

The Zest S13E16

Andrew: [00:00:00] There is a sacredness to food. Even people who aren't religious like to have a little blessing before meals or time to reflect.

Dalia: I'm Dalia Colon, and this is The Zest: citrus, seafood, Spanish flavor, and southern charm. The Zest celebrates cuisine and community in the Sunshine State today, the sacred side of food.

Andrew Hudson is on a mission. He's an organic gardener and program director for the nonprofit organization Community Harvest SRQ and Andrew wants to connect the people of Sarasota with its local food. I met Andrew through a mutual friend. Steve Phelps of Indigenous Restaurant. Maybe you've heard of it.

If not, do yourself a huge favor and look it up. Steve describes Andrew as, quote, rebooting the community food system in Sarasota. Ooh, those are some big words. So of course I wanted us all to meet this guy. So as Andrew explains in this conversation, [00:01:00] he connects restaurants and neighbors. To get surplus produce off the field and onto people's plates.

We also dig into Sarasota's Eat Local Week, food sovereignty and what it means to give communities more control over what they eat. As I learned in this conversation, Andrew is full of surprises, one of which is he's a Mennonite minister, so he brings a really thoughtful. A perspective to the sacredness of food and the idea of giving farmland time to rest.

What a concept, Andrew reminds us. All that caring for the soil and each other go hand in hand. So here's my conversation with Andrew Hudson.

Andrew: I'm Andrew Hudson. I am the program director for Community Harvest SRQ. I'm also a Mennonite minister. And I work with churches in that capacity on, um, finding the sacredness in the land where [00:02:00] their buildings are.

So that's called Sabbath gardening, and that's my other thing. And I promote local food in the Sarasota area.

Dalia: Okay. I didn't know about the Mennonite pastor thing, so let's just bookmark that for now. Tell me a little bit about Community Harvest. What exactly do you all do?

Andrew: Uh, we work with, as I call it, the local food shed, which is the layer of farms and restaurants locally who are involved in food that is both grown and eaten here. So we promote local foods, uh, local restaurants like uh, Indigenous, and I also work directly with local farmers a lot. Uh, I was a. An organic farmer in this area for 15 years. So I've got a lot of connections to farmers around here, and we try to get them out in front of people through, um, Facebook Live events.

But the main things we're known for are two things. Um, we're known for gleaning, so we go to farms where there's leftover food and get that onto [00:03:00] people's plates. And then we have eat local week, which is a, a week or so in uh, November where we promote the local food shed.

Dalia: I love the gleaning idea. How does that work?

How do you find the leftover food and how do you match it with the people who need it?

Andrew: It's really important to make it a win for the farmers. So part of it is just cultivating the relationships with the farmers so they know that people are gonna come and they're gonna follow the rules and they're gonna respect the land and all of that.

Once you get there, it is pretty easy. We get, we have a partnership with the local food banks and so they send out pallets full of boxes, and so we just have to take the boxes and put sweet potatoes or greens or whatever into the boxes, and then that goes to the food bank for the larger green. Anything less than say.

For banana boxes, we just take it directly to a local distributor. So it's, it's kind of a food banking thing. But one [00:04:00] thing that I like that we do, that we've done for all of our 15 years is we make it ambiguous, uh, who's there to get food and who's there to get food for the food bank. So everybody who gleans gets a box themselves.

And so we're able to have people who need food just come out to farms and get it for themselves.

Dalia: Oh, that's so cool. And then tell me about the eat local week. That seems like it would get a lot of support in Sarasota.

Andrew: It is. It's a very Sarasota thing. We had 13 events in nine days, so it's a busy thing.

And we have everything from a fermentation class to a couple restaurant events to events on farms. So it's it's ways, it's a time for people to get an intensive connection to the local food shed, and especially we try to get people to cross lines. If there are restaurant people, we'd like to get them at a fermentation event or a plant walk or something, you know, to, to see [00:05:00] themselves connected across outside of the silos that we often operate.

Dalia: That's very cool. And I know you told me before we started recording, you're not a specialist in food sovereignty, but I've been doing some work around food sovereignty and we also had, uh, Will Schanbacher, who's a professor at USF and leads a food sovereignty initiative there. How do you see these things being connected sort of.

