

For U.S. Food Elite, an Unlikely (Crowned) Hero

By KIM SEVERSON

TETBURY, ENGLAND
WHEN Prince Charles gazes from the upstairs windows at Highgrove, his home near this tiny town in the English countryside, he can see a tree planted by the Dalai Lama. It grows near a field of rare British wildflowers, which fade into a row of box hedges trimmed to frame four small busts of the prince's head. Tigga, his late, beloved Jack Russell terrier, is immortalized in a relief sculpture on a nearby garden wall, behind which a longtime gardener prepares the ground for the prince's favorite vegetables, potatoes and Brussels sprouts.

Prince Charles, whose hobbies have included both polo and the peculiarly English rural craft called hedge laying, cherishes tradition. In his world, it seems, not much good can come of change. He has waged war against modernity, both in faceless urban architecture and in the erosion of the rural British way of life.

At home, the royal perspective has been criticized as conservative, stodgy and elitist. But to some of the generals of the American food revolution, the prince qualifies as downright progressive.

Alice Waters, who drove the organic movement in the United States, is smitten. "He is, in private, really one of the most forward-thinking, radical humanitarians I have ever talked to," she said.

The left-leaning food elite of the United States has prince fever, and it has nothing to do with an underlying fascination with the monarchy, Diana and Helen Mirren notwithstanding. To Ms. Waters and her troops, no one else of the prince's stature has spoken out on the issues they hold dear: responsible stewardship of the land, preservation of rural life and the need for good food grown without chemicals or worker exploitation.

"Can you think of any American political figure who has spoken eloquently or bravely about these issues?" asked Eric Schlosser,

Prince Charles is lionized by Americans in the organic food movement.

the author of "Fast Food Nation," who has become a friend of the prince.

Ms. Waters agreed. "Al Gore doesn't even talk about food," she said.

(That's not to say Mr. Gore doesn't have prince fever, too. He has visited Highgrove to discuss the environment with the prince, and the two happily trade shout-outs to each other in speeches.)

Eleanor Bertino, Ms. Waters's former college roommate at Berkeley in the 1960s and a food and restaurant publicist, is so impressed that she recently took on the job of



Photograph above and below by Duchy Originals, bottom photograph by Tony Corcoran/The New York Times



A PALACE, A PASTURE

Prince Charles takes pride in the Ayrshire cows and ginger Tarnworth pigs on his farm in Gloucestershire, England. His line of foods, Duchy Originals, including ginger biscuits stamped with the crest of the Duchy of Cornwall, below, and jams, are sold in some specialty stores in the United States.

ONLINE: IN HIS WORDS

In an audio feature, the Prince of Wales discusses small-scale agriculture and the Slow Food movement in a 2004 speech. nytimes.com/dining

world who would gather that year in Turin for the Slow Food conference called Terra Madre. Naturally, she wanted the prince. "I just immediately try to figure out what the biggest doors are we can open, and that seemed like a door to me," she said.

The Slow Food rank and file thought she was out of her mind. What would the future king of England have to say to an Ethiopian wheat grower?

Plenty, it turned out. The prince had them from the moment he said: "We no more want to live in anonymous concrete blocks that are just like anywhere else in the world than we want to eat anonymous junk food that can be bought anywhere."

By the end, if the honey gatherers and yak cheese makers had been carrying disposable lighters, they would have been lit and aboil.

A year later came the trip to Marin County, a stop at Ms. Waters's Edible Schoolyard at a middle school in Berkeley to eat goat cheese pizza baked by the students, and a stroll through the Ferry Plaza farmer's market in San Francisco, where he worked the stalls like President Bill Clinton on the stump.

The prince has recently embarked on a project to bring more of his organic products to the United States. His Duchy Originals products, made from classic ingredients like damson plums as well as crops from his own farm to help preserve British ways of farming and eating, first appeared in this country in the early 1990s.

In Britain, some 250 Duchy products are available, including bacon; hand-rolled Yorkshire pies; and hampers, old-fashioned boiled sugar mint candies made by a family in Yorkshire. The products are almost uniformly delicious, and their prices reflect the quality of their ingredients. Last year, Duchy Originals had almost \$80 million in sales; profits, about \$2.4 million, went to the prince's charities.

"It's odd that the prince has such a big brand because the royal family historically never muddied themselves with such commercial things," said Simon Darling, a marketing executive in London. "However, it is an act of brilliance because the execution of the proposition has been flawless. Given Prince Charles can be accused of being a privileged rich man, it's surprising that he's managed to produce something so good."

The company is frequently scrutinized by the British press. For example, its Scottish smoked salmon is imported from wild stocks in Alaska, which, aside from annoying Scottish fishermen, leaves the prince open to complaints about the size of his carbon footprint.

Americans who want to sample the products can find a small selection of biscuits, jams, teas, body lotions and Highgrove-brand gardening tools online at duchysusa.com or at stores like Zabar's and Whole Foods. The savory oaten biscuit, which in the United States would be called a cracker, is a good place to start. Often, these staples of the British cheese plate can be stale and leaden. The Duchy Originals versions have a light crunch and just a hint of sweetness.

But the prince does not need biscuits and lemon curd to work his way into American hearts. Just being a prince who talks about the value of sustainable farming is enough, as Dan Barber of the Blue Hill restaurants in Manhattan and Pocantico Hills, N.Y., can tell you.

Mr. Barber was one of five chefs selected to cook for Prince Charles and his wife, Camilla, when they came to New York in January to receive the Global Environmental Citizen Award from the Harvard Medical School's Center for Health and the Global Environment. Mr. Gore and the actress Meryl Streep were presenters.

Mr. Barber is usually a composed, focused guy. But cooking for the prince made him weak in the knees. He created tiny, perfect vegetarian hamburgers from his best Stone Barns beets and goat cheese, and personally arranged almost every pickled baby turnip that was passed to the crowd at the Harvard Club in Manhattan. When it came his turn to explain his offerings to the prince, Mr. Barber was so nervous he couldn't even get the honorific right.

"Your sirsness," he began, before launching into a stammering story about organic food being something like leather to a shoemaker, which he now regrets.

"I honestly don't know what happened," he said.

It was prince fever.



Photographs by I van Lang for The New York Times; center, Lauren Cohen/Barb visited the Harvard Club in New York in January.