

## What's Cooking

# Notes from the Canadian Chefs' Congress

By Jan Napier

### The uncertain future of organic food

"You have to wonder why there are so many people that are sick in hospitals and have cancer...I don't find that in my circle of friends, of people that I live with, who eat clean and pure food." This statement came from Chef Michael Stadtländer, renowned Canadian chef and food activist, during a panel discussion on genetically modified (GM) alfalfa at the Canadian Chefs' Congress, held last month in Grand Pré, Nova Scotia.

Chef Stadtländer is the founder and President of the Canadian Chefs' Congress (CCC) and his vision was to "bring together chefs, winemakers, growers, farmers, fishers, foragers and artisanal food producers from across Canada to celebrate our unique food culture in a setting that would encourage both discussion and debate as well as the building of new relationships." Chef Craig Flinn, Chives Bistro, organized the event on the provincial level.

Celebrity Chef Michael Smith was also on board. "It's extraordinarily important that we get together to share our vision; you know we are all sort of disciples of Michael's and thrilled to be on Team Stadtländer," he said.

Fabulous food was featured at the Best of Canada luncheon, the Nova Scotia Kitchen Party, the Taste of Nova Scotia luncheon, and a pig roast with all of the trimmings. Keynote addresses from Michael Ablemen and David Cohlmeier addressed serious food issues facing the world. Workshops included such topics as: chefs as activists and agents of change; sustainable food; lobster; the disappearing butcher; cheese making; Canada's food history; Acadian/Cajun cuisine, and much more.

About GM alfalfa, Chef Stadtländer continued to say, "I like to have a choice. I live in a democracy. I want to choose organics. I want to know what's in my food. I want to know where my food comes from, and in this eleventh hour before GM alfalfa is potentially introduced into Canada, and the contamination to organic crops and animals expected, organic farmers are deeply worried about the future of organic foods."

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Chef Stadtländer urged chefs from across Canada to be part of World Food Day on October 16th, and to make it Canada GM Free Alfalfa Day. "Make dinner in your restaurants connecting to media. There is no need for GM alfalfa in our society and on our land."

For more information about GM Alfalfa visit: [www.cban.ca](http://www.cban.ca)

### On a lighter l'Acadie note

I was wildly excited to have the privilege of attending the Congress and to taste the dishes (close to 100 possibilities)

prepared by some of Canada's very best chefs and sous chefs.

And with the importance of Acadian history in food culture at the heart of the event's theme, my half Acadian self was deeply proud.

The event opened with a parade of flags carried by top chefs representing each province and territory and an American flag carried by guest New Orleans chef, Stephen Stryjewski, before they took their food stations at the Best of Canada Luncheon. A First Nations flag bearer led the procession. Before the ceremony, Chef Stadtländer handed off the Canadian flag to be carried by first year NSCC culinary student, Francis Kelder.

I asked Chef Jamie Kennedy, an Order of Canada recipient, what he hoped the students would learn from the congress. He said, "Kids should be taking in the political position of everyone here. I believe we are all on the same page about sharing food, but the theme of this year's congress, the family farm, is a model of what was current a hundred years ago. So progress for us is to go back and restart where we left off a hundred years ago, with feed technology that we have now, and to apply to the ideology that you are working in harmony with nature and so developing a gastronomy and food culture that reflects where you live and the seasons of the year."

Some of my favourite local top chefs were there and I was delighted to see Chef Claude Aucoin, whose fine cuisine I remember well from his Digby Pines days. Chef Aucoin and Chef Bob Dowden were directing 22 first-year NSCC culinary students in their service of an extensive breakfast for approximately 300 people. After only a week and a half of classes, the students spent three days prepping the



Chef Michael Stadtländer (right), founder and President of the Canadian Chefs' Congress, plating with sous chef Falani Thomas-Clifford at last month's event. (Photo: Jan Napier)

meal, making everything from scratch, including the condiments. Chef Aucoin took part in a fascinating discussion on Acadian/Cajun food culture and shared delicious memories of the cuisine he grew up with in the village of Cheticamp.

In the spirit of the Acadian theme, here's a recipe for a simple Acadian classic that I grew up with, a chicken stew with summer savoury.

### Fricot à la Poule (Chicken Stew with Summer Savoury)

One small chicken (2 lbs), cut in pieces  
2 onions, chopped  
2 Tbsp butter  
1 Tbsp flour

4 large potatoes, peeled and cubed  
2 medium carrots, peeled and sliced  
8 cups water  
Salt and pepper (up to 1 Tbsp salt and 1 tsp pepper)  
1 Tbsp summer savoury  
Chicken bouillon cube (not original but can add a lot of flavour)

In a large pot, melt the butter and brown the chicken on all sides. Remove chicken and stir-fry onions for a minute or two. Add flour and continue to stir for one minute. Add the chicken, bring to a boil, and then reduce to a simmer for 30 minutes or until chicken is tender. Remove chicken and discard bones and skin. Add bite-sized pieces of chicken back to the

pot and all remaining ingredients. Bring back to a simmer and continue cooking until vegetables are tender, about 20 minutes. Add additional salt and pepper to taste.

View more of Jan Napier's photos of the Canadian Chefs' Congress 2012 at [www.jnapier.ca](http://www.jnapier.ca)



Jan Napier is a freelance writer/photographer with a penchant for people, pets, places and food. Visit her at [www.jnapier.ca](http://www.jnapier.ca) or [www.viewpointgallery.ca](http://www.viewpointgallery.ca)