

**Show Transcript  
Deconstructing Dinner  
Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY  
Nelson, B.C. Canada**

**January 5, 2006**

**Title: Why Deconstruct Dinner?**

**Producer/Host: Jon Steinman  
Transcript: Rachel Frohlich**

JON STEINMAN: And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner produced in the studios of Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman. For those of you who are perhaps not familiar with Kootenay Co-op Radio we are a volunteer-driven not-for-profit radio station here in Nelson that has now been broadcasting for over five years. All the financial support for this station comes from either members, or local businesses that sponsor our shows.

As the first broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner, tonight's show will revolve around the concept and, the objective of the show itself. Essentially, tonight's show will be an introduction and a glimpse into the range of topics and issues that this program will attempt to deconstruct, and discuss. But more importantly, the theme of today's show is, why should we, be deconstructing our dinner? Why should we make efforts to fully understand the chain of events that led to that moment before we place a forkful of food into our mouths? And in answering this very question, we are going to hear from a number of individuals why they think we should be deconstructing our dinner, and by doing so, hopefully achieve a better understanding of the issues facing our food supply here in this province, and sending this show on its way to better educating British Columbians about the food choices we make every day.

*increase music and fade out*

One thing I was hoping to do at the beginning of each show is provide some sort of anecdote or joke of sorts to get things rolling, and I hadn't actually prepared anything for tonight's show, but just before leaving my house to make my way down to the radio station tonight, I was cleaning up after a light meal, and when I went to go throw out some of the scraps into the compost bin underneath the sink, I opened the bin and these smells that were coming out of the bin reminded me of those intensely flavoured brand-name potato chips, like I think one of those ketchup flavoured ones or smoky bacon if those even still exist as flavours, but I remember as a child coming home and bringing food that I had bought with a pocketful of change at the school cafeteria, and I remember my mother would look at these bags of chips that I would bring like these ketchup chips, and she

would say, what are doing with that garbage? And at the time, I didn't know how right she was.

But to matters at hand. Given tonight's show is an introduction to the show itself, I thought it important to mention that as this weekly broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner progresses throughout the year, you can expect to tune in to far more focused topics on the issues surrounding perhaps the farming practices that were involved in producing your box of breakfast cereal – were these farming practices carried out through organic principles of agriculture, or were they cultivated using the assistance of chemical pesticides or herbicides, and what exactly are these pesticides and herbicides composed of, and what implications does the use of these chemicals have on our health and our environment? Is there really a benefit from purchasing organic food? Were the farming practices that contributed to your box of breakfast cereal achieved locally, or were they carried out thousands of miles away?

We will discuss the state of our provinces fisheries and the issues surrounding the increasing prevalence of aquaculture or fish-farming operations, and by doing so, a glance into the seafood bins at the grocery store will contain a much more detailed history behind how all those items got there. We'll dig deeper into the connection between our food supply and increasing rates of poor health and disease in this country, and I could go on and on listing all these topics, but ultimately, in the end, I think we can hope that by discussing and exposing our food supply, we can learn how to become more involved in determining what food is available to us, and how each of us can play a role in influencing these choices. But that in itself will be an issue that we'll discuss here on the show in the next few weeks – the Right that we as British Columbians, and as Canadians, and as human beings have to food. Because the more and more that these decisions are in fact placed into boardrooms thousands of miles away, the more we lose this very right we all deserve.

With food being a major element of all of our lives, the goal behind this show is to reach as many British Columbians as possible, and it's really exciting to actually mention that word about Deconstructing Dinner has been circulating throughout the province, I've received responses recently and comments from people in Vancouver, Victoria, Nanaimo, some of the communities around Parksville, for example. And what's even more exciting was just recently receiving some emails all the way from Ontario, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and next door in Lethbridge, Alberta, and this is only the first broadcast. But over the course of the next few months, efforts are going to be made to syndicate this show on community radio stations throughout the province and ensure that all British Columbians can be exposed to these issues that affect us all.

A little bit about the show's website - and again I'll remind you that all broadcasts are going to be archived – so if you do miss a show, if you do have to take a bathroom break, no worries, you will be able to listen again on the show's

website. The website is also going to act as a source to further inform those of you listening to either alternate sources of information or sources referred to on the show, you'll be able to get a glimpse into the topics that will be covered in weeks to come. And what I really want to stress, is that given the importance and influence that issues surrounding food have on all of us, if at any time you feel that urge to respond to the program itself, or simply donate a response to a topic covered, there's contact info on the website, and I'll be making an effort to repeat those comments here on the show. I really want to encourage hearing ideas from people, because I want this show to be for the people. (And quickly, that website is [www.cily.net/deconstructingdinner](http://www.cily.net/deconstructingdinner) - one word). And if you didn't quite catch that I'll repeat that address at the end of the show.

