

SUSTAINABILITY CORNER

PRESENTED BY AMERICAN CULINARY FEDERATION AND KENDALL COLLEGE

PART II: THE COMING FAMINE—IS IT INEVITABLE?

A CONVERSATION WITH AUSTRALIAN AUTHOR, JULIAN CRIBB BY CHRISTOPHER KOETKE, CEC, CCE; EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, KENDALL COLLEGE SCHOOL OF CULINARY ARTS; VICE PRESIDENT, LAUREATE INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITIES CENTER OF EXCELLENCE IN CULINARY ARTS

In my previous article, I began talking with Julian Cribb, author of *The Coming Famine*. He believes that chefs have it within their power to be the catalyst that can help our world build a sustainable food system. Here, we will continue that conversation. Mr. Cribb will also be the international keynoter at the upcoming International Foodservice Sustainability Symposium (IFSS) in Chicago on May 24-25 immediately following the close of NRA Show 2011. For those who are interested in attending IFSS and hearing more from Julian Cribb and other sustainability experts, information can be found at www.ifssymposium.org.



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Chris: It's exciting to think that chefs may hold one of the keys to this dilemma because they set "food fashion." Where do they start? What can we say to chefs about what they really need to do to help people understand the issues at hand?

Julian: As I mentioned in the book, I'm a very humble, domestic chef but I was impressed when I visited the The World Vegetable Centre regional research facility in Arusha, Tanzania. Scientists there have collected seeds from the whole of Africa, including about 400 vegetables that have never appeared in any restaurant or supermarket; these vegetables were being eaten by local indigenous tribes and, indeed, sometimes even the next tribe didn't know about them. And that's just Africa. Think about how Christopher Columbus brought over the American potatoes, tomatoes and peppers to Europe and how that revolutionized the world diet. Now multiply that by Africa, Asia, and Australia. We have about 6,000 edible plants in Australia and only five of them are regularly consumed – macadamias, cumquats, bush tomatoes, bush pepper and lemon myrtle. We have not even begun to discover the richness of this world's edible plant foods. We talk about eating more plant foods and it can be a marvelous and healthy culinary adventure. When I traveled to Africa I was with a German scientist, who is one of the leading experts on diabetes, and he said there are several vegetables that can actually reverse the symptoms of diabetes; there's no drug you can get from a doctor that will do that! If we eat right, we can fix the food problem along with our own



bodies, so we can live a longer, healthier life and put less pressure on the water, land and all of the things that provide our food.

Chris: You say you're not a professional chef but your comments are very much those of a professional chef because we are increasingly learning about the diversity within the plant world and it is great inspiration. I frequently travel to other countries like Brazil and I've tried a whole host of fruits and vegetables that I never knew existed. It's fascinating and elicits the kind of creative inspiration that really gets the ideas flowing, whereas meat is essentially limiting.

Julian: Well meat isn't all that limiting. I was recently invited to address a beef feedlot association's annual conference and I gave them my usual message which really worried them, and one guy asked, "What can we do?" The fact is that if the primary input, grain, is going to triple in price, then beef feedlotting isn't going to work out. And I said to them, "Have you ever thought about diversifying into guinea pigs?" I mean there are livestock other than just cattle. Smaller livestock, like guinea pigs and rabbits can run in much smaller areas, can eat

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a more diversified diet – you can grow algae and feed it to them or you can use vegetable waste from supermarkets. The current formula is very limiting, but my point is that it doesn't need to be. I believe that diversification is going to happen; we already see it with the Chinese who essentially eat anything that runs, swims or jumps. I think people will even begin farming certain types of insects as a good source of protein, just like we're farming prawns which are essentially insects of the sea.

Chris: In Chapter 12 of your book you open up with a scenario set in 2085 in which students visit a museum to see how their ravaged world came to be; they see an object at the end of a long hallway that is the cause of the end of the world, the symbol of indulgence – a cookbook. I thought that was really interesting and would like you to comment on that really means.

Julian: People think their own indulgences don't matter, but when you multiply those personal indulgences by seven billion human beings, they have a very big impact. A cookbook looks innocent, but the wrong kinds of advice in a cookbook about what you eat can kill you and make agriculture unsustainable. We need to have cookbooks that help farmers and send market signals to grow fruits and vegetables in sustainable ways. Current cookbooks aren't produced like that. We have to encourage protection of the soil, the water, the biosphere that produces our food. As I said, this is an exciting time when food needs to recreate itself

both because added varieties of food are fun and healthy, but also because it's a necessity for feeding our world.

Chris: You've pointed out a potential cookbook market segment that could be very interesting.

