



Nutrition Milestone: the First Mediterranean Diet Roundtable

Natasha Lardera (April 23, 2015)



The first edition of the Mediterranean Diet Roundtable has just concluded. The event, produced by Accent PR and put together by its President, Daniela Puglielli, has brought together different segments of the U.S. Food Industry willing to capitalize on the health benefits of the Mediterranean Diet for their respective audiences.

Participants came from all over the nation and representing major colleges and universities, with giants of the leverage of Premier, Sodexo, Compass Group and elite health care facilities like the Memorial Sloan Cancer Center. It was a great networking opportunity for those interested in doing business with the food service as well as retail and government contract. In attendance also representatives of different trade missions: Greece, Cyprus, Spain but also France and Turkey. Italy was represented by iconic sponsors Barilla and Colavita.

It all started with a glamorous night the day before the symposium delicious appetizers and got a chance to meet. Then the first national event took place at the Graduate Center of CUNY University, the MDR was not a scientific gathering but an informative and resourceful setting and especially a



networking event.

"The fact is that obesity in America is indeed an issue," Daniela Puglielli, president of Accent PR told i-italy, "and, paradoxically, people who live in economically poor countries facing the Mediterranean live better and longer! It's been scientifically proven that nutrition has a decisive effect on that. That got me thinking and I realized that it's important to introduce, in places like schools, hospitals, work cafeterias, as well as restaurants and cafes, meaning all places where food is prepared for you, new, healthy products. Of course, people also have to learn how to use them in order to eat less but to eat better, using high quality products."

In 2010, the Mediterranean Diet was recognized by UNESCO as a "Global Intangible Cultural Heritage," and it is a world-renowned symbol of a unique synergy between nature and culture, distinctive of Mediterranean countries. Research has shown that the traditional Mediterranean Diet reduces the risk of certain illnesses. A study conducted on more than 1.5 million healthy adults, demonstrated that following a Mediterranean Diet was associated with a reduced risk of death from heart disease and cancer, as well as a reduced incidence of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases (source: Mayo Clinic, ranked #1 Hospital in the nation).

"The goal of the MDR is to increase the presence of healthy products, distinctive of the Mediterranean Regions, in American cuisine and menu choices." Puglielli continued, "The full-day program includes a discussion on all levels of nutrition aspects, menu engineering, stores and cafeteria strategies, best practices in mass feeding programs: attendees gain a better understanding of the health values and commercial benefits of sourcing Mediterranean products for their respective clients/customers."

The day started with Sara Baer Sinnott, President of Oldways, a real icon of the Mediterranean Diet in America. They are the ones who came up with the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid, the nutrition guide that suggests the types and frequency of foods that should be enjoyed every day. The scientific panel was led by Italian professor Giovanni Scapagnini, M.D. Ph.D. who also serves on the "International Network of the Centers on Genetics Nutrition and Fitness for Health," in Washington, D.C. The panel focused on both the positive and negative elements found in food and their effect on our organism. Among the speakers was the scientist Artemis Simopoulos, the founder and president of the Center for Genetics, Nutrition and Health, a nonprofit educational organization in Washington, DC, and the first who spoke about the importance of a balanced ratio of omega-6/omega-3 fatty acids in health and disease and in growth and development.

The day continued with more panels: one dedicated to the culinary system in colleges and universities (among the participants there were representatives of U-Mass Dining, Yale, Davidson College and Rice University). The second panel was for the procurement business with representatives from Premier, Sodexo, restaurant Associates/Compass Group and Memorial Sloan Cancer Center.

The event was an opportunity to witness the dynamics that guide each sector in the realization of different menus, in the choice of ingredients and in the strategies used to "pilot" the people's preferences for certain foods. The afternoon, preceded by a delicious lunch featuring Mediterranean specialties hailing from Italy, Spain, Greece, Cyprus and Turkey, continued with an analysis of the classification of foods within the Mediterranean Diet presented by nutritionist Elena Paravantes, who came directly from Greece! Following that there was the presentation "Mediterranean Diet, consumerism and the secret world of food safety" by Susan Reef (President, U.S. Food Safety) which focused on the culinary routine of the American population and how they developed through the years.

Last but not least there was a presentation by the Camera di Commercio di Campobasso and one by Anna Rosales of Barilla, who spoke about the benefits of pasta.

"Two words come to mind to describe the first MDR - educational and inspirational, as well as a wonderful opportunity for networking. I learned so much more about the health benefits of the Mediterranean Diet and additional attributes of some of the main components such as olive oil. I came away from the Summit wanting to implement even more Mediterranean concepts on our



menu,” Ken Toong, Director of Dining Services at U-Mass, said.

“After participating in the first Mediterranean Diet Roundtable event, I came away impressed by the scope of the material presented. The agenda provided an excellent mix of scientific research, culinary overviews and practical application case studies, all focused on the role that traditional Mediterranean regional cuisines can play in a healthy diet. I particularly liked the scientific overviews of recent research and the noncommercial market segment case studies that showed how these principles can be adapted for large-volume meal production in real life circumstances,” John Lawn, former editor in chief of Food Magazine added.

“We are working on two formats of the MDR ” Daniela Puglielli concluded “The first featuring a tasting of several recipes, the latter presenting further insight into the topic in order to increase awareness and get things moving along.”

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