### *soundbite*

On the show today we will be hearing from a number of British Columbian's who will be answering the question, "Why Deconstruct Our Dinner?" with the hope that the responses will shed light onto the nature of this show and the path it will take each week. But before we get to them, I wanted to share my own vision behind this program, I know as the weeks progress I intend to open the microphone up to as many people other than myself, so I'm going to use this first show as an extended opportunity to share this vision, and that vision is to provide you and I with a vast range of information that in the end, will hopefully allow us to better understand the food we purchase and eventually put into our bodies.

Earlier today I was interviewing Abra Brynne in pre-recording, an interview that we will hear later on. Abra is affiliated with the Kootenay Organic Growers Society and she handed me a little booklet here that she wrote, I think back in 1999, and it was entitled "A Canadian Consumers Guide to Ingredients Which May Have Been Genetically Engineered" and it wasn't the title that actually caught my eye but it was the subtitle. And the subtitle is "How to Become a Detective in Your Own Food System." And that is a great way to summarize how I think this show is going to progress. In essence we are going to be detectives in our food system. But the troubling element to this subtitle is the word 'own' and we certainly do not own our food system right now because if we did we would not have to be a detective.

I think there has already been some confusion that – "well a show about food must be a show about cooking," and I want to stress that this is certainly not a show that will be discussing recipes and exotic cuisines and traditions from around the world, so you can put your spatulas away. But, granted, as much merit that recipes and cuisine deserves, and truth be told, it is incredibly important to know - how to compile ingredients together to make a meal, or simply understand a menu at a restaurant, but, what good is a recipe, what good is a meal or a snack, if we don't fully understand the history behind those ingredients, the history behind the countless products we find on grocery store

shelves, but most importantly, the impact that all of our purchases have on not only ourselves, but on our communities, and the health of this planet.

And that's just it, each and every person around the globe needs to eat, and because our food choices have such an effect on that which exists around us, ultimately, food is that major component of our lives that connects every human being on this planet, and it's for that reason, that discussing our food choices holds such a high level of importance with food having such a role in shaping the very social fabric that holds everything around us together, discussing and understanding the food that's available to us, should be one of the most democratic processes within this country. And Deconstructing Dinner aims to be a forum for that very process.

*increase music and fade out*

If we quickly look back at the connection Canadians had to our food supply, food was most commonly purchased in markets or from local bakeries or butchers where the origins of the food were known, and any questions about that food could be answered, that producer or farmer had a face, and they cared just as much about the well-being of the community as those purchasing their food. And these options still exist, but comparatively speaking, in an incredibly short period of time, our options to purchase food have become increasingly limited to those products available in large supermarkets, where these products have gone through countless channels to eventually make their way into the produce section or the aisle containing bottled beverages and bagged potato chips. And as is now the case, we have lost sight of where this food has come from, and the food options that are now most available to us, are these very products without a face.

But let's face it, our current lifestyles here in this country have allowed our options for food to become as limited as they are. Canadians are spending increasing amounts of time at our jobs, commuting to and from these jobs, as we work towards accumulating an increasing range of material desires, all of which leads to a decreasing amount of time available to reflect upon the origins of the food we purchase and eat. And this works out perfectly for the mega-size supermarkets and industrial producers of food, because the ease at which corners can be cut increases alongside these lifestyle changes. And essentially these conveniences, these cut corners are becoming almost a necessity in order to facilitate these modern lifestyles, but also facilitate the regulations that favour industrial food production and agriculture.

I quickly want to remind listeners that you're listening to Deconstructing Dinner. My name is Jon Steinman.

As I mentioned earlier, we will be hearing responses tonight from a number of British Columbians who have been posed the question, Why Should We Be Deconstructing our Dinner? Why should we understand the food we choose to

buy instead of just simply tossing it into the shopping cart and popping it into the microwave?

Answering this question over the phone yesterday from their office in Fanny Bay on Vancouver Island was Frank Moreland and Sandra Mark of Edible Strategies. Since meeting in 1998, Frank and Sandra have worked and volunteered together in food related community economic development and co-operative development. Both are passionate about arming communities with the necessary tools to become economically viable. Sandra teaches at the University of Victoria's School of Social Work where she teaches community development. Here's Sandra Mark, and why she thinks British Columbians should be deconstructing their dinner.

