

**Show Transcript  
Deconstructing Dinner  
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**Title: Reclaiming Our Food**

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JON STEINMAN: And you're listening to Deconstructing Dinner – produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. My name is Jon Steinman.

While this weekly radio program and podcast is primarily focused on food issues here in this province, the number of responses that we have received from all corners of North America is a true indication of how interconnected our food is, but also how regardless of location, we are for the most part sharing the same concerns about the food choices that are available to us.

And the title of today's broadcast is RECLAIMING OUR FOOD – and this title is taken from a recent conference held between September 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> in Sorrento, a small community located in the Shuswap region of British Columbia. And there at the conference were representatives from all over the province who were coming together as part of the BC Food Systems Network – a non-profit organization launched by Cathleen Kneen who, along with her husband Brewster Kneen, have been at the forefront of community, provincial, national, and global discussions pertaining to how our food is controlled, and who should be controlling it.

Now this topic is one that certainly could be broadcast on any day of the week, but, given recent events, is quite timely as the North American-wide E. coli incident that as of September 20<sup>th</sup> 2006, has now seen 146 reported illnesses and one death. As this incident occurred during the four-day conference titled "Reclaiming our Food Systems," this is perhaps an unfortunate but ideal illustration of the dangerous direction our food has been heading in for quite some time. But this conference was refreshingly a glimpse into the many individuals and groups who are striving to respond to such a concern.

And today's broadcast will feature three speakers who introduced the BC Food Systems Network conference, and who all address the idea of Food Sovereignty and ownership. Those speakers include well-known author Brewster Kneen, seed farmer Patrick Steiner of Stellar Seeds, and Community Development Facilitator Dawn Morrison of the Secwepemc (Shuswap) Nation.

*increase music and fade out*

One of the common responses heard from listeners of this program, Deconstructing Dinner, is the way in which such information about our food has completely altered the way in which they approach food. Discovering the history of a large corporation or exploring organic methods of agriculture are two examples of what can lead to such a re-evaluation of our food choices. Today's topic is one that truly represents a way of looking at our food that presents a real social and cultural shift for those of us here in North America.

On the other hand, there is a network of cultures that have existed here in North America long before the roots of our current food system took hold. And those are of course the many indigenous cultures that once thrived across the continent, and who are in many cases now sequestered to reservations. And while our food system does contain influences from indigenous cultures, the relationship to food that is core to indigenous communities has in many cases been lost or is struggling to survive. And the first speaker that we will hear on today's broadcast will explore the topic of Indigenous Food Sovereignty.

Again, a reminder that today's broadcast will be featuring recordings from the September 2006 conference of the BC Food Systems Network. The network is a non-profit society that connects all groups throughout the province who are working to eliminate hunger and create sustainable food systems. The founder of this network is Cathleen Kneen – a well-known food activist who was a guest on the first broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner back in January of this year, 2006. And along with her husband Brewster, Cathleen has since 1980 been publishing the monthly newsletter "The Ram's Horn." And here's Cathleen first introducing the conference.

CATHLEEN KNEEN: Welcome to the gathering of the BC Food Systems Network. This is our number seven. I can't quite believe we started in 1999, and with the goal of trying to create a sustainable local food system which was equitable, just, economically viable, and ecologically sustainable. And we probably haven't quite achieved that yet. It is my – not hope – it's absolute confident knowledge that this weekend that energy will begin to spiral and carry us, I hope, into a new place of both vision and power to go home and do what needs to be done.

Again, those of you who've been here before will know that every year we have a jar of sunflowers in the middle of the room. The first year, I collected the sunflowers out of my garden 'cause I thought they were pretty and yellow and bright and cheerful. And then I think it was Trudy Jack who explained that traditionally in this area, the sunflower was a food for the native people. But also one of the things about the sunflower is that its roots contain a substance which is specific against diabetes. I thought, "Well that's pretty good." And the jug that it's in is one which was originally given to a man who was Brewster's teacher in grade school, who was the man who taught his teacher who taught him to question what you're told.

JON STEINMAN: And that was Cathleen Kneen, the founder and Executive Director of the BC Food Systems Network, as she introduced the annual gathering held in Sorrento, a community located in the Shuswap region of British Columbia. And as Shuswap is taken from the indigenous community of the Secwepemc Nation, it was certainly appropriate to hear from a member of that community who spoke on this topic of Food Sovereignty and reclaiming our food.

As the media has been frequently covering the issue of preserving agricultural land here in BC, all of the land in this province was once, and still is, the food source for many indigenous communities in this part of North America. And this first speaker is Dawn Morrison – a Community Development Facilitator of the Secwepemc Nation (or the Shuswap Nation). And she lives in Chase, British Columbia, and was most recently the coordinator for the first annual Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference for the Interior of the province. Using the historic network of indigenous communities as an example, Dawn highlights the importance of the BC Food Systems Network in bringing all communities across the province together.

