of regional cooking and banish the degrading effects of Fast Food."

Local food is a vital ingredient of this movement.

Hawkesbury Harvest is one of three Slow Food Conviviums in the Sydney Basin, the others being the Blue Mountains and Sydney itself. Recently Slow Food Sydney took a stand at 'A Taste of Slow Victoria' in Federation Square in Melbourne where they created a magnificent menu of NSW regional food. Produce from Hawkesbury Harvest members includes vegetables from the Hawkesbury Vege Farm for a huge vege pie, 800 beautiful fresh figs from Galston and honey for desert supplied by Malfroys Gold. Steve Craig of Blue Mountains Honey at Penrith attended the event and reports the food from the Hawkesbury went down a treat.

Details of all that we have spoken about and more is available by going to

www.hawkesburyharvest.com.au