**SANDRA MARK:** We need to deconstruct dinner because if we don't we're not going to have too much dinner in the future. In my view the food system as it exists right now is heading towards a real big blow-up because it's based upon the oil transportation, transporting things from one country to another country. And as oil becomes more and more expensive and unavailable we'll be in really big trouble, so that's one thing.

The other thing is that people are really concerned about their health and recognizing that they got to maybe eat a lot better than they are and I think that as consumers become aware then we are seeing changes as Frank has mentioned. But communities have been really challenged by their relationship with food and this is based upon the shifts and the centralization of the food system over the last forty years, that have really destroyed all the infrastructure that facilitated agriculture and food preparation in BC, and actually all over the world at the community level because all the food production has been centralized through the big multinational corporations. And so we used to be able to feed ourselves really nicely here in BC, on the Island we used to export food to the main land, there was lots of food processing going on all throughout the province and now the whole idea of adding value to food is almost like a whole new idea that has to be completely re-incorporated into the farmer and rural lifestyle, because again, the infrastructure has been decimated.

In the urban areas we have just been involved working with a group of folks looking at the Vancouver food system. And the urban system is even more terrifying because you know if push comes to shove people are not ready to be able to grow their own. I mean in the rural areas like us we can throw a few things in and we can probably keep on feeding ourselves but in the urban areas it's problematic.

However, there's examples of people in many countries where people in urban areas are actually feeding themselves in urban areas by having built an infrastructure, created the training and the support necessary. It is possible. You know we can feed ourselves, we can feed ourselves wonderful food but we can't

unless we realize that we got to do something about what's happening right now. So, it's an urgent problem from my point of view. Read your labels. See where the product was grown. See who owns the company that has sent you the product. Go back to your computer, look them up and discover whether they're not one of the big five. Try and make choices that favour local or BC companies or even Canadian companies.

There are lots of small companies trying to get going again, so we need to really work hard to find out the right information. And a lot of work we're doing is helping people brand their products and develop community branding strategies so that kind of information can be available to consumers. This is quite a difficult thing to do for a whole bunch of technical reasons primarily lead by the big companies who want to make sure that labelling – it really favours their approach to doing things. So it is a challenge but it's not an impossible thing but it requires people to cooperate at a regional level: growers, small scale processors, distributors and so on. If people all cooperate then they can get this information to consumers and consumers will very much move towards buying local, buying organic, buying Canadian if they know that's what authentically they are in fact buying.

Right now we have identified a large number of inauthentic local labels where big companies are just putting a big local label on and people think, oh this is great, I can buy milk that is actually grown here in my area, and you know it's a big multinational corporation and it's got nothing to do with the local area. So, they're able to get away with all kinds of things by just playing the edge there. So we need to, as community folks, as people concerned about food, at the regional level, and provincially, community people have to say: we need the right information on our food so we can make the choices we want to make.

JON STEINMAN: And that was Sandra Mark of Edible Strategies, and here's Frank Moreland, also of Edible Strategies, with his response to why British Columbians' should deconstruct their dinner?

FRANK MORELAND: I think the reason we need to start looking at deconstructing our dinner is that we have given our nutritional health up to the decisions made by scientists and the food retailers. We used to have local systems, delivering nutritious food to people but there was not enough of an income to keep people working on the farm, and in the last twenty years we've been losing farms at an outrageous rate and when I look at my own use, I didn't stay on the family farm either. I had a dairy farm in Ontario. I came to BC to look for high paying jobs in forestry, mining, fishing, construction. Nobody really stayed on the farm. So as the farms have declined and we've given up to a centralized food system we've also given up the knowledge of the true benefits and the nutrition and who made the food and is good for us.

We're finding more and more that reports are coming out and whistleblowers in Canada Health are getting fired because they want to tell the public the food is being made to preserve its shelf life and its appearance and its made homogeneous for the global market. But the considerations are not being made for the safe food consumption by people and eaters. So with this great disconnect and this trust that we are seeing, it is being eroded and they are finally make changes at the transnational level to actually respond to consumer demand and take the trans-fats out of foods and start producing organic products.

But the problem is they don't have social justice or ecological guidelines to produce organic products, they just want to be able to make the product and test it. But with these international rules they don't have social justice or ecological integrity combined with the organics, it's actually possibly worse to be eating organic tomatoes flown in from Mexico than it is to be eating local tomatoes from the farmer you know down the street. But it's unfortunate, our connection with the rural 15% of the population that is growing the food has been disconnected and a lot of the urban areas don't really know where the food comes from. So any programming or any kind of information that can get out to the common public, I say 'common' as opposed to the activists, the other food activists that working to get people to change their consumer habits.

