

GLOBAL FOODS AND MACROBIOTICS

by Melanie Brown Waxman and Anna Mackenzie

This is a concise presentation of the discoveries Melanie and I have made on our journey around the world, via home research and Skype. We look at the food humans have eaten for millennia – how it has been grown, and the primary methods chosen for its' preparation. We're fascinated by the similarities of traditional diets worldwide, whatever the climate, and the customs around eating, sharing and health.

Many foods have been introduced from one country to another through invasion, and adapt to different environmental conditions. For example the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Portuguese who spread maize and cassava through Africa, and the Spanish, Dutch and English spread the potato and sugar widely.

From these findings, we present some ideas on how to broaden the image and range of macrobiotic eating habits.

The journey of your food



Nicaragua



WHOLE GRAINS

Throughout the world many cultures have cooked grains with vegetables and beans. Often they are prepared with more water such as risotto or paella. Soft cooked grains are more relaxing and easier to digest.

Porridge has also been used in almost all countries from Russia to Ethiopia. It has a long history as a staple food and was often used as a snack. All kinds of whole grains and also dried peas (pease porridge in the UK) and beans. Rice, oats, millet, maize, sorghum, wheat, buckwheat, and barley have been included. Porridge is considered extremely strengthening. Many cultures consider it to be vital for pregnant women especially after birth, for energy and health. Porridge is made from the whole grain, flakes or ground into flour.



Millets

It is also very important to look at ways to increase diversity and to start using less well known grains. For example, there are many different kinds of millet. The small millets are an especially nutrient-rich food source traditionally grown and consumed by subsistence farmers in Asia and Africa. These include finger millet, foxtail millet, kodo millet, proso millet, barnyard millet and little millet. Local farmers value the small millets for their nutritional and health benefits, tolerance to extreme stress, including drought, and ability to grow under low nutrient input conditions.

Another interesting grain that is not widely used is feekeh which comes from young wheat and is used in the middle east.

Beans are one of the longest cultivated plants



BEANS & LENTILS

Usually dried and stored, beans and lentils are put into stews and soups in most cultures, and also cooked and ground to become hummus and/or mixed with grain to make falafal or dough balls also added to stews. Also eaten across the Middle East as flat bread with pickles for breakfast. Chickpeas, Fava, Field, Pinto, Kidney, Aduki, there are so many and Blackeye Peas. Known for their ability to keep nitrogen in the soil. Lentil crops sprayed with chemicals and harvested by one huge machine as agri-business are not quite the same.



Indigenous vegetables

VEGETABLES

Are grown everywhere, roots, onions, greens. Different in each country. Often part of the soup or stew with grain or dough. Wild roots are dug up in dry open landscapes. Strong wild greens are picked and added as the last ingredient. Often strong green leaves are used to wrap other ingredients to cook over the flame or in the pot. Many of these leaves impart bacteria helpful to the digestion. Okra and portulaca can withstand drought.



Sea Vegetables

SEAWEEEDS

First came approximately three and half billion years ago. In Japan they have been used for at least 2,000 years. Seaweeds were also used as medicine by the Romans and fed to animals in ancient Greece. In the UK seaweed harvesting became popular in 1200Ad. Today in Ireland the red algae, dulse, is still sold on the beaches. Hawaii harvested up to 60 kinds of sea plants and incorporated them in daily meals, medicine and even as decoration.



NUTS AND SEEDS

Most often nuts and seeds have been gathered, dried and ground to a flour or paste, often added to beans and different grain flours, or put with pastry, dried fruit and honey to make sweet puddings. Many are ground and mixed with herbs and oil to enrich the milk for Mothers to feed their babies. The nutrients in seeds have been considered difficult to digest until they are ground or cooked, and in Australia millstones have been found that are over 30,000 years old, with identifiable seed remains on them. In all countries they are used as extra nutrition.



Red Currant



White Currant



Strawberry



Loganberry



Boysenberry



Silvanberry



Raspberry



White Alpine



Youngberry



Tayberry



Marionberry



Gooseberry



Black Currant



Waldo Black Berry



Josta berry

FRUITS

Many varieties of fruit are disappearing from the markets. In the past, over 20 different types of berries were used. Today, raspberries, blueberries, strawberries and blackberries are most widely sold. There are over 7,500 different kinds of apple in the world and yet supermarkets only offer a few. It is important to visit and support local farmers who are trying to preserve these wonderful and diverse fruits that are at risk of disappearing altogether.



DRIED FRUITS

Dried fruit have long been prized for their sweet taste, nutritive value, and excellent shelf life. Eating dried fruit dates back to the hunter-gatherers who ate wild grapes that had been sun dried into raisins. By 3000 BC, the Egyptians were cultivating fruit, such as apricots, raisins and dates, along with nuts and spices. In the Arabian desert dates sustain travelers through great heat.

