



ANIS Étoilé Profile

Introducing ANIS Étoilé. . . .

By Anna Colibri, Marketing Consultant, Food Sovereignty Tours

ANIS Étoilé (pronounced ah-neece ay-twa-lay for non French speakers) is a not-for-profit food activist association based in Auvergne, France. For those who haven't been, Auvergne looks a little like California's Marin, with the addition of impressive volcanic formations. Because the soil has been enriched by volcanic action over millennia, it is an area of high and varied agricultural production. Although rural, the area supports an impressive number of dedicated food sovereignty and sustainability educators and activists, including ANIS Étoilé.

ANIS Étoilé was born in 2006 from the efforts of a group of nonprofits working on environmental education in Auvergne. Nathalie Grégoris, founding director, was working in environmental education when she teamed up with Céline Porcheron, a food scientist focused on food justice and the organic food movement who had recently settled in the area. The two quickly realized that organic food and food sovereignty were an important and effective way to reach French people with a message of change. Together, they formed an association and a board (of which Porcheron is a founding member) with local citizens.

ANIS Étoilé is a membership organization, but it functions a little more like a family. The board is comprised of food professionals and activists who have formed the type of bond created when people are passionate about what they are doing. ANIS Étoilé is providing logistical support for the France: Food Sovereignty and Artisan Production Tour (September 15-25, 2011) and is also one of the tour's featured organizations. To learn more about the tour, [click here](#).

ANIS Étoilé focuses on education in its broadest sense, providing pedagogic programs focusing on children; adult education such as workshops and train the trainer sessions and events including food workshops, film viewings and debates and community dinners. They are also a presence in local politics, educating politicians and implementing projects and creating resources used nationally to broaden the understanding and use of organic and sustainable food to encourage food sovereignty in France.

Is food sovereignty an issue in a rich country known for gourmet food? I spoke with Ms. Porcheron who said, "People don't always realize the complexity of what food sovereignty is. Food sovereignty is the ability of a country to decide on its own food system. However, in France we have been very influenced by outside forces and this is harming our people and our way of life." For example,

France now imports soy, mostly genetically modified, from the Americas, and grows corn to feed livestock. On the one hand, use of soy creates economic dependency for France and on the other hand, corn is not sustainable, mainly because of how water intensive it is to grow.

One of the ways in which France differs from the United States is the country's strong trade unions. France's largest utility union provides summer retreats for its members and their families. Based on the communist ideal of providing cultural education for all levels of society, the retreats offer programs ranging from music and dance to art, science and, of course, food preparation, to participants. ANIS Étoilé teaches cooking workshops and guides tours of local organic producers for the retreat centers, which are located across France. This partnership is one of the many innovative ways ANIS Étoilé educates the French and furthers their mission of increasing the use of organic and sustainable food in France.

The use of organics is an important issue in France because, as of now, only 2% of France's food production is organic. Although genetically modified foods are for the most part banned in France and in Europe as a whole, they have not managed to escape the use of genetically modified substances in their food chains (see above). France is, in fact, the 3rd heaviest user of agrochemicals in the world. Because of this the pesticide industry maintains a strong political and economic influence in France. ANIS Étoilé aims to change this situation.

One of the first things people want to know is, "What does ANIS Étoilé mean?" In English, it means star anise, an Indian spice that is sweet and warming. ANIS is a French acronym in which the A stands for Agriculture, the N for Nutrition, the I for Intercultural and the S for Solidarity.

Ms. Grégoris explained the symbolism behind the name: "Étoile means star, and stars refer to our dreams and imagination. At ANIS Étoilé, we want to change the world through the medium of food. Food sovereignty and sustainability is a metaphor for all of the important issues facing the world today. We must maintain our solidarity as we use our collective imagination to think big about changing the world." To round out the significance of the organization's name, star anise is a digestive herb that, on a figurative level, aids the digestion of information. Grégoris said, "We have so much information about food!"

Ms. Grégoris is looking forward to introducing ANIS Étoilé to people from the United States and sharing not only the pleasures of French food but the spice of French food politics as well.