There is a converted group that already knows that we need to be changing the food system but the deconstructing message has to go into the mainstream. Once the mainstream got a hold of organics, it's been growing double-digits for the last fifteen years, mainly because the mainstream market is buying and voting with their dollars. If we can really deconstruct supper, your dinner, and have people understand that they can vote with their dollars on local food, like their voting on organic food, we can have double growth, economic growth, in the rural areas for authentic local branded products.

So one way to get the mainstream of people knowing, or demanding the local products, authentic local products, is through the educational process of showing them the 2,000 kilometres or miles that the food is travelling now and how that is damaging our ecological integrity and how it's exploiting slave labour in Mexico and foreign labour that we fly to Canada. So that's why I think it's important that we really need to deconstruct where our dinner comes from and how that will work out into actually supporting local food infrastructures.

Dr. Andrew Weil made a speech in Victoria a little while ago and he was talking about, he was once of the original activists in organics, 40, 30 years ago. But it wasn't until the mainstream consumer market actually put their money down that the growth in organic growing and processing has increased really exponentially. But at the same time it's only providing food for the 5, 10 percent of the whole mainstream consumers. So we got a long way to grow just with organic.

And the first step is education. We really have to know where the food's coming from, and how safe is it really. Is it safe to export or is it safe to eat?

JON STEINMAN: And again that was Frank Moreland of Edible Strategies, which is located in Fanny Bay on Vancouver Island.

If you're just tuning in, this is Deconstructing Dinner, a new weekly program that will dissect the food we purchase and place into our bodies. Tonight we are finding out from a number of British Columbians, why they think we should be deconstructing our dinner. I was joined earlier in the studio today by Nelson area resident Abra Brynne. Abra is the chair of the certification committee for the Kootenay Organic Growers Society. She sits on the board of Nelson's local Kootenay Cooperative Natural Food store. Abra was also instrumental in forming the BC Food Systems Network which was designed to connect people all over the province involved in community-level action related to food.

And here is Abra Brynne responding to the question "Why Deconstruct Our Dinner?"

ABRA BRYNNE: For me the reason we should be deconstructing our dinner is because our food is inescapably tied into a globalized and industrialized food system with very few exceptions. Because of that, for me, there are social, economic, environmental, and cultural justice implications for what it is that we consume and choose to not consume. The cultural justice implications of the food system we are currently tied into are around the fact that food traditionally was part of how we helped define ourselves as individuals and as a culture.

And with the crazy food system we currently have, most people have lost their ties to their traditional foods, not only eating them, but also knowing how to grow them, how to process them, how to prepare them, how to even serve them. And I think that's quite sad. And it's a real loss of culture. To identify our culture as being "Fast Food Nation," to quote a book title, I think is quite a sad state of affairs. The economic justice implications for me is that food has become a commodity. When it is a basic human need and therefore some would say it's a basic human right, if you don't have food, if you don't have money you can't generally access food and that ties into both access to land and access to food.

It is also a problem; the economic piece of it is also tied into the fact that we put very little value on our food even though food is something we put into our bodies everyday and has a huge impact, I think, on our growth if we are children, on our health if we are adults, on our quality of life generally. And yet, in Canada, we're living with a culture where there is a cheap food policy set nationally back in the 60's and it has really pervaded our society, so that everybody is seeking for the cheapest possible food. And yet, we will spend a lot of money on our entertainment, our clothing, our toys. We won't think about looking for the lowest

possible price, yet it tends to be the dominant approach to food even though it's such an intimate thing we do – eating everyday.

In terms of environmental justice repercussions there are all kinds of crazy things like air miles and green house gas repercussions of shipping food all around the world whether it's by boat or plane or truck. The fact that most food travels a ridiculous amount of miles before it lands on our plate; most of the stats are around 1,600 miles or something crazy like that.

There are also environmental repercussions of doing monoculture agriculture which is how most of our food is produced and so there are huge problems with producing one crop over a vast acreage. It is a sitting duck, for a lack of a better word, for crops and pests and so it becomes intensive chemical agriculture which then pollutes the water and puts toxins into the food system from the bottom up.

There's also problems with the fact that a lot of the intensive production is also heavily dependent on water. So for instance, I think it was in 2005, production in California went down by 20% because they have – they are running out of water, they're tapping too deep in the water systems. Given that California produces 80% of North America's fresh fruits and vegetables that's a rather frightening statistic and reality.

