



## Yes. A Mediterranean Diet Roundtable in New York!

I. I. (March 23, 2015)



A new event to discuss an old concept? Yes, the Mediterranean Diet Roundtable. Planned and produced by Accent PR, this event will address a very sensitive (and somehow critical) subject: the approach to food in America, especially in contexts such as schools, cafeterias, hospitals, workplaces. Food is the foundation of our health and is intimately tied to our lifestyles and our overall well-being. If food is an important issues in your work, your business or your simply in your life and the one of those you care about, you should be attending the Mediterranean Diet Roundtable. I-Italy had a conversation with the agency's owner, Daniela Puglielli, PR veteran and creator of this format.

What is the Mediterranean Diet Roundtable?

The Mediterranean Diet Roundtable is a revolutionary conference and networking event dedicated to the national and international Food Industry. Attendees will meet with U.S. Food Industry Professionals (buyers, importers, distributors), International Manufacturers, International Trade Missions and Agencies as well as Doctors, Nutritionists, local, regional and federal professionals in



the Purchasing and Procurement Departments of Schools, Hospitals, Cafeteria, Food Service, Chains and other mass feeding programs. Our goal is to inspire and inform about Mediterranean products and Mediterranean-inspired menus in stores and cafeterias, promoting the Mediterranean Diet's health benefits as an added value for doing business. Our first national event will be held on Thursday, April 9, 2015 at the CUNY Graduate Center (365 Fifth Avenue, NYC) from 8 am to 5 pm.

The Mediterranean Diet is widely known and appreciated in the United States for quite some time now. Why did you feel there was a need for this kind of event?

Although the health benefits of the Mediterranean Diet have been stated over and over, little has been done to actually implement this dietary pattern in places like schools, hospitals, seniors' centers, etc. There are scientific conferences out there about this topic, but it appears that this is the first time that something applicable to the entire food industry sector has been planned. Our program is vertically integrated and encompasses Retail and Food Service. We lined up a superb set of speakers including, but not limited to: Sara Baer Sinnott (Oldways, a nonprofit organization pioneering the introduction of the Mediterranean Diet in America), Artemis Simopoulos M.D. (Center for Genetics, Nutrition and Health and author of The Omega Diet), Ken Toong, MBA (University of Massachusetts-Amherst Dining), Rafi Taherian (Executive Director of Yale University Dining), Johnny Curet, CEC (Director of Campus Dining at Rice University) and Craig J. Mombert, MCFE, CPFM (Executive Chef at Davidson College), Tara Narula, M.D. (CBS contributor and Lenox Hills Hospital Cardiologist), and representatives of major operations such as Premier, Inc., Sodexo, Restaurant Associates (part of the Compass Group) and Memorial Sloan Cancer Center, and many others.

Why should the Mediterranean Diet enter in systems like schools, workplaces and cafeteria? Wasn't this similar to the Michelle Obama's initiative?

Research has shown that the traditional Mediterranean Diet reduces the risk of certain illnesses. A study conducted on more than 1.5 million healthy adults demonstrated that following a Mediterranean diet reduces risk of heart disease and cancer, as well as a reduced incidences of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases (source: Mayo Clinic, ranked #1 Hospital in the nation). Therefore, it is of long term value to implement genuine foods distinctive of the Mediterranean Diet on American tables and cafeterias. Our goal is to facilitate this process again, providing information and inspiration.

I was personally inspired by the Let's Move Campaign that was launched by the First Lady. I am not sure why it didn't click though; perhaps strict regulations don't always translate into positive action/response. That program had a high risk of boomeranging results in the opposite direction. Our Roundtable is composed of Food Industry professionals for Food Industry professionals. It's a hands-on approach from peer-to-peer. We are highlighting the industry's best practice and attempting to stimulate discussion among decision makers. It is not an easy task to move them out of their current comfort zone to something new. In fact, the response from the procurement offices of the public school system was really bad! But we are counting on a long term operation and we are sure that, once the values of our proposition will be clear, more and more facilities will join the discussion.

### **Wouldn't the American companies feel threatened by this kind of initiative?**

We strongly believe that certain foods are distinctive of certain countries: of course fresh vegetables, fruit, fish, and several other ingredients should be sources as locally as possible (although I was surprised to find out that my blueberries from a major local store were from Chile and not from New Jersey...). We strongly believe in what in Italy has been defined as "Kilometro Zero" approach: the minimum possible distance to source certain foods. However, ingredients such as olive oil, spices, nuts and some other products, recipes, flavors are distinctive of the Mediterranean Countries: Italy of course, but also Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Spain, Morocco, Tunisia just to name the most obvious ones. So, American manufacturers shouldn't feel afraid but use this as an opportunity to serve their customers healthy and sustainable food, either manufactured in loco or with some products sourced directly from those countries. And a not-so-obvious consequence of all this, is a substantial reduction in food waste, with big ethical implications: eat less and more tasty!



Q.: What good reasons are there to attend the Roundtable?

There are several good reasons to attend: Learn from Industry rock stars about Menu Engineering, Food Display Strategies, Business Best Practices, hear about latest Scientific Findings, FDA Regulations & Food Safety Issues, become aware of current Market Trends and, best of all, network with a room of your peers.

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For more information about the program and registration, please visit [www.mdrproject.com](http://www.mdrproject.com) [2]

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