

Low Excellence

Please note – These are extracts from one student’s response

Risotto is a traditional Italian meal. The main ingredient in risotto is rice which is a staple food grown in Northern Italy. The history of rice growing in Italy dates back to when the crusaders ventured east and returned with knowledge of how to cultivate or grow rice. It was quickly discovered that the humidity and weather in the Mediterranean was perfect for the optimum growth of short grain rice.

The traditional method of cooking risotto is to fry off garlic and onion in a pan with olive oil and either Vialone Nano, Carnaroli and Arborio rice. Then white wine is added. When the alcohol has evaporated, heated homemade stock is added one ladle full at a time until complete absorption occurs. Once the rice is al dente (perfectly cooked), it is served in a bowl topped with parmesan cheese.

Italy’s creation of risotto has influenced the world and different companies to make products that make risotto making easier and less time consuming for the consumer. Some of the products are premade stocks, parboiled rice and heat and eat risottos. Jamie Oliver, the chef and other cooking appliance companies sell risotto pans. A risotto pan is a wide based pot which allows heat, flavours and liquids to be evenly distributed through the rice, resulting in a perfect risotto. All of these products make it easier to make a more authentic risotto for those who don’t have time to make their own or buy expensive ingredients.

1

During class time we were lucky enough to make a traditional Italian risotto using Italian ingredients. I was able to get first-hand knowledge and skills of how to cook this dish and to experience the smell, sight, textures and taste of a genuine risotto. It was obvious that the slow cooking with a good quality stock had an effect on the depth of flavour each rice grain had. I have also experienced authentic risotto in our local Italian restaurant and the flavours of both risottos were very similar. These experiences help me and other people to try and make authentic recipes at home as the flavour was so good. Now I have the skills, I can choose to make stock if I have time but I can also buy and use a well flavoured premade stock to get a good flavour.

2

Chefs like Jamie Oliver and Jo Segar influence our eating patterns by travelling to foreign countries like Italy and staying there for a period of time learning about cultural practices, recipes, ingredients and the traditional ways Italians cook. Jamie Oliver was closely influenced by a famous Italian chef, Contaldo during his training. He shared his love of Italian food with Jamie who eventually went back to Italy to produce a TV series highlighting traditional Italian food. These chefs then travel back to their own countries and produce popular cookbooks and cooking shows which are used to share their newly found knowledge of Italian cuisine. Both of the above chefs are well known in New Zealand from cooking shows on TV and because they focus on promoting family meals that can be cooked quickly. This allows us as ordinary New Zealanders to experience and create authentic Italian cuisine at home without having to travel as not everyone can afford that. Sometimes the chefs in New Zealand will adapt the recipes by adding local seasonal produce instead of expensive ingredients that may be unavailable but will still give a similar product. Asparagus is suggested as an alternative during summer and pumpkin in Winter – both of these are not

3

normally used in an Italian risotto but are readily available in New Zealand and cheaper during these seasons.