But I think for me, the thing that strikes closest to home is the social justice issue of our food system and the fact that what we choose to eat, what we expect to have available to us can be having a huge detrimental impact to someone somewhere else around the world, and for me I can't escape the knowledge, nor do I want to, that I live on a global community and I want the people in India, and Bolivia and Moscow and Salmo, to all be able to get their food needs met. When we are being supplied with same kinds of crops year-round obviously they are not all coming from here. And the reality is that many, many peasant farmers have been pushed off their land all over the world in order to produce crops for export markets instead of crops for feeding themselves and their families. And I think that's the saddest reality of this globalized food system.

The chain stores tend to be constrained by policies from their head office that requires that food, even if it's going to end up here, if it starts here, it still is required to be shipped to Calgary or to Burnaby or someplace like that before they sort it and send it back, which is kind of a silly way to try and deal with local food. I do know there have been some managers at some of the chain stores who have jeopardized their position by agreeing to take backdoor deliveries, as they call them, instead of requiring that the producer ship it out of the community first.

JON STEINMAN: And that was Abra Brynne of the Kootenay Organic Grower's Society.

We are going to take a quick musical break, and we'll be right back to hear some more responses, to why British Columbians should be deconstructing their dinner.

*musical break*

JON STEINMAN: And we're back to Deconstructing Dinner a new weekly program that will dissect the food we purchase and place into our bodies. This will be a weekly program that will focus on more specific food issues in weeks to come, and tonight's show is an introduction to the show itself.

That short musical break was a performance by Misa Blam of his tune Memory. That one was recorded in the former Yugoslavia. And moving along we are introducing this new show on CJLY by posing the question to British Columbians "why should we be deconstructing our dinner?"

Next we are going to hear from Kim Stansfield from Summerland over in the Okanagan. Kim sits on the board of the SSFPA, also known as the Small Scale Food Processors Association. Kim also operates a 10-acre farm where she grows grapes and creates products from those grapes. Over the phone yesterday morning Kim responded to the question: why deconstruct our dinner?

KIM STANSFIELD: First of all, consumers need to have a genuine choice about what they eat and they need access to good food because good food is the basis of good health. And the more they know where their food comes from, then they can make those choices. The increase in convenience food and pre-packaged goods has led to certainly a decline in farmers' income and making it a lot more difficult to earn a living in this industry. It has also given us as consumers less choice. We don't have a choice in 100 different kinds of tomatoes – we have a choice of one, one tomato that travels that travels well and holds up well, not necessarily a tomato that taste flavourful. We need to support regionally based small scale food processing systems in order for the local economies and small communities, and large communities, to survive.

One of the issues with small-scale processors and farmers is insurance issues. And I think you don't have to be in the food processing industry to know how the cost of insurance has risen over the last few years; you only need to be a resident of Kelowna, when the fires happened, to know that the insurance industry, the costs have gone up sustainably. And these costs affect me, as a small producer. Government regulations, sometimes, become barriers small scale processors don't have the finances or resources to necessarily upgrade equipment or have the appropriate cooling equipment that they made need. There is also a sad lack of information out there. Information often goes to the large processor but it's a trickle down effect to a small-scale food processor. There are organizations, such as one that I belong to, the Small Scale Food

Processor Association, which is an advocacy group for small-scale processors and helps support and represent the interests of the small scale processor.

One of the things that the Small Scale Food Processor Association is trying to do, apart from representing the interests of the small scale processor, is to establish regional identities, so that people can say “oh this is an Okanagan apple” or this is from the Cowichan Valley, or this is from Naramata, even as narrow as that. And we provide the relevant and timely information and create programs to support the development and growth of small scale food processors.

One really great thing that’s happened recently, that we’ve been able to do is we’ve been able to create a web based speciality foods directory for British Columbia. So all speciality food processors and processors can go to the directory and fill out the form and basically this provides new markets for the small scale processor. Food service buyers can go to this resource and look for local, quality speciality foods. I encourage anyone out there – its free, to sign on. If you go to our website, [www.ssfpa.net](http://www.ssfpa.net) you’ll find the links to go to this speciality food directory. Buy local. Support your local economy. You’re doing more than one thing when you buy locally. You support all kinds of initiatives in your area. You support jobs in the area, as well as you get fresh, quality food, while our system is not sustainable it’s a small step in that direction and that should be our goal.