From the Middle East, dried fruit spread through Greece to Italy where they became a major part of common meals. In ancient Rome raisin breads were popular at breakfast along with cooked grains, beans and cultured milk. Raisins were so valued that they transcended the food realm and became rewards for successful athletes and a premium barter currency. Deservire, from Latin, to serve well became “dessert” a much deserved reward. In 1500’s France Un seve desservir – served after the main meal was cleared.



SPICES

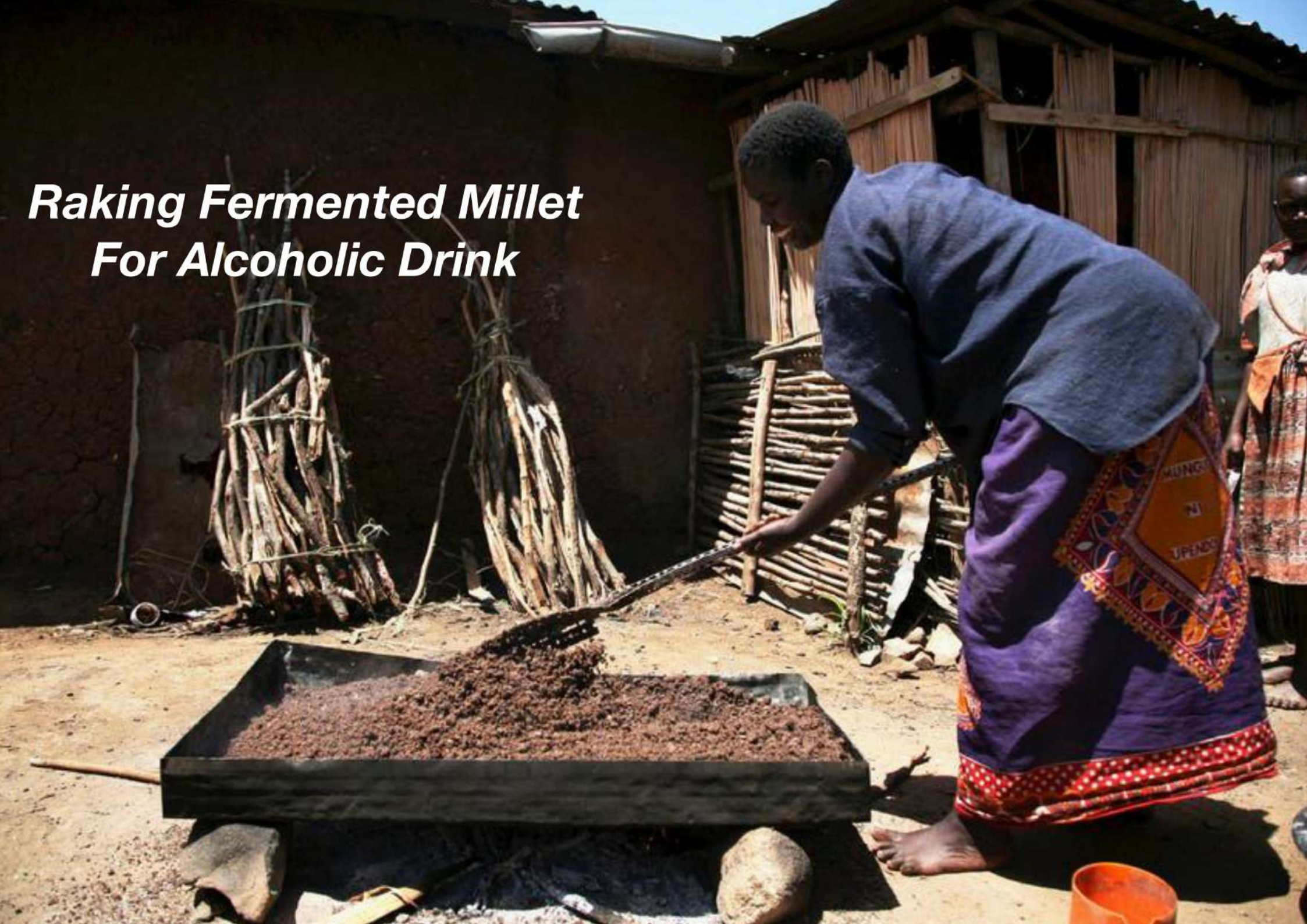
These are often associated with hot climates, however, in colder climates – cinnamon, garlic, horseradish, bay leaf, dill, ginger, cloves and nutmeg, were used. Many of these spices date back to the Middle Ages where they were used in everyday life to add flavor and nutrition. The worlds most popular spice is cumin.

FERMENTATION AND PICKLES

In this picture the woman in Africa is turning over millet that has been fermented and is now ready to put with liquid to make a drink. The fermentation helps to grow beneficial microbes called probiotics that improve intestinal microbial status. They help degrade phytic acid and mycotoxins and improve digestion. Many of these are non-alcoholic such as Kavas in Sweden.

It is very interesting indeed that different fermentation or/and pickling methods, have been used throughout the world, in all climatic conditions, for over 6,000 years. Illustrations can be seen on stone carvings from many countries, notably Sumarian. Pickled foods are used as side dishes at almost every meal, in every culture and fermented drinks used as frequently. Not only a way to preserve and store a lot of food but with extraordinary benefit for the health of the human digestive system.

***Raking Fermented Millet
For Alcoholic Drink***





Pickles & Preserves



TEAS

Teas made from flowers have a long history and go way way back. Some commonly used are rose, hibiscus, chrysanthemum, dandelion, chamomile, jasmine or ecinachea.

They are simple to brew and have many benefits such as relaxation, weight loss, cleanse, lower high blood pressure, help digestive, skin and hair issues, and immunity.

Teas from flowers are easy to include in any macrobiotic practice. Herbal teas are also marvelous for health and include basil, lemon verbena, fennel, nettle or mint.

Herbal & Flowering Teas





***Diversity through
herbs***



HERBS

Most countries in the world have used herbs and wild plants to flavor food and increase the nutritional content. In Denmark, the Vikings were familiar with many wild plants and herbs. These were classic Nordic plants like dill, juniper, caraway, mugwort, chicory, yarrow, plantain, mustard seed, wild garlic and horse radish. Other herbs grew there including coriander, marjoram, mint, thyme and cilantro.

FRESH HERBS

Are way more potent than in supplement form. Herbs are vital for carrying microbes to the gut. Discovering and using local herbs is a wonderful way to increase diversity and nutrition in our diets. They are one of the easiest plants to grow in a small garden or in pots on a window sill.

Tapas & Mezze



COOKING STYLES

In the past most local foods were cooked into stews or steamed. Today, foods are fried in poor quality oil which contributes to many health problems including heart disease, high cholesterol, weight gain, and diabetes.

Stews have been made throughout the world using all kinds of vegetables and proteins. They provide strong, stable energy and also help to satisfy cravings for sweets and sugar. Macrobiotics has always excelled in using a variety of cooking styles to enhance the energy and nutrition of food. Many cultures serve an array of small side dishes with different ingredients, flavors and textures. This is a marvelous way to create diversity and has been used in macrobiotics. Spain, Middle East, China, India, and Japan enjoy this style of food preparation as well as Africa and Northern Europe. Fermentation and preserving is used worldwide also.



TRADITION AND CULTURE

Every country honours its' common values through their agriculture, seasonal food preparation and the social importance of eating together to nourish the family and community with a spirit of sharing and digesting for a healthy life. To facilitate discussion and diplomacy and celebrate occasions that keep the culture intact. Food is group oriented, achieved by mutual effort, to eat every day and to treat guests'. Every culture offers thanks, respect and greeting; finish food that is offered; and takes pride in emotional control while eating together. Always talk about family before discussing business, and only end a meeting when everything is settled. In parts of Africa is a saying that means, we all work together. Harambee!



**Shared food
nourishes on a
deeper level**

SUMMARY

The diversity of foods has been slowly shrinking. In the past 50 years it has shrunk by 68%. In 1980, the Regan administration subsidized corn and wheat thinking it would help eradicate hunger in the world. However, it has come with a big price. Industrialized farming (plus increased use of pesticides) has created a loss of diversity from wild pollinating insects, birds, to crustaceans and fungi.

Nearly 4000 wild food species are in decline. Large-scale farming has encouraged specific foods like soy, rice, wheat, dairy, and palm oil. Nine make up most of the worlds total crop production. The effect on our health has been drastic and heart disease, obesity and diabetes have risen greatly.

It is important to understand that humans and nature are one. Less diversity is linked to less minerals in the soil and to poor gut health in the human.

Macrobiotics can use biodiversity in response to climate change challenges and include foods that are nourishing to the environment. 6000 different plants can actually be used in our diets but today only about 200 are widely eaten.

It is important for each of us to start researching our local area and to discover which traditional foods can be re-introduced into our daily meals. For many years macrobiotics has been linked to a Japanese style diet, often to the detriment of local foods and preparations, that are also healing, strengthening and could be more suited to a country and climate. We do not suggest abandoning these amazing foods from Japan but to include a more global viewpoint.

This report shows how we can begin to broaden our approach, increase diversity and also use little known but nutritious foods that can feed and nourish an ever-growing global population.

Thanks to Denny, Susan and Teresa who had to leave the group early on.

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Macrobiotic

Global

Diversity

