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Prince Charles advocates organic growing. He visited San Isidro, Mexico, to observe traditional farming practices.

Prince Charles learns from an organic detour

By Barbara Ann Rosenberg
FOR THE INQUIRER

Under the blazing sun in San Isidro, Mexico, a shiny, black Rover station wagon pulled up near the fields where villagers grow crops and the herbs they use to treat such ailments as psoriasis, asthma and gastritis.

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The crown prince of England stepped out, dressed in a khaki safari suit.

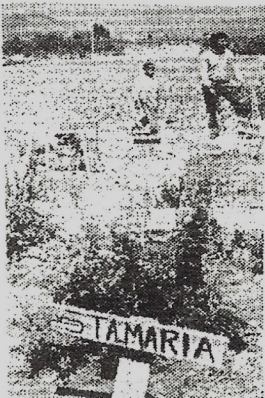
Prince Charles? In San Isidro? Why had he made this detour on his recent visit to the state of Oaxaca, Mexico?

He was there to learn, to observe the villagers' farms and herb gardens and to see what tips he might pick up for Highgrove, his country home.

Although the fields and gardens in San Isidro are vastly different from those the prince oversees from his Georgian windows at Highgrove, there is an underlying tenet that both areas — and the prince — embrace.

Organic gardening.

Since Prince Charles acquired Highgrove 13 years ago, he has transformed its overgrown grounds into a horticultural showplace. And one of its outstanding features is a remarkably beautiful kitchen garden planted with leeks, carrots, potatoes, peas and assorted other vegetables, all grown entirely without the use of chemicals. (To detail this feat, among others, the prince has written a recently



San Isidro's gardens, like the prince's own, are strictly organic.



ANDREW LAWSON

Prince Charles strolls in the garden at Highgrove, his country estate. Since acquiring it 13 years ago, the prince has transformed the gardens into a horticultural showplace.

A prince takes a side trip to talk crops with villagers

PRINCE CHARLES from C1
this project?" The answer: "We have requested the funds from the government — and we are waiting for the reply."

Charles probed intently, obviously delighted with the encounter.

For years, the prince has advocated pesticide-free organic gardening in England, a method that many there greeted with skepticism, but a method that was used with much success at Highgrove.

In his book, the prince acknowledged the difficulties he encountered in putting his gardening theories into practice: "There are certain problems with pests and diseases. Several of the apple varieties seem to develop canker and the greenfly can be dreadful, but I find that each year is different and I decided to adopt the approach of taking the rough with the smooth in order to have vegetables and fruits in their natural state."

In San Isidro, there was no choice. Not only were there no chemicals of any sort, there were no tractors or other modern machinery to cultivate the fields. The villagers steered a wooden plow, drawn by two bullocks, exactly as their ancestors had done.

So the prince took a turn at this primitive farming method, lurching along furrows that had previously been turned over, fully in control of the plow for several lengths of the field. The prince, as it turned out,

was actually putting into practice another ancient farming method — one that he had been using with much success in his kitchen gardens at Highgrove: plowing well-rotted manure into the fields.

In "Everything Organic," his chapter on declaring his kitchen garden a chemical-free zone, the prince heaped particular praise on its value: "Well-rotted manure proved its worth, and everything in the garden has grown remarkably well, making it look more mature than it is."

In San Isidro, the town musicians were out in force to greet the prince, along with uniformed children from the town school. Each child carried a small sample offering of herbal medicines prepared by parents, grandparents and other villagers from closely guarded secret recipes passed down through generations.

The music blared, the prince accepted the children's gifts and his entourage prepared to depart.

But before Prince Charles and his coterie disappeared in their immaculate vehicle, he had devoted more than an hour comparing notes with the people in San Isidro.