DAWN MORRISON: Weyt-kp xwexwéytep Twilúcw. I just said “Hello everyone” in our Shuswap language. And I’ve introduced myself by my Indian name, which is Twilúcw and it means “To shed light on the land.” And so I’ve made it my commitment to work on different land- and culture- and ecology-type projects for the last about twenty years of my life.

So I’m talking about something that’s really important here – Indigenous Food Sovereignty. I’ve been learning a lot about what that really is. One of the aspects of what Indigenous Food Sovereignty is is having good relationships – not with just people but also with the plants and the animals and the natural world. In the last week of August, we organized a conference that took place at En’owkin Centre in traditional Syilx territory – and “Syilx” is the proper way to relate to the land and the people of the Okanagan territory. And it was on Penticton Indian Reserve at the En’owkin Centre, and so I’m going to talk about Indigenous Food Sovereignty in that conference.

And I think that it’s important to say as well that with the three years, or two years, that I’ve been working with the BC Food Systems Network, it’s been a really awesome experience for me, because I see a lot of the work that people are doing here in the context of social issues and environmental issues around making sure that people have enough food. One of the things that I bring to a lot of the discussions and to the work of the BC Food Systems Network is to try and help people understand what Indigenous Food Sovereignty is. And how is that unique? How is that different from Food Sovereignty issues of the mainstream society and how is it the same?

There's an elder, Auntie Irene Billy, in our community, who many of you may have seen on the news because she's been very active in protecting, speaking out for the land and for the people and for the food. She does a lot of work around food, and she's been around the world. And I've gone out with her a few times to speak with her at different events. And one time, I was going out and I prepared all these notes, and it was like my training I've had in Western education; I was all nervous, thinking, "Oh my God, I don't want to miss anything, and I want to write it all down." And she gave me heck, because she said that you need to speak from the heart. If you know that what you're saying is true, and you really believe it, and you know your stuff, the words will flow more freely, and it's really an important part of the oral tradition.

With that then, the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference is actually a conference that was organized for the Interior region. One of the reasons that the committee, the planning committee, believed that we should start at a regional level was because we want to make sure that – promoting the whole concept of bioregionalism and local food systems – we want to make sure that what we're doing in our own backyards and our own communities, that we're working from a good strong base before we start linking to other areas in the province. And I know that with the BC Food Systems Network, the designation of this provincial working group is great because traditionally our people have always traded with different Nations around the province. So the conference being regional, there's six Indigenous Nations in the Interior region. And they are the Ktunaxa or Kootenay people, the Nlaka'pamux or the Thompson people, the Secwepemc (Shuswap), the Stathlum, and Tsilhqot'in. We're really trying to make sure that the grassroots traditional harvesters, hunters, gatherers, fishermen were the people that were going to make it to this conference – so trying to make sure that we have representation from the grassroots community level.

JON STEINMAN: And you're tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner, as we hear from Dawn Morrison who was most recently the coordinator of the first annual Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference for the Interior of BC. As the connection between our food and the land is often discussed here on Deconstructing Dinner, it is often overlooked how the very land we look to connect or reconnect ourselves to has been integral to the survival of indigenous populations in this province for thousands of years. And Dawn Morrison points to the presence of land use planners at the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference.

DAWN MORRISON: So there were also people who are involved to some extent in land use planning, because that's one of the things about Indigenous Food Sovereignty that is different from the mainstream food security issues, is that when we talk about indigenous foods, we're talking about all of the land and all of the ecosystems that basically sustain the plants and the animals that we rely on for our foods.

The first big dinner was hosted by the Syilx people, and it was all traditional foods. And the Secwepemc – the meal that we provided – there was over twenty-one different indigenous foods. So it really goes to show how many people are actually really active in harvesting the foods and taking care of them and eating them. All of those foods were either harvested from the forests, or from the water, from the land, or some of them were grown in community gardens, because traditionally we were hunters and gatherers in the Interior nations. That's changed since the time of contact with European settlers. We've also adopted agriculture – so growing fruits and vegetables. So that was really a powerful highlight of the conference – was the food, actually eating the food that we were talking about.

There was some really powerful things that were said. My whole summer has been spent thinking about nothing but food. Traditionally our economy was based on food; it wasn't based on money. There was trade, but it was based on food and not so much mass consumerism of other items.

