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I recently returned from the International Food Blogger Conference held in Sacramento, CA. I knew I would be outside my comfort zone at this event. I am not a foodie (not even close) and I don't blog about food. But I do blog about *where your food comes from*. Sacramento is known as America's farm-to-fork capital. Here are some highlights and reflections from my trip.

My goal for the conference was to learn what makes food bloggers tick, what motivates them and to make some foodie connections. And I am happy to say I accomplished my goals.

Highlights - The Farm Tour

Sacramento wants to be known as the farm-to-table capital of the world. And rightly so. The Sacramento Delta area, which is the where all the water streams from the mountains and ultimately heads to the ocean, is home to many varieties of produce.

Early Friday morning a number of us embarked on a farm tour to an endive farm and a pear orchard. Now I am going to be honest, I had no idea what an endive is. Thank goodness for Google.

First, I found out I didn't know how to pronounce the word. I pronounced it's written--En Dive. I was wrong. Endive is pronounced *ON DEEV*. I also didn't know there was only one endive farm, the [California Endive farm](#), in North America. Endive is not grown naturally--you will never find it growing in nature. Let me explain.

The process of growing endive starts with planting the chicory root plant. Chicory is a root plant and honestly looks like a chunky carrot. Once the chicory has grown to maturity it is harvested and put into cold storage--about 29 degrees. The below freezing temperatures does not kill the plant because of the high sugar content within the root. But rather, the cold temperatures puts it into a dormancy state.

The next step is to take the chicory root and plant them into trays and place them into a dark and moist room. Think of growing mushrooms. When placed in these conditions, a bulb-like plant starts to grow on top of the chicory root crown. Crazy, I know. After a few weeks, the endive is harvested (which is just the top of the plant) by snapping it off the chicory crown. The rest of the root is then chopped and used as cattle feed.

So how is Endive used? Typically it is put in salads. We were served endive during a meal that day and it was tasty. Our Endive Farm tour guide was the owner of the farm up until two weeks prior to our tour. He learned to grow endive by traveling to Europe and worked under some endive growers, where he learned the trade. It is very difficult to grow.

Pear Orchard

Our next stop was the Stillwater Pear Orchard. We were greeted by the family owners of the orchard. There are only four large pear orchards in the U.S. And did you know that it takes ten 10 years before a pear tree bears fruit? That's a long time to wait for the first pear!

When we arrived, workers who hand pick the pears were working diligently. The orchard also packages the pears and sells them to various outlets under the Stillwater name. And to our surprise, our meal in the orchard included an endive salad and a fresh pear dessert, using the pears from the orchard!

Network with Food Bloggers

The focus of this conference was farm-to-fork and when you think about it, isn't *all food farm-to-fork*? One of my first encounters came the first morning at breakfast. I happened to sit by Jessica who works for a company that grows the [Arctic Apple](#). If you are not familiar with arctic apples, they are a [modified apple which suppresses the enzyme that causes apple to brown](#). So imagine apples without browning! Can't wait to buy my first one.

The night before the last day we had a sit down meal outside the hotel. It was at this point that we had a near "[Portlandia](#)" moment. The chef came out and talked about the chicken we were about to devour. Our chicken came from [Mary's Farm](#). He proceeded to tell us about how great a life the chickens had on Mary's Farm. I understand that people do want to know more about where their food comes from, but for me personally, this narrative was a little too much. He used lots of words to make us feel better about our food. I realize I have a different perspective from others because I farm and I know a lot of farmers, which means I know we take good care of our animals. But those outside of ag want to be reassured animals are well taken care of.

I get it.

Farmers Market

On my California bucket list I was to visit a farmers market while in Sacramento. And there was one

about 10 blocks away from our hotel. Consumers in California are so fortunate they have access to farmers markets 12 months out of the year (compared to our three). And yes, the produce looked fabulous!

So what did I learn in Sacramento?

Most of the food bloggers I talked with have a history that encompasses the love of food. Many talked about how important food was to them growing up and how they had close family members who loved to cook and good food. That was something I could relate to.

But, at other times, I felt like an outsider. When one of the speakers made the comment that we needed to pay more for our food, the room clapped enthusiastically. I couldn't clap. I immediately thought about those families that cannot afford to pay more for their food. What about them? Growing up, I was that family.

Which takes me to the next point. I am glad we have food choices and we should celebrate those food choices. I feel it's important that we maintain ALL food choices, even if we don't agree with those choices. In addition, we need to keep the marketing honest.

I also realized how thankful I am to all types of farmers. If I had to survive on what I grow in my garden, all my meals would consist of tomatoes this year.

But perhaps my biggest reminder is that *all farmers are farm-to-table farmers*. No matter what kind of farmer we are. It's easy to take offense when I hear the term "know your farmer" or "buy local." I am a farmer and people can get to know me so I qualify for the "know your farmer" part. But because they can't buy from me directly, all of a sudden I am dropped to a lower tier. Yes, my pride takes a hit because I don't feel like I am the farmer consumers want. Or maybe not even a "real" farmer. But *I am proud of how we farm*. I am *proud of how we take of our animals and the environment*. And I know there are families (including my own) who appreciate and enjoy the food we raise and grow, even though they may not be very vocal.

I am sharing information about the food bloggers I met. Check out their sites!

[My Imperfect Kitchen](#), [Eazy Peazy Mealz](#), [Adrianna's Best Recipes](#), [Okanagan Specialty Fruits \(Arctic Apples\)](#), [Fine Wine Poet](#), [Dessert Now Dinner Later](#), [Mimi Avocado](#), [Lespritdescuisine](#), [That Susan Williams](#), [Tanya Seibold](#)