I think like any good movement is starts from the grassroots and we as consumers have to demand local food in our grocery stores. One of things that always irritates me is to go into my local grocery store in peak raspberry season, when we have local raspberries, and find raspberries from California that are half the price that we can sell them for.

JON STEINMAN: And that was Kim Stansfield of the Small Scale Food Processors Association, who joined me on the phone yesterday here in the studios of Kootenay Co-op Radio. This is Deconstructing Dinner, and the question for tonight’s inaugural show is, “Why, Deconstruct Our Dinner?”

Next up we’ll hear from Gwen Chapman. Gwen is an associate professor in nutritional sciences at the University of British Columbia’s Faculty of Land and Food Systems. Some of Gwen’s research involves how our everyday food practices and concerns are shaped by socially constructed notions about food, about health, about our bodies, and social roles. Gwen joined me over the phone from Vancouver earlier today.

GWEN CHAPMAN: I think that we in Canada and in North American in general have an interesting relationship with food right now. On the one hand people have a certain level of concern and suspicion about food. I think we worry about food a lot. And one of the studies that I have been looking at a bit recently was work done by a Dr. Rosen, a psychologist in the United States, and they

compared people's attitudes towards food in North America, particularly the States in that case, with France. And they found that the people in North America have this very, sort of worried attitude towards food, whereas people in France had a much more relaxed and pleasure attitude towards food. Food is important to them because of pleasure. And yet, despite all of the worry in North America we don't do as well as people in France in terms of nutritional related health problems. So I think somehow we're missing the boat when it comes to the kind of things we think about with food. And instead of worrying as much about some of the risk factors in food we need to look at food more holistically and recognize that food is important to us for many reasons. Yes it's related to health but it's also intricately interwoven in the social fabric of our lives.

So some of the research that I've been doing has been looking at the role of food within families and how families interact around food, how we make decisions around food, so how we do or don't pay attention to people's like and dislikes, how children influence their parents, how parents try to shape what their children are eating.

I think that when we think about food we think about it in a fairly narrow way. That people tend to think about the nutrients, the health, perhaps risks related to food and we're not as aware of how our food choice are shaped by the environment that we live in, particularly in terms of the kinds of foods that are available, as well as our cultural history, what we grew up with, what we see, as related to maybe our ethnic identity as well as our family context. So at the same time that we're worried about sort of the nutrient value of food or eating too much junk food or eating too much processed food or eating food that has been produced in ways that may not be as healthful for us, we see it as an individual matter, that we just need to make better choices as individuals instead of recognizing how the whole food system is shaping those choices; the foods that are available to us in stores, the foods that are advertised and so on.

So by deconstructing dinner, if we get a better understanding of where the food is coming from and why we're making the food choices we're making. That may help us to not only change our individual choices but work in ways to change the food system so that it become easier to have a more healthful, sustainable, socially just diet.

*soundbite*

JON STEINMAN: Welcome back to Deconstructing Dinner on Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia.

Tonight we're hoping to get a glimpse into the issues that this show will attempt to tackle in weeks to come. To do so, I've posed the question, "Why Deconstruct Our Dinner" to a number of British Columbians who all share one thing in common – and that is that they are concerned about the state of our food

systems here in this province. We just heard from Gwen Chapman, associate professor at UBC's Faculty of Land and Food Systems.

Quickly want to remind listeners that if any of the information on this show sparks any interest to maybe know a little bit more about the groups my guests are affiliated with, you will be able to find that information at [www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner).

In continuing with this question, "Why Deconstruct Our Dinner" and understand all the implications of our food choices, we're going to hear next from Barbara Seed. Barbara is a Public Health Nutritionist and also a PhD student in Food Policy at City University in London, England, where her advisor Dr. Tim Lang is internationally renowned in food policy issues. Barbara is a Registered Dietician and was also a member of the Vancouver Food Policy Council. Barbara joined me over the phone from Vancouver just yesterday.

BARBARA SEED: If we take apart and analyze our food we might then start to recognize the value of food in our lives. And the keyword 'value' is something I will keep coming back to. Food is something, that's in this day and age, is so central but we take it for granted in so many ways and it's a shame because it has the ability to connect us to ourselves, to each other and to the environment. Not recognizing the value and importance of food has its costs in the form of healthcare, antibiotic resistance, environmental degradation, increased food safety concerns, to name just a few areas.