Julian: Without being too preachy, I'd like the cookbook to gently educate the reader. Perhaps recipes could be labeled with a number of droplets signaling that the recipe is water-heavy or water-light, oil-heavy or oil-light so they understand their choices and may choose the recipe that is lighter in water or oil.

Chris: That's interesting because that kind of weighting is very much what the nutrition industry has done. It could be done much like nutritional content is done now. I think there's an awful lot there to think about.

Julian: Ordinary people in cities that don't have contact with agriculture don't understand these things. They don't know how their food is produced and that most of our meat is produced by cruel, inhumane and toxic methods. They just see it as pink stuff in the supermarket that's part of their diet. Chefs, cooks, and food designers can look further upstream in an attempt to understand it and help educate people, because as I said before, they set the food fashion. If they set fashion of eating sustainable food then I believe the world will go with that.

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Chris: I think that's correct. So back to the book and something you said earlier about there being two kinds of agriculture: small- and large-scale. I thought your point was interesting. We tend to see them as competing interests – as “right or wrong,” “good or bad.” It seems that your point is that we need both of them as part of the viable solution.

Julian: Well, I think you're talking more about Western agriculture now where you have a religious and philosophical divide between farmers who want to use high-intensity, high-production methods designed to provide high yields, as opposed to organic farmers who farm at a slightly lower level and never the twain shall meet. Most research money goes to the chemical guys. I know both kinds of farmers and sometimes I just want to say that I wish you guys, instead of sounding off at one another, would sit down and share ideas because I know something would good out would come out of it. We know we're going to need to farm with fewer chemicals, less fertilizer and less oil, because those things are finite, so let's design a system from scratch that can do that. We also need high yield and highly nutritious food that isn't completely energy dependent. Farmers need to bring all their ideas to the table and work together

to build this new agricultural system. We've done it two or three times before in human history. We need agriculture that does not leak nutrients, soil and water into the environment. That's a bigger scientific challenge, in my view, than curing cancer. We need to redesign a system so that it is sustainable; no such system exists today. Furthermore, we need to make it work for large and small farmers alike. Basically, the damage is being done by super-cheap food, a product of the competition between big supermarkets fighting for the food dollar, and that needs to change. Cities do have an enormous resource of nutrients and water that they must quit wasting because we can recycle those resources into hydroponic food production. Fungal protein, using those nutrients, could also produce a whole host of new foods that give rise to enormous culinary opportunity.

Chris: In Chicago, we've discovered so many vacant lots that we're turning into urban farms and it's truly a great opportunity to use the land that's otherwise sitting there vacant and blighted.

Julian: And I'm sure chefs prefer to serve salad that was harvested 15 minutes ago, rather than buying something at the market or from a distributor that has to be shipped into the city.

Chris: Absolutely, and that's why Kendall College has a 60 X 80-foot garden that sits right outside our building and we're located right in the middle of Chicago. So my last question



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is what advice would you have for chefs? Besides your book which I highly recommend, how can they educate themselves?

Julian: Go to farms from time to time and have your students study the different methods of production to understand the systems and what is and is not sustainable. At the end of the day, the market signal to farmers will probably be initiated by chefs and others who choose the food in the marketplace, so they need to understand what's happening.

Chris: One of the things I love about your book is that you call it as it is. A lot of the data is hard to read, because it tends to seem pessimistic, but I think your book treats the subject with a certain sense of optimism that we can fix the dilemma that you have so accurately described.

Julian: I don't see it as gloom at all; I see it as a realistic appraisal of the situation and a call to a great adventure to redesign the way we produce and consume food. It's a wonderful opportunity for humanity. I was so pleased when I was asked to speak at the International Foodservice Sustainability Symposium because I expected farmers and policy makers would be interested in this book, but not chefs and restaurant operators. So to know they are interested is gratifying because I firmly believe they can be the catalyst for change.



ABOUT KENDALL COLLEGE'S SCHOOL OF CULINARY ARTS

Founded in 1985, the School of Culinary Arts at Kendall College is among the premier culinary-training programs in the United States, offering associate and bachelor's degrees and certificates in culinary arts as well as associate degrees and certificates in baking and pastry. The school occupies a stunning "Riverworks" campus near downtown Chicago. The American Culinary Federation Education Foundation Accrediting Commission has accredited the Culinary Arts Associate and Baking & Pastry Associate programs since 1988. Kendall, which celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2009, also operates Schools of Hospitality Management, Business and Education. Kendall College is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and a member of the North Central Association, www.ncahlc.org, 1-312-263-0456. Kendall College is a member of the Laureate International Universities network. For more information, visit www.kendall.edu.

