



You are what you eat

I love food, all sorts of food. I'm always willing to explore new tastes and culinary cultures. With my travels around the world, I want to have an open mind – and mouth. Serve it, and I'll eat it. Well, almost all of it.

Over the years I have become more health conscious. While I can't say that I am an ethical eater, I am concerned with the health effects of food.

For me, food is energy. That's why I've started exploring a number of plant-based foods and smoothies of all sorts.

They give me more energy than fish, meat or poultry, and the taste is not too bad either.

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WILD FOOD ON
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FINLAND HAS ALWAYS

had a food culture that's somewhere between East and West. Up here in the North, we were slower than in the South in developing agriculture, that is, learning how to exploit land. Consequently we have always lived from the fruits of our forests and lakes.

Eeropekka Rislakki of the ELO Foundation, which promotes Finnish food culture, puts it well. He says that while others breed their livestock and farm their fish, we hunt and fish. While others artificially grow fruit or mushrooms in greenhouses using chemicals, we pick wild berries and mushrooms in the forest. And when others go to a hotel for a holiday, we go to a "mökki," the summer cottage in the countryside.

Our culinary culture is lively and wild. It keeps on moving and changing. I can't say that our food culture in the 1970s was world class. I do, however, think that nowadays Finnish food is fantastic and the restaurant scene is awesome.

FOR ME FINNISH FOOD is pure, natural, functional, and it's tasty and healthy. I think Finland has the best wild food on the planet and we should do our utmost to brand it around the world.

Anyone can buy organic produce, but in Finland we have the possibility of reaping the benefits of real wild food. Our forests are full of lingonberries, blueberries, and cloudberries, not to mention chantarelles and other mushrooms. And our lakes and rivers are full of wild fish.

We just need to find better ways of maximising the potential harvest. Much of

it is left to rot in the forest, even though wonderful berry and mushroom picking traditions remain strong throughout Finland. We have a concept called "everyman's right." It means that anyone can move around the country and use natural resources (for

example, pick berries) as long as they don't cause harm to the land or disturb those living near by.

CHEF SAMI TALLBERG has written a great book called *Wild Herbs*, which portrays 59 wild plants in Finland along with delicious recipes for each. How about scrambled eggs with goat's beard and sweet cicely? Or grilled zucchini with blackthorn flowers, or bilberry pie with cherry blossom sauce? Not only do they sound good, they look and taste good.

You are what you eat. Well, I want to be wild. Join me and take a walk on the wild side of Finnish food.

Bon appetit! ●

ALEXANDER STUBB is Finland's minister for European affairs and foreign trade.

