

Food and Thought Intercultural Mela

Hamilton, Victoria, 24-25 February, 2006

Notes by Kelly Donati

The Food and Thought Mela was an extraordinary event that brought people together to exchange stories and to celebrate the rich diversity of our food communities. The Sanskrit word Mela refers to large gatherings that create a festive atmosphere in which serious issues can be discussed. In this spirit, the Food & Thought Mela was a public event for anyone interested in giving in-depth thought to the connection of food to everyday life and to the world around us.

This setting produced a powerful exchange between the communities of the Hamilton region, academics and some of Australia's leading food writers, activists and practitioners including Helena Norberg-Hodge, Stephanie Alexander and Zannie Flanagan. The result was wide-ranging discussions that highlighted the importance of local food economies while introducing new dimensions to the question of how communities respond to the threats and opportunities of globalisation. It was also an opportunity for over 300 people from around Victoria and beyond to come together in the spirit of having fun, laughing, and engaging in meaningful dialogue and enjoying good food at a shared table. Many participants felt it was one of the best public events they had attended in years.

The success of the Mela can also be attributed to the wonderful support of local producers, the volunteer cooks and the general community who assisted with the event. The Mela was an important step in building on the food movement in Australia in a way that gives critical thought to our local and global food systems. Researchers at the Globalism Institute hope to continue their collaboration and engagement with the community through the production of an edition of *Local Global: Studies in Community Sustainability* and a recipe book in which explores the politics of the global food supply.