And if we focus on health concerns alone, recognizing the value of food in our lives spills into many areas and as a dietician, foremost I guess, of the things that I initially think of is our own personal health. So of course the many health benefits, that you have from eating a good diet but also collectively when you look at nutritional health, that's no small thing, the potential for disease prevention if we are all eating well and of course health care costs, health care eating up the largest percentage of our spending is pretty significant.

In terms of helping us have a healthier relationship with our food and to help us value our bodies more; so many of us have a messed up relationship with food and our bodies. We have this love/hate relationship with food where we no longer value food as a way to nurture and respect our bodies. But maybe as a necessary evil or a vehicle for short term pleasure. If you think about the feeling of sort of stuffing some fries down your throat as your driving your car along, thinking I really shouldn't be eating these but I got to get to the next meeting versus sitting down and having hot bowl of homemade vegetable soup and thinking about what you're doing for your body as your doing that, it's a real sign again of valuing your body.

When you look broader than just ourselves there are so many other areas: the health of agricultural workers is very key, whether that's locally or internationally.

And when you think about the fruit that we're eating from Central America, for example, and hearing reports of congenital malformations with agricultural workers who are exposed to high levels of pesticides; we got to think that that's our concern as well as theirs. And whether it comes back to us directly or indirectly it should be a concern for us.

The influence of food security on our environment is important and reflects again back on our health. Whether it's genetically modified foods or CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in terms of how far food is travelling to get to us, the quality of our water and soil is important to our own personal health.

And finally, for our community, for centuries food has been a mean for livelihood, a way to connect socially, and a way to show others that they are valued. When this breaks down I think that we may be suggesting that people aren't valued and we got lots of examples of this. Say, for example, food banks. When we pull out the expired food out of the back of our cupboards and send it to the food bank, or we send day old doughnuts to the food bank we're saying that these people don't deserve quality food and deserve less than what the rest of us do. And I believe that it's no one's first choice to go to the food bank and no one is going to take advantage of the system by going to the food bank. And even though many of us would agree that we'd prefer not to see food banks at all, again, it's going to reflect back in health care costs.

A U.S. guru, Joan Gussow who said "save the farmers first and reform their later," so that we need to help the farmers to stay alive in our areas and if we want them to look at different methods of production then we first need to help them out by supporting them.

We need to move ourselves beyond the idea of being just passive food consumers where the idea of our power is based on the idea of just accepting or rejecting certain products. And really that's a false sense of power anyway. And we need to move to the idea of being food citizens where we take an active role in determining how our food system is shaped. And this moves us towards the idea of food democracy where we have rights and responsibilities in relation to our food supply.

JON STEINMAN: And that was Barbara Seed, a PhD student in food policy, and a member, and past chair of the BC Community Nutritionist Council's, Standing Committee on Food Security.

When discussing issues surrounding our country's food supply and the systems holding these supplies together, it's common to come across the name Cathleen Kneen, who along with her husband Brewster publish and distribute their monthly food systems newsletter "The Ram's Horn." Cathleen is also instrumental in coordinating the BC Food Systems Network, and is the editor of BC Organic Grower – a quarterly magazine of the Certified Organic Associations of British

Columbia. Cathleen is joining us from her home in Sorrento. Thanks for joining us Cathleen.

CATHLEEN KNEEN: You're Welcome.

JON STEINMAN: After listening to the show from your home in Sorrento, you are tuned in, are you?

CATHLEEN KNEEN: I am. Though I got to say the internet was a little fuzzy at times. I think I missed a couple of points but by and large I think I got most of it.

JON STEINMAN: Well can you maybe add to this all encompassing question on tonight's show, why should be British Columbians be deconstructing our dinner?

CATHLEEN KNEEN: Well I would say first of all that you had an incredible, an incredibly powerful and appropriate range of comments already. And I think I would like to start with thinking of Socrates, I believe it was, said the unexamined life is not worth living. And in that sense, perhaps, the unexamined meal is not worth eating. I think one of the reasons why people don't want to deconstruct their food is because we're afraid of what we're going to find. I don't think it's any mystery to anybody who eats food in North America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that the food system is largely controlled by a few conglomerates who are not under local control, that most of the food comes from a long way away and that an awful lot of it is not very good for our health.

So, I think people knowing that, and knowing as Gwen Chapman I think quite appropriately pointed out, that part of what the system has done is to systematically remove the capacity for choice about what you eat, from people. We're really scared of coming face-to-face with what someone has called the forces that make us fat, sick and poor. We will feel that if we start looking at it then we're going to feel even worse about ourselves than we do now.

