

Foodorama

Letter # 22: Traditional seeds in Costa Rica

By Foodorama, May 07, 2019



As we told you in our last letter, during our stay in Costa Rica, we met Eric, a Frenchman from the Kokopelli association who works on the protection of traditional seeds.



What is a traditional seed? Farmers need seeds to produce their fruits, vegetables and grains. To obtain these seeds, they can either buy them directly from seed sellers, or recover these seeds from their crops. For example the seeds of tomatoes are easily recoverable to grow new tomato plants. For corn, corn kernels are simply used to grow new seedlings.



Seed vendors only sell seeds listed in a reduced catalog. Other seeds not listed in this catalog cannot be sold. To increase production and profits, seed sellers have created modified seeds, called F1 hybrids (Filial 1 generation). These seeds are not reproducible, that is to say that farmers will not be able to use the seeds from their crops to re-sow the following year, as most farmers do. In addition, these more fragile F1 hybrid seeds are created to grow with certain fertilizers and pesticides sold by these same seed sellers. You imagine how farmers then become dependent on these sellers to buy each year new seeds, pesticides and fertilizers that go with them.



Fortunately, some associations are fighting to continue to produce and distribute (even illegally) traditional seeds. These traditional seeds are reproducible and there are multitudes of them - much more than what is listed in the catalog. More varieties means more different tastes and more biodiversity... Do you know that there are more than 12,000 varieties of tomatoes? How many do you know?



Eric grows hundreds of different plant species at home. Showing us his garden we taste strange fruits and leaves with the taste of garlic, sugar, lemon etc. He also tells us about all medicinal plants he possesses. And it falls to the point because Kalima has a stomach ache for a few days. He immediately makes us a "magic" herbal tea with lemongrass, sage and other herbs. We will not know if it is thanks to this tea, but the next day Kalima was already much better!



He regularly sends his seeds to farmers all over Latin America so that they can regain their independence from seed vendors. Once these farmers have received the peasant seeds, they can in turn recover the seeds from their harvest for sowing the following year! Eric tells us that we need to see the indigenous communities in Colombia who are also working actively to protect these old seeds. He gives us some contacts and we hope we can see them.



In the meantime, we have to leave Costa Rica and cross Panama. We follow the famous Panamerican road that connects Mexico to Argentina. Here we find once more the sweltering heat and lush wildlife of the region. In Costa Rica, we stop the time for a hike to a waterfall. We see the famous little dendrobates frogs, colorful but extremely poisonous. Indians use the poison of their skin to smear their arrows and kill immediately their prey.





Along the way, the screaming monkeys welcome us with their cries during our passage. They are a big dozen grouped in a tree, crushed by the heat. It's a pleasure to see all these wild animals in the wild!



The Panamerican route stops between Panama and Colombia. It is an area of virgin forest where there is no road. It's impossible for us to continue by land. The next challenge is to find a boat or a flight to reach Colombia from Panama.



See you soon for new adventures!

Sylvain and Kalima