When we think of that – and to really engender and think how we're going to do that in a modern-day world, and really connecting with your food on a really deep, spiritual level, which is what came out of the working group, especially on food, land, and culture – for me that was a highlight, because when we think about Indigenous Food Sovereignty and the way we've heard the elders speak about it, Indigenous Food Sovereignty, or sovereignty in itself, comes directly from Tqelt Kukpi7 or from the Creator. So it's a divine sovereignty, just as the gift of food is; it comes directly from the Creator. So I know that the word "sovereignty" – and there's been some articles floating around, and there's always the issue like I know Brewster's talked before about the language of rights. And we need to be careful when we're using that language, and I think the same thing goes for the language of sovereignty. Sometimes these words that sound very political – what do they really mean to us? And with a lot of the conflict that's happened in native communities around land. And knowing that in the courts, which has been kind of the way that the governments like to deal with some of those conflicts around land, you're dealing with a different kind of sovereignty; you're dealing with the sovereignty that's said to come from the Crown.

JON STEINMAN: In just a few moments, we will hear the second speaker at the recent BC Food Systems Network Gathering held in Sorrento, and that is author Brewster Kneen. Brewster spoke of the language used to address food issues, much of which consists of new and confusing terms such as food security, Food Sovereignty, or maybe even food systems. But as Dawn Morrison wrapped up her observations from the recent Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference, she addressed this issue of language and the words used to address our relationship to food, community, and the land. And she uses the word responsibility, one that is often void when addressing our food systems. As our culture is one that

frequently promotes responsible drinking, how often do we promote responsible eating?

DAWN MORRISON: And so this conference was very, very powerful in the sense that it got us back together to strengthen our network, and to get people working on community action plans, and taking their responsibility to make sure that we've got good healthy food – not just for our own generations, but for future generations. And so I think that's another important thing that came out of this conference, was the responsibility, as opposed to it being a right. It's not a right that's given to us; it's a responsibility that we uphold, and that we need to practise that on a day-to-day basis. And because a lot of you are from community food groups, you probably understand how that is where the power comes from. It's what we do in everyday life.

On that note, there's some real struggles, and I think we need to continue this. We will continue this educational process so that people from all races can come to understand a little bit more what Indigenous Food Sovereignty is here in the Interior of BC in a way that we can help each other on a day-to-day basis, and that we can be powerful, or take our power from that. And I know that in agro-ecology, how do we look at agriculture and consider the health of the neighbouring ecosystems which is where a lot of the Indigenous foods are?

JON STEINMAN: And that was Dawn Morrison speaking at the BC Food Systems Network Gathering that took place in September of this year, 2006. I will briefly mention that this broadcast, along with every broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner, is archived on the program's website, and that website is [www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner). And for anyone interested in finding out more information about the BC Food Systems Network, their website is an easy one to remember. And that is [fooddemocracy.org](http://fooddemocracy.org).

*soundbite*

Again, the title of the conference in Sorrento was "Reclaiming Our Local Food Systems." Reasons to why reclaiming our local food system is so important is perhaps one of the primary directions that this radio program heads in each week. But for those who are new to Deconstructing Dinner – and as mentioned earlier, the recent contaminated spinach incident that is sweeping North America is an unfortunate illustration of the dangers of a nationally and globally dependent food system, and I'll speak a little more on this recent news later on today's broadcast. But while the term food security is certainly a confusing one, maybe this recent incident of E. coli contaminated spinach originating in California and sweeping across North America is one that brings this term, food security, to light. As an incredibly influential media source, CNN chose to sensationalize the spinach contamination story by emphasizing how the widespread impact of the incident was not an act of terrorism. And while I do hate to jump on their unfortunate correlation between the two, this incident is certainly one that

questions the security of our food sources. Here in Nelson, for example, the only place you can currently buy spinach, is at the one grocery store that carries locally grown spinach. And herein lies the importance of secure local food systems.

This term, food security, was addressed head on by well-known author Brewster Kneen. Brewster is the author of a number of books including *From Land to Mouth* and *Farmageddon*. He is the co-publisher of "The Ram's Horn," a monthly food systems newsletter, and he spoke about the language used to address reclaiming local food systems.

BREWSTER KNEEN: ...over the last several years, as we've come together as a community and in this setting, with Dawn and all your relations. It's been a wonderful experience – very enriching for me personally – and I want to acknowledge that. My world has grown by being part of yours, and it's a wonderful thing.

Dawn mentioned the language, because this is something that I've – sometimes we don't pay very much attention to what we're saying. We use words without thinking about what they do to us. It's sort of like our food; we often don't pay too much attention, and we say, "Well, you know, it goes down and it tastes good." But maybe we haven't thought about really what we're doing to it and it's doing to us. And I think our language often we think is just sort of a neutral phenomena, and we can use words without realizing that when we speak them, they affect us as much as they may affect somebody else. And then it goes both ways. This looks like biology; it's all dialectical. The genetic engineers say, "Oh, you just do this, you know, you push