

March 11, 2014

6 Latin Farm-to-Table Restaurants to Know

By Kathleen Squires - March 11, 2014



Stockfood

harvested, from beetle-killed ponderosa to salvage from a nearby sawmill. Their list of farm purveyors, proudly printed on the menu, includes one that establishes farms at cancer treatment centers. It's that type of community responsibility that allows patrons to enjoy plates such as *carne asada* tacos with cabbage, avocado, *pico de gallo*, jalapeño glaze and *cotija* cheese in extremely good conscience.

Grab a seat at these impressive farm-to-table restaurants...

Frontera Grill, Topolobampo, Xoco, Chicago, IL

A staunch advocate and pioneer of farm-to-table cuisine, celebrity chef Rick Bayless not only is largely responsible for introducing the US to authentic Mexican cuisine, he's also shown us the way a successful restaurateur can give back. Bayless's Frontera Farmer Association, founded in 2003, is a non-profit "committed to promoting small, sustainable farms serving the Chicago area by providing them with capital development grants." The organization has given 84 grants in four states to 60 family farms. Bayless's restaurants also have state-of-the-art recycling and composting programs. Plus, their vehicles use alternative fuels.

When people in the US think of **farm-to-table** fare, their minds tend to go to the earnest food of the American heartland. But the standards of organics, sustainability, and low food miles cross many cultures, especially in the Latin diaspora. And many of those examples are right here at home. Following are some of the best *finca-a-mesa* kitchens across the country.

ABC Cocina, New York, NY


Superchefs Jean-Georges Vongerichten and Dan Kluger, the team that put forth one of NYC's greenest restaurants, ABC Kitchen, repeated the formula with a Pan Latin accent. Within the same building as its *compadre*, the Cocina version also promises fresh, safe ingredients on a seasonal menu that is "globally artistic and cultivating a healthy relationship on our tables and for the planet." Dishes include grilled beets with *pimenton* cheese, sherry and herbs, while the seasonally-inspired guacamole swings from sweet peas in spring to ruby grapefruit in winter.

Criollo, Flagstaff, AZ

The "handcrafted Latin-inspired local food" here capitalizes on the farms and ranches of the Southwest. Even the décor, made largely from pine, is locally

Mayan Café, Louisville, KY

"Indigenously inspired" from the cooking traditions of the Mayans, farm-to-table fare is what Yucatan native chef Bruce Ucan grew up eating. Coca Cola is banned here and juices are made in house. The wine is organic and biodynamic; the beer, locally-brewed; the spirits, boutique and artisanal. Dishes such as oven-roasted rabbit with pumpkin seed *mole* with fried plantains and grilled cactus demonstrate his point-of-view, while the restaurant also retains a commitment to recycling, composting, using biodegradable products and earth-friendly cleaning supplies.



1919, San Juan, PR

Offering a menu that is 60% local is no easy feat on an island; but chef Juan Jose Cuevas has the tools to make it happen: he spent time, after all, as the executive chef at the farm-to-table icon Blue Hill in New York. His cooking makes an effort to reduce the need for imported ingredients and is spurring a growing support for island farmers, too. Dishes like veal chop and cheek with organic carrot fricassee, creamed parsley and whole grain mustard is exemplary of how the *Isla del Encanto* got its agro back.

Nopalito, San Francisco, CA

Two locations spread the local, organic, sustainable gospel in the Golden Gate City. Both spots truly celebrate their philosophically-aligned purveyors with an exhaustive list of local dairy, produce, meat, seafood, wine, beer and spirit providers. Earthy treats such as sweet potato tamale with yellow corn masa and chile, peanut, sesame and pumpkin seed salsa, prove the love of the land here.