Eliminating or reducing food waste, connecting people with their food, and just the idea that people should have more control over how their food is grown and, and how it's prepared and all of that.

Andrew: Well, one partnership we're really excited about is with Coco Rootz, uh, in the Black community here in Sarasota, which is called Newtown.

And, uh, Coco Rootz, uh, is working on gleaning and other things, but they just brought in Robin Greenfield, who is a foraging expert.

Dalia: We've had him on the podcast. Yeah, we love Rob.

Andrew: Oh, great. Okay. Well, we had him here. [00:06:00] And so, uh, we partnered with Coco Rootz to produce that event. We had over a hundred people there on Friday.

And, uh, the main theme, you know, I mean, Robin talks. In a lot of directions, but I'd say the main theme of our partnership with Coco Rootz is how do we do things that are gonna help us survive if we need those kind of skills, but how do we do it in a thriving way? I. How do we produce more food and, and access food that will help us, um, not just in the way the world is now, but fossil fuels are running out and, you know, we need to prepare for things, but how do we thrive while we're doing it?

So I think food sovereignty is great news to everybody because they have more control over their future. Looking at foraging as a, a way to get superfoods, like amaranth, which grows wild. So another partnership with Coco Rootz is we're gonna have a, [00:07:00] um, a chef, Rebecca Perio. Rebecca's gonna give a

class on how do you cook amaranth so you could forage this food, but then let's make something really delicious with it.

And that's a sovereignty and a survival thing. That is something we can all be excited about.

Dalia: Yeah. So another thing that Chef Steve said, he's the one who connected us Chef Steve Phelps of Indigenous restaurant in Sarasota. He described you as rebooting the community food system in Sarasota. That sounds like a monumental task.

So for somebody who just wanted to get involved, what's a step they could take to changing the entire system that that feels doable?

Andrew: I would say communitizing, um, becoming part of networks of people who are working on this. I, I think Steve is giving more, more credit than I deserve. There are a lot of people [00:08:00] like Steve and I who are working on the local food shed here.

And I'm privileged after 15 years as a farmer in this area to be connected with a lot of those people. So the main thing that I think I'm contributing is, is say, is just naming the potential there. We have, uh, a really wonderful organization that's Chef Steve is part of called the Sarasota Manatee Originals in this area, and that's 70 independently owned restaurants who promote local food here.

So that's a pretty potent, and that's some of our, our, our most shihi restaurants. You know, Sarasota's a pretty glitzy place, and this is a lot of our leading restaurants are part of the Sarasota Manatee Originals, and Steve's got leadership within that. So, uh, he got me in front of their annual meeting, uh, a couple months ago and I was able to talk about the food shed and they, they responded really well.

So at this point, my main answer would [00:09:00] be to. To just back to how to get involved, come glean, just help food get to where it should be. We don't want food waste. We want food to be on people's plates and then, um, get, eat local week on the calendar. Because when people have larger connections, there are all sorts of possibilities.

And in, in our movement, we call, we call it, uh, unleashing Collective Genius.

Dalia: Oh, I like that.

Andrew: And that's one of the main things we try to do is create social situations where collective genius can emerge. So we don't just have events. We have events where people can have unplanned social interactions. Uh.

That's one of the reasons we do gleaning. It's not just we're accomplishing something, we're also building a social network. We have a, um, series last Thursdays of the month of what we call community conversations. So we're gonna be talking about the book drawdown, this coming, uh, month, which is, um, [00:10:00] about addressing climate change.

But we're gonna have a potluck first. So, um, yeah, for a lot of our events we have potlucks first 'cause everybody loves potlucks and, and it's a way to, um, not only celebrate food and learn stuff, but to get to know your local food she, through other people.

Dalia: That's so cool. And when is Eat Local Week?

Andrew: That'll be, uh, November 1st through 15th. So it's, it's a ways out and I was talking with. Chef Steve yesterday trying to get him on board. 'cause we're, we're hoping to have, so eat local week. The theme will be the farmer and the fisher. Because when people think about food sheds, they often only think about the land.