As soon as the prince's vehicle was out of sight, the townspeople dispersed to take up their usual activities. The villagers of San Isidro may never tire of talking about the visit by a royal personage, particularly since they had a significant meeting of the minds about the way they both cultivate their crops.

published book, *Highgrove: An Experiment in Organic Gardening and Farming*, in conjunction with Charles Clover, environment editor of the London Daily Telegraph.)

So the prince's visit to San Isidro had been arranged through lengthy talks between the British Foreign Office and the Mexican government, because of the special interests of the prince.

Before he could get into the fields and talk to workers, he was whisked from the brilliant sunlight into one of the two tiny, low buildings that make up the town center. There, after a few minutes to permit the prince to adjust his eyes to the dim interior of a room lined with charts explaining the various alternatives to traditional medical practices, the mayor and other local people extended greetings and explained (through a translator) the mission of the townspeople to preserve their traditional organic-farming methods while increasing the output of the harvest.

But the prince had questions. "What about the insect life — how bothersome?" He asked which of the plants particularly attracted flying, sucking or chewing insects — or were they all equally attractive? What were the methods of control? He asked detailed questions and listened intently to the answers.

Back outside, Prince Charles stopped at the town well that had gone dry and asked about any plans to restore it. "Is there any chance that it will give forth water again?" If so, "where will the money come from to initiate

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Kingdom is a recent entry among them. Falafel is, of course, served in great quantities, both at the restaurant on Bustleton Avenue and out of an off-premises catering kitchen that is used for special occasions. On Israel Independence Day, people lined up several rows deep to gobble TOFK falafel tucked inside pita with special sauces invented by owner Itzhak Wainberg. One is based on tahini, sesame seed paste, while another involves spicy peppers, and a third is a Yemenite green sauce with an indescribable combination of herbs. "Falafel must be made fresh," Wainberg says, "and people love it."

Falafel alone, however, does not an Israeli restaurant make. Wainberg also serves shwarma, a roasted leg of lamb cooked on an open grill in Israel, which he fashions primarily from dark turkey meat.

Other Israeli restaurants tempt hungry diners to other parts of the city. Tirat Hashwarma, on Bustleton Avenue, is glatt kosher and has a menu similar to that of TOFK. Tiborius Cafeteria, on Castor Avenue, is a dairy restaurant specializing in pizza. And Jenkintown area residents enjoy La Pergola on West Avenue, which offers a wide variety of Mediterranean flavors.

giant couscous, because of its size and because it is oven-roasted, provides a more interesting texture and has become the favorite of trendy chefs here and elsewhere, Joel Assouline says.

Other imported delicacies can be found at Bitar's, on 10th Street in South Philadelphia, which carries an extensive line of canned products as well as mixes. Carmel Brand fruits and vegetables, from the ordinary to the exotic, are distributed through Agrexco USA. They offer such exotic items as Sharon fruit, Fuyu-type persimmons that are crunchy outside and sweet and juicy inside, and pomelo, a unique variety of citrus. Although the more unusual items are only available for a limited time, other favorites, such as cherry tomatoes and oyster mushrooms, are grown and distributed year round.

So, Israel has come a long way since the days when its food amazed American travelers looking for familiar flavors. Now, the Israeli flavors are familiar, and becoming more so. Best of all, they are delicious. Who can keep that a secret? Who would want to? ■

Folks who have learned to enjoy the taste, but have neither the time nor the inclination to cook these food from "scratch," can now find packaged products that provide directions explicit enough to enable almost anyone to recreate their Israeli favorites for family and friends. Osem, headquartered in Tel Aviv, has a catalogue of more than 100 products made in Israel for export. Falafel, humus, and techini mixes are popular.

A recent import, available through Assouline and Ting, the Brown Street gourmet center, is giant couscous. Although commonly mistaken for a grain, couscous is actually a form of pasta. It was once rolled, by hand, by Middle Eastern women, into the tiny grain-like pieces that are then cooked into a fluffy mass and are designed to be eaten as a vehicle for a delicious sauce. The new,

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