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Lara, Szymon Wojciech (2025) Eating forgotten crops: multispecies gastronomy, culinary memory and food system repair. In: Gastronomy in Transition: Exploring directions, dilemmas, and consequences, 28-30 Sept and 01-Oct 2026, Aarhus, Denmark. (Submitted)

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Eating Forgotten Crops: Multispecies Gastronomy, Culinary Memory and Food System Repair

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Format: Slice

Presented at Gastronomy in Transition Conference, Aarhus, Denmark, 28-30th September and 1st October 2026

Forgotten, neglected and underutilised crops are increasingly positioned within debates on agrobiodiversity, climate resilience and sustainable food systems. Yet their significance is often framed through agronomic, botanical or nutritional perspectives, with less attention to their role in everyday eating practices, culinary memory and more-than-human food relations. This paper approaches forgotten crops from a gastronomic and food systems perspective, examining how crops that have been displaced, marginalised or rendered undesirable can illuminate the ecological and cultural consequences of contemporary eating.

The paper engages with a broad category of food plants, including historical varieties, landraces, neglected crops, regionally underused varieties of otherwise familiar crops, and unpopular forms of modern cultivated species. It argues that underutilisation is not an inherent biological characteristic, but a relational condition produced through industrial food systems, standardised markets, shifting regimes of taste, supply chain consolidation, agricultural policy and the erosion of culinary knowledge. The disappearance of crops and varieties from fields, kitchens and plates therefore affects more than human diets; it also reshapes landscapes, farming practices, seed systems, sensory traditions, recipes, non-human species and local food webs.

By positioning gastronomy as a multispecies practice, the paper considers how eating may either reproduce ecological simplification or support more diverse relations between humans, plants, soils, pollinators, landscapes and culinary cultures. It proposes that the recovery of forgotten crops should not be understood only as conservation, production or nutritional optimisation, but also as care, repair and re-familiarisation through which crops are made culturally meaningful, sensorially recognisable and practically usable.

Foregrounding the ecological consequences of ordinary eating, this paper contributes to debates on multispecies gastronomy by arguing that forgotten crops provide a critical lens for examining food system uniformity and imagining more biodiverse, culturally situated and ecologically attentive food futures.