So what I would say, perhaps, to sum up, what a lot of other people have been pointing towards is that the main reason for deconstructing our food and deconstructing our food system that it's fun, it's enjoyable, it's a way of connecting ourselves to our own communities, to our own families, to our own bodies, to our own cultures, to our own selves in a way which is rewarding. And I know you said you weren't going to do any recipes on the show and I do understand that but you know, its around that sort of thing, sharing recipes, sharing food, sharing stories about food that people, I think, can communicate in ways which are, how can I say this, non-political. Do you know what I mean? It's like this is where we are ourselves with each other. And then we get into the issues and then we've to get out there and start struggling and certainly all the struggle issues the people have mentioned are of critical importance.

So the other piece that will happen when we deconstruct our dinner is that we will discover not just that our food system is controlled by a shrinking number of extremely powerful transnational corporations whose job, of course, is nothing to do with nutrition, or feeding the hungry of the world for that matter, but has to do with returning a profit to their shareholders on the quarter. That we will discover that we will also discover all the wonderful things that are going on locally. And ways of connecting with the people who are growing food, producing food, processing food, selling food, preparing food in our own communities, which will again will be very, very rewarding. So yes there's the political and I don't think we could possibly shrink from it, of looking at the policies at the municipal, the local school board, the provincial, the federal level, the health authority level, all the policies that are imposing and supporting, what I call, the industrial food system. And we do that at the same time as we enjoy and celebrate food.

JON STEINMAN: What are the most influential decisions you can maybe shed light on that are made at a federal level that effect our food choices here in British Columbia?

CATHLEEN KNEEN: Well, the major one I suppose is the one that Abra alluded to, about agricultural policy which has been to develop and support a food system which is essentially producing commodities for export and which is not geared toward the production of food to feed the local population. And there is a myriad of different regulations and subsidies and policies and support systems all of which need to be examined in that light.

One piece might be the fact that the federal government is withdrawing, has withdrawn, from independent and research and monitoring of food. So, that now, for example, when Monsanto wants to stick in another GMO crop all that Health Canada can do is assess the information that Monsanto gives it and they have no capacity to do any independent research. So the independent research which is how, for example, crops like canola got produced in the first place, how we developed the main mainstay of our food system in Canada which is wheat, was done all at publicly funded laboratories by scientists working for the public and in the public interest and sharing their information freely with one another. Now everything is owned and controlled by transnational corporations outside of the country and Canada has no way of getting at that stuff. So that's another piece. It would be really nice if the Canadian Food Inspection Agency didn't have a dual mandate to, on the one hand, assess and approve novel foods as they call them, genetically modified foods, and on the other hand to promote them. That conflict of interest could be easily disposed of.

Another really important piece has to do with seeds. The policies at the federal level which hamper the abilities of farmers to reproduce and breed and grow their own seeds is another issue at the federal level where policy is made. That's only a few. We could go on and on but I don't want to bore people.

JON STEINMAN: Well, Cathleen we do only have one more minute left here on the show. Maybe to kind of wrap things up you can maybe comment on the role the media has played up until now.

CATHLEEN KNEEN: I think the biggest problem is that the mass media, which is not surprising given who controls the mass media, has bought in body and soul to the notion of technology as being the key driver of the economy, agriculture and everything else. That's not what drives agriculture. Agriculture is driven by people who are producing food for their own communities. And that needs to be understood as a basis of food policy and it needs to be the perspective from which the media approach new developments in agriculture, it needs to be the perspective from which the media approach questions like marketing boards supports etcetera, etcetera.

JON STEINMAN: Cathleen, given the influence you have had I guess in promoting the awareness of issues surrounding our food it was great to have you on tonight's show. I think it was really important to get your voice out there. I look forward to having you on future shows and I want to thank you again for joining us tonight.

CATHLEEN KNEEN: My pleasure.

*ending theme*

JON STEINMAN: That was Cathleen Kneen, editor of the "The Ram's Horn" a food systems newsletter based in Sorrento British Columbia, also an editor of the BC Organic Grower. That was this week's Deconstructing Dinner on Kootenay Co-op Radio, broadcasting to you from Nelson, British Columbia. I've been your host Jon Steinman. I thank my technical assistant tonight Terry Brennan, for manning the dials. All of those affiliated with this station are volunteers, and financial support for this station is received through membership, donations and sponsorship from local businesses. For more information on the station or to become a member, you can visit [www.cjly.net](http://www.cjly.net) or dial 250-352-9600. And should you have any comments about today's show or perhaps want to learn more, you can visit the website for Deconstructing Dinner at [www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner).

Till next week.

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