The Worlds of Healthy Flavors ASIA hits town

Decision makers in the food service industry will be attending The Worlds of Healthy Flavors ASIA, the first annual invitational leadership conference and educational initiative to be held in Singapore. As official F&B Media Sponsor, epicure talks with one of the speakers, Greg Drescher from The Culinary Institute of America, to find out what’s on his agenda during the three-day event.

What can participants expect from your special presentation on opening day?
Greg Drescher: We will emphasize that much of the world—from the U.S. to Singapore and other parts of Asia—are on an unsustainable path of rising incidence of diabetes. Food choices play a major role in the onset of the disease, but the good news is that there are absolutely delicious solutions to this challenge.

How do health promotion priorities in Singapore differ from other countries?
GD: The chronic disease challenges are the same in many countries, but Singapore is clearly more focused on developing and implementing innovative solutions than most. Food and diet-related chronic diseases can only be addressed with leadership from all sides, especially governments and the societal leaders that are experts at making foods delicious—namely, chefs and trained, talented cooks.

What changes can be made in food service operations that will have the biggest impact in diabetes control?
GD: In some cases it will be replacing white rice and white bread with whole grains (or at least a partial mix of whole grains initially) and replacing unhealthy fats with healthy fats. In other cases it will be a matter of reducing portion size on some items like red meat, and increasing vegetables, fruit, legumes and nuts. The challenge is to do this in a friendly, appealing and creative way. And that is why chefs and talented cooks at all levels of society have to get involved. I am convinced that Singaporeans don’t have to give up their marvelous food culture to move the needle towards health and wellness. The key ingredient is culinary strategy.

Should Singapore introduce diabetes-friendly, and reduced calorie menus alongside regular offerings?
GD: Our experience in the U.S. tells us that it is perilous to introduce food service menu items that are labelled as “healthy”. It tends to be a turn-off for many customers. American chefs are increasingly pursuing what we call “stealth health”—just doing more of the right thing in quiet and creative ways, and not drawing attention to it. Top chefs in the U.S. and Europe are paying much more attention to and celebrating vegetables than years ago but not hanging a “health banner” on those menu items.

The Worlds of Healthy Flavors ASIA will take place at the Raffles City Convention Centre from 28 to 30 November 2012.