

Excerpted from November 11, 2013 interview with Johnathan Corcoran, Middlebury, VT (AU2014-1006) for the AFC Archie Green Fellowship Project (VFC2014-0005)

Jonathan Corcoran: Local Food, Regional Culture

Jonathan Cocoran: Well, I grew up in Rome, Italy, and lived there till I was about 14 years old. And it was a very interesting time to be in Italy because basically, all the food you ate, you know, had been harvested the day before. People still shopped at uh, you know, markets every day for whatever they needed. The supermarkets had, were just beginning to arrive. And the quality of food was just incredible. I think if you've ever traveled out to California, you know, you just taste that difference because you're just so much closer. You know, whether it's in a restaurant or at somebody's home. And I think, I think that made a big impression on me. And when I came over here, I guess it was around 1968, early 70s, I was just shocked at, going into a supermarket and just seeing what was available. Everything, you know especially the produce, it just looked really tired, really dead. No flavor and enormous size. You know, everything was kind of pumped up big. And yeah, and people were still eating mostly canned and frozen food. So there was not a lot of variety in terms of fresh food, and it clearly was all designed to, you know, make the trip from wherever it had come from. But, you know, like there was one kind of lettuce and that was iceberg lettuce, which just has no flavor. You know, it just has some crunch and that's about it. Yeah. So yeah, just touring the supermarket. It just made...it was just a new world to me. And then the other thing about the time that I was growing up in Italy, because Italy changed dramatically while we were there. They call it "El Boom", you know, and it was, what happened in in the 60s, particularly where there was just this, you know, huge outmigration from rural towns, villages to the cities for work and Italian industry boomed, but you could still go back to those villages and see...making their own pasta, you know, and drying it outside. And if anybody's traveled to Italy, you know, you know that you can, you know, have a certain dish at a particular village here. And you know, you just go 10 miles away and they have their own version of it, or something completely different. It's just all enfolded in history and in traditions. And as a result, you know, just there's just so much diversity and variety and richness. And I'm really grateful that I landed here in Vermont, you know. Obviously, with stops between, but I love Vermont for that reason. I think there is just, you know, if you're from Bristol, that immediately tells somebody something and they'll have an opinion about that. And you know, or you're from Monkton, you know. God forbid it's only, you know, 10 miles away or whatever, but completely...It's like the land informs the people and the history of a particular town and some of the characters there, the industries that develop there. But I just love that about Vermont, and it reminds me a lot of Italy.