And for a waterfront place like this, we need to include the Bay and the the Gulf. So yeah, we'll have a lot about fisheries and of course Chef Steve is really big on that.

Dalia: That's a great point. And you know, November. It'll be here before we know it. And that's such a busy time of year. And we have the snowbirds down.

So just put it on your calendar now. You said November 1st to 15th?

Andrew: Yes. [00:11:00]

Dalia: Okay. I'm glad you brought up the word glitzy. 'cause I think that's what a lot of people think of when they think of Sarasota. It's, you know, the mansions and the fancy cars and the shopping. You guys have like my favorite shopping plaza of all time, right off 75 with all my favorite stores.

But we are hearing from you about the need in Sarasota. So can you talk about that disconnect? And for people like me who are in Tampa, the Tampa area, is it

hard to explain that there is need when Sarasota has this reputation for being, as you said, so glitzy?

Andrew: Hmm. I see a lot of wealthy places having, um, a lot of people who are part of a, a sort of servant class, for lack of a better term.

They're people to do the jobs for the wealthy. There's something very rich about that kind of community that I love being around. So one of the main things I always like to say is, this is not a grim topic. [00:12:00] These, you know, there are communities who have an awful lot to offer who fit that kind of demographic.

So we have a fantastic community garden here. It's in the Black community. It's the best community garden here in Sarasota. Anybody who's realistic knows that you're gonna have to have a lot of people to fill the jobs for a place like Sarasota. And so we've got a really good community of folks who fit that.

Dalia: That's a great point. Okay. I had no idea that you are also a Mennonite minister. Say more about that. And the gardens. I wanna know all the things.

Andrew: Cool. I got into the Mennonite Church through farming. There are a lot of Mennonite farmers, some of the best ones around here, including our raw dairy, our, our Mennonites, and by reading Wendell Berry who admires Mennonites.

So I, I ended up going to seminary because I was so [00:13:00] interested in what the Bible has to say about, uh, how you grow food. The Bible has a lot of recommendations around letting land be fallow, and that the land has its own wisdom built into it. And if you just let the land regenerate, it'll solve a lot of your problems.

So it's called letting the land be fallow. I had this theory, what if we took that really seriously and on on small plots, started practicing those kinds of agricultural cultural practices they call them. And so in seminary, I cooked up what I call Sabbath gardening. Which is based on, uh, in Leviticus and Exodus and, and Deuteronomy.

It says every seven years you're supposed to let the land rest. And I found even at the seminary, it was hard to get people to let the land rest. They, they don't wanna stop if they're gardening and it's going well. So I came up with a Sabbath model, divide a garden into seven parts and let one seventh rest every year.[00:14:00]

And that's what I'm promoting with, with churches. Create a garden, use regenerative practices, enjoy growing food, and then you see the, the seventh, the resting part move across over seven years and it's really easy and it works. It's really amazing what happens when you just let the land rest and you treat it well.[00:15:00]

Dalia: Wow. Okay. It's so interesting that you're coming at this from like a biblical perspective because I mentioned earlier Will Schanbacher, who's a professor at USF and does a lot with the food sovereignty initiative there, but he's a professor of religious studies and his interest is also in food. So why do you think these two keep intersecting?

Andrew: Yeah, well. There is a sacredness to food. Even people who aren't religious, like to have a little blessing before meals or time to reflect. That is so interesting. I, I wanna meet this guy.

Dalia: Yeah. You two would hit it off. I'll, I'll introduce you. But the idea of like the food sovereignty and food justice meshed, enmeshed with religion regardless of what that religion is or if anybody even has a religion, what do you think's going on there?

Yeah.

Andrew: Well, one [00:16:00] thing that I really loved in seminary is there are these, uh, different big theological concepts, and I love the concept of incarnation. Classically, it's the idea of God being, you know, embodied in a person. But, uh, it's really fascinating to think of food in terms of incarnation because somehow we have this matter that becomes our bodies and then all of a sudden it's a person.

You know, there's this mystery to we are what we are, we are what we eat. And so I, I love thinking about the incarnational mystery of food. Um, and I think very few people would articulate it that way. But when I bring it up, people seem to recognize what I'm talking about. I think, I think we all are a bit mystified by, okay, there's this food, you know, okay, here I have this smoothie that I just drank and this is gonna become me.

That's, that's really trippy.

Dalia: That is trippy. I never thought of it that way. So when we [00:17:00] feed people, people always say like, food is love. But I guess you really are like giving a piece of yourself to someone by feeding them. So that's cool.

Andrew: Yeah. And you're putting the matter together with your own energy, your own creativity, you know?

And so. So when food is formed by somebody, that's a great point. It's, it's the person's love becomes this person's love for this other person. That's an amazing thing. Yeah. So I, I never get over finding that. There's just juice in that.

Dalia: Yeah, so much. And I think most religions would say, love your neighbor. So what better way to love your neighbor than feed them?

Can I ask an ignorant question? What's the difference between Mennonite and Amish?

Andrew: Yeah, I get that all the time. Well, first of all, there are many types of Mennonite and there are many types of Amish. Some of them actually overlap. By and large, Amish tend to be plain people. I mean, I'm, I'm dressed somewhat plainly, but Amish, you know, have a codified way that they [00:18:00] dress and they tend to be in communities that are overseen by a bishop.

Mennonites live more among the general population and there are tendencies, like Amish tend to have limits on how they use technology, which I think there's a great wisdom to because technology runs away with all of our brains, you know? So I, I really admire that. We don't have that in my community.

I kind of wish we did. I kind of wish I had limits placed.

Dalia: I know. Well, I'm glad you have technology today 'cause you're talking to me over Zoom, but I get it. I'm from Ohio and we have some Amish friends and every time we visit them we're just like, ah, this is nice. Yeah, this is really nice. Yeah. Okay.

Thank you for explaining

Andrew: that. You're in Ohio,

Dalia: uh, Cleveland.

Andrew: Okay.

Dalia: Yeah.

Andrew: So outside of Cleveland, you, you, yeah. I assume you don't have Amish people in Cleveland.

Dalia: Uh, you know what, you'll see 'em at the Cavs games once in a while on their room. Springer, but a little bit east of Cleveland. There

Andrew: you go.

Dalia: [00:19:00] Listen, I got an Amish cookbook in my, uh, kitchen right now that I could break out, but they're in the, our friends are in middle.

Field and Burton, so a little bit east of Cleveland, that's like an Amish enclave, but we're used to seeing them and they're pretty, you know, pretty worldly I suppose. Like our friends have cell phones, they shop at, you know, Walmart and everywhere else that we shop, but we can tell that they're Amish because of the way that they're dressed, whereas you are dressed.

You know, we wouldn't necessarily know that you were of a particular faith by the way that you're dressed. Um, so thank you. I was just curious about that. Are there any good now? I'm so curious. Like, like when I think of Amish food, I think of like pies, like shoe fly pie and like the big pretzels. You know?

Are there any like traditional Mennonite Foods?

Andrew: Well, since you brought up cookbooks, one of my profs was really into a couple Mennonite cookbooks as a theological works, you know, works of [00:20:00] incarnation. So the *More With Less Cookbook* is the, uh, classic. Um, Doris Janzen Longacre. She just worked through this, uh, really delicious simple food that also drew on simple foods from other parts of the world.

So they were helpful in being conscious of other people in other cultures, which Mennonites are very strong on doing outreach and support for people in other parts of the world. So that's the number one thing I would. I'm, I'm an eater of food and a grower of food. I'm not actually a preparer or cooker of food.

When I think of Mennonite foods, I don't think of so much, uh, like shoe, fly pie or prepared things. I think of canning and I think of preserving and growing food and. And just the joy of just last weekend we had a planting at our church garden and it's just awesome to go out with people and [00:21:00] enjoy being there and do things together.

So that's, that's the big thing about Amish and Mennonites, uh, and a Baptist, is we, we do things together.

Dalia: I love that and I've noticed more churches planting gardens, which I think is amazing on so many levels. Do you have any interactions with the indigenous community? That was the original purpose of this call, but I'm loving it.

I'm learning so much.

Andrew: Well, at the risk of telling you stuff you already know. Just the, the basic indigenous reality in Florida is the Seminole and Miccosukee weren't originally from this peninsula. I don't have any meaningful contact with them. I, I do want to give a shout out to something I'm really glad to be part of, which is, um, there are a bunch of clergy throughout the peninsula who are, um, having vigils every Sunday in support of those who are incarcerated in the Everglades.

And there are actually two other, um, places that never get any press. [00:22:00] So we have a Sunday vigil at 4:00 PM here in Sarasota, um, in support of a Miccosukee lead thing for the freedom of, of the folks in the Everglades, because that's also a violation of Miccosukee land that, that prison. So that's, uh, I indirectly am connected with them.

I know there are seminal led food sovereignty efforts. I'm not in touch with those, uh, when I was in seminary. So my well, and. It has to be said. Um, the Calusa and the Toko Bagga and all the other original peoples of this area where I was with Tocobaga land, uh, they died off very quickly after contact with the Europeans.

Um, so they're not around unfortunately, but gone but not forgotten. But when I was in, I think you're gonna like this. When I was in seminary, I was in the Great Lakes region and so I was part of a couple studies of, um. Robin Wall Kimmerer's Braiding [00:23:00] Sweetgrass.

Dalia: Love it.

Andrew: And I was actually in Potawatomi territory, which is her nation.

And so I got to go to events led by the Potawatomi when I was up there. So there's this wonderful thing, you know, up, up there. They tap. What they call sugar bushes. Uh, sugar maples, traditionally the Potawatomi have done that

and the Algonquin and, and a lot of northern tribes, they didn't boil the sap like Europeans.

They actually figured out that you could make these very, um, shallow. Dishes and leave it out in the frozen air and the ice would separate and form pure water, and they would reduce it by taking the ice off every night. And so I got to be part of a bowl making thing, and I have one of these reducing bowls from the pot otomy, so that's one of my prize possessions.

But yeah, so, so I, that's the kind of [00:24:00] thinking, and I just love to tell that story because. That is superior technology. Right. They're not burning the, like, there's so much more energy efficient to do it that way. Why has that not occurred to anybody in the dominant culture? I, you know, we could, we could guess at that, but there, yeah, there's so much to learn from indigenous ways of doing things.

Um, you know, there's the. The rice culture of the Potawatomi that she talks about in the book. I can't recommend for breeding sweetgrass enough. And it sounds like you're a fan too.

Dalia: Yeah, and she has another book I read a few months ago. It's, it's shorter. And the name is escaping Me.

Andrew: Service Berry.

Dalia: Yes.

Thank you. Service Berry. Loved it. Yeah. It's funny that you brought up the Potawatomi. There's a friend of mine who's an artist, Marsha Morse Mullins in Polk County, and she learned to weave baskets from the Potawatomi and now she's won all these awards and her work has been shown all over the [00:25:00] world. So yeah, they're definitely onto something.

This is fascinating. Well shout out to, uh, chef Steve for connecting us. This was kind of like a blind date. Like I didn't really know what we were gonna talk about neither did you. Is there anything else you wanna mention?

Andrew: No, I, I really appreciate your curiosity. I, I don't get to talk about Sabbath gardening enough.

Um, I'm, I haven't figured out how to get paid to do that yet, so thank you so much. And I, I just want to encourage people, anybody listening, you really can

go out and start a garden in Florida. You need to keep the land. Covered. So mulch. Mulch is my big one word. Recommendation

Dalia: mulch is our friend. Okay.

Thank you so much, Andrew. It was great to talk to you.

Andrew: It's a pleasure.

Dalia: Andrew Hudson is an organic gardener, Mennonite minister and program director for the organization Community Harvest SRQ. If you wanna get involved or learn more about Eat Local week, which is coming up this fall. [00:26:00] You can find a link to Community Harvest, SRQ in the show notes wherever you're listening to this episode or on our website, the zest podcast.com.

Thank you Chef Steve Phelps for connecting me with Andrew. Who else do you know? Send them my way. I'm Dalia Colon. I produce The Zest with Andrew Lucas and Alexandria Ebron. The Zest is a production of WUSF. Copyright 2026, part of the NPR network.