

## A movable feast

### **FOOD MOVEMENT Sustainable Table rolls through the country to promote a philosophy that's about respect for food, farms and people**

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Sustainable Table found the fork in the road and took it to the heart of American foodies.

The educational group's "Eat Well Guided Tour of America" began Aug. 2 in West Hollywood, Calif. and concluded at last Sunday's Farm Aid concert at Randall's Island in New York City.

Sustainable Table director and founder Diane Hatz led the tour from a colorful, 45-foot long biodiesel rock 'n' roll tour bus formerly used by Tom Petty, the Allman Brothers and others. Yes, it was a Greenhound instead of a Greyhound.



**Sustainable Table founder Diane Hatz (from left), bus driver Sharon Leete and consultant Karen Hudson dig into pies during a Chicago stop on a cross-country tour of local foods.**

*(Jean Lachat/Sun-Times)*

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The tour hit 25 towns ranging from Chico, Calif., to Missoula, Mont. The group visited family farms, farmers markets and restaurants that serve local and sustainably-produced food.

"The sustainable food movement is no longer a trend," Hatz said during a break from the group's Aug. 28 visit to the Green City Market in Lincoln Park. "It is a way of life."

The tour bus often echoed with the sounds of Willie Nelson CDs blaring "On the Road Again," and a color photo of Farm Aid founder Nelson was posted near the

front of the bus. At other times, the bus was silent with people blogging and listening to iPods.

Like lane-merging on the Dan Ryan, some people still struggle with the definition of sustainability. In general terms, sustainable agriculture is a method of raising food that is healthy for consumers and animals, does not harm the environment, is humane for workers, provides a fair wage to the farmer and supports and enhances rural communities.

Sustainability is a lot about respect.

"Everybody has a different answer, which is part of the beauty of sustainability," Hatz said. "It is a philosophy. It's OK with a local farm that might use chemical fertilizer and everything else is organic. But they need to know what new pesticides do. Look at what's happening and make your own informed choice."

For example, the U.S. Department of Agriculture requires that a farm operate for three years without pesticides, herbicides or synthetic fertilizers before granting it an organic seal.

Hatz, bus driver Sharon Leete and filmmaker Steve Clack made the entire run. Others jumped on and off for legs of the trip. At night, the group left the bus and stayed in hotels.

The bus was parked near McCormick Place during the group's two-day stay in Chicago. It normally sleeps 12 but six bunks were removed for office space. The bus was equipped with Wi-Fi and roaming satellite television.

Leete smiled and said, "I've been driving rock 'n' roll tours for 17 years. I usually drive at night. This is interesting because now I'm seeing the country I've been driving in the dark for so long." Ironically, Leete grew up on a 365-acre sustainable farm in southern Connecticut.

Downstate farmer Karen Hudson met the nonprofit group in Illinois. The bus picked Hudson up near the fifth-generation, 1,170-acre grain and soybean farm she operates with her husband Rock Hudson (yes, it's his real name) near Kewanee.

"The fresh blood helps us energize," Hatz said.

Hudson is a founder and president of F.A.R.M. (Families Against Rural Messes), a grassroots organization formed in 1996 when large-scale factory farms targeted Illinois for expansion. The Chicago native has been educating the public on factory farming issues revolving around public health, food quality and air and water quality.

The exterior of the green bus featured the group's itinerary and characters from "The Meatrix," the critically acclaimed animated films of which Hatz is executive producer. "Meatrix" characters, such as "Moopheus" and others based on "The Matrix," expose disconcerting truths about factory farming.

The group also visited progressive places such as City Slicker Farm in urban Oakland, Calif., which offers produce based upon a customer's ability to pay.

"They have chicken. Tons of vegetables. Its all on a sliding scale," Hatz said. "If you don't have money, you can take anything you want. To me, that is sustainability. Everybody should be able to eat sustainable foods."

What did Hatz learn on the tour?

"I don't know if I actually believed that the sustainable movement was no longer a movement, but a premise," she said after a thoughtful pause. "It took a couple of weeks for me to get a feel of what we were experiencing. I learned that for people today who are involved with sustainable food, it's not just about food. Its about each other. Sharing.

"We had a pot luck in Lincoln, Nebraska and 100 people showed up. Nebraska wins for most food fed to one person in one day. These people didn't randomly think of something in a pot. They spent hours making gourmet concoctions. It's about a sense of community. We felt this everywhere. It's been nothing short of moving."

*For more on Sustainable Table and the connection between regional food and regional music, check out Dave Hoekstra's Scratch Crib blog at [blogs.suntimes.com/hoekstra](http://blogs.suntimes.com/hoekstra).*