Community

FoodWISE: Gigi Berardi's new book examines food choices

by Grow Northwest

Food. We all eat, need, and want it, but how much do we really think about our food choices, or even try? Gigi Berardi, long-time resident and professor at Western Washington University, hopes you do, and has released a new book guiding this very subject.

FoodWISE (standing for whole, informed, sustainable and experienced-based thinking), asks people to stop, think, and then act when making food choices, in the belief that eating is more rewarding the more we are connected to the sources of our food. And at the very least, in this busy world, to try and do so. Along the way, she shares stories of farmers and people right here in our northwest corner, and her experiences with food through the years. Teaching food and geography classes domestically and internationally, and growing a lot of her own food or acquiring locally, she also maintains the food blog FoodWISE.

In the making over seven years, and started as a classroom resource, the book is published by North Atlantic Books and was released Jan. 14. She is hosting several community events, including a FoodWISE lecture series at WWU.

The book is called FoodWISE: A Whole Systems Guide to Sustainable and Delicious Food Choices. In the book, Berardi explores the impact of our food choices on our health and the environment, and provides practical advice on how to make more sustainable choices.

As I write in the book, "Around the start of the twentieth century, saturated fat was heralded as one of the most important components of good health. Even early United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) dietary guidelines touted its vast benefits. Now, saturated fat is widely condemned. But—spoiler alert—it's about to get a serious makeover, as I'll discuss in Part 2.

With all this conflicting information, maybe it's no surprise that many of us are guided as much by our own feelings and ideas about food as by what anybody else tells us. Emotions and information sometimes clash over food—our mood and what we feel like eating versus what we know about what's in particular foods and what's "good for us." How much of us buy that muffin in the coffee shop because it seems just the ticket for what ails us, or have had a bowl of ice cream at bedtime because we feel blue? Mood ups and downs can lead to an awful lot of senseless eating, and it turns out that some foods can reinforce those mood swings."

"I see farmers as environmental stewards... Many farmers in western Washington are interested in teaching and learning— it's a very exciting time to be working here.

FoodWISE Lecture Series with Joel Salatin, Jan. 30
Gigi Berardi presents "Our Shared World of Food and Farming" with author and farm activist Joel Salatin. Free and open to the public, 10-11:30 a.m. in Communications Facility 115 at Western Washington University.

FoodWISE Lecture Series with Sister Noella Marcellino, Feb. 20
Gigi Berardi presents "Our Personal World of Food: Traditional Foods and Fats" with guest speaker Sister Noella Marcellino, known widely as "The Cheese Nun" and featured in Michael Pollan's Cooked book and docuseries on Netflix. Free and open to the public, 10-11:30 a.m. in Communications Facility 115 at WWU.

Celebrating FoodWISE with Gigi Berardi, Feb. 27
Gigi Berardi will discuss her experiences and celebrate the farmers and people in her book at 6 p.m. at The Restaurant at Twin Sisters Brewing, Bellingham. All welcome, donations accepted. Sweater Weather String Band performs, and Twin Sisters appetizers available.

Writing FoodWISE, March 11
Writing your stories, with Whatcom Writers and Publishers at 7 p.m., Nick’s Bella Marina (Skyline Room), 2615 S Harbor Loop Dr, Bellingham.

Gigi Berardi with her sheep during lambing season. COURTESY PHOTO

50 students at a time cook for the class. These potlucks are epic! Some of the students' recipes appear in the book.

We're going to get back in the kitchen as people realize how simple it can be, and wholesome, and inexpensive!

As I write, "Cooking FoodWISE isn't whipping up a perfect souffle or staging Instagram-worthy plates. It's learning to put together some tasty whole food dishes, even if with just a few simple ingredients. It's finding sources of local and fresh foods, and becoming familiar with what's available in what seasons. It's experimenting with a few new foods of ways of cooking, even if just a little bit. It's connecting with your friends to learn about other places to find ingredients, or other ways of preparing foods you're familiar with, or new dishes altogether."

It's lovely to read about your family's heritage, including your parents being from different backgrounds and some of the dishes in your childhood. What foods bring back fond memories of family and cooking together, and did you share them with your children?

Yes! Lasagna with fresh tomato sauce cooked for days and flavored with (now, our own venison) sausage (although my daughter's a lifelong vegetarian!), homemade breads, stir-fries, egg frittatas, fried cauliflower. The biggest and fondest memory, though, is sitting around a table eating together.

Farmers and producers in our region look forward to seeing you at these events and more! See FoodWISE, continued on page 6
Experience leads to empathy—the ability to understand and have compassion for other living beings—and empathy results in better decisions about food.

That was from an "environmental" Fulbright in Italy—there were only two that year for Europe—resilience in farm systems in Washington, catastrophic US farm and food policy (making US agriculture less resilient), disaster scenarios—and recovery—for food systems. I've also edited and contributed to books on international political food economy (World Food, Population, and Development—Frances Moore Lappe's Diet for a Small Planet fame wrote the foreword to it), soils (Agricultural Soil Loss: Processes, Policies, and Processes), and technological change in agriculture (Social Consequences and Challenges of New Agricultural Technologies—which really was a survey of technological change dating from the beginning of the last century! Imagine! Rural sociologists were concerned about the impacts of donkey-powered threshing machines!).

Plus, I’ve gardened all my life, and now have sheep that I milk and then make cheese. But...I’m also very curious—about everything. So one day I was in the Barnes and Noble bookstore on the Guide, and turned around and found I was in the diet section. My eyes focused on an intriguing title—Mindless Eating. It was by a scholar whose work was little followed these days, but it did get me to thinking about the fierce food beliefs I hold, and my students hold. Where do they come from? How do they get in the way of us making good food choices? So, I had the idea, then, to write a personal food memoir that addresses the fierce food beliefs we hold that lead us down problematic paths (like, no fat in our diet or lots of sugar in processed foods). I began the book in 2012, which is why we say FoodWISE was seven years in the making. The working title was "A Cultivated Life," but it was difficult to sell. Nevertheless, I kept reworking it, until one day I came across another book, by chance.

I was reading an issue of Real Simple and there was a column on happiness. The magazine featured the work of Barry Schwartz and Kenneth Sharpe in their book, Practical Wisdom: The Right Way to do the Right Thing. The authors were at Swarthmore College and as an undergraduate, that first year at Swarthmore, I had taken a class with Barry Schwartz on moral philosophy, so I knew about him. My professor for that class was a woman named Dr. June Besong, and she was a really good friend of Barry. She recommended him to me. So, I read the article and then the book, and I was just so impressed with the work and what it said about food. I thought, "Wow, that’s really interesting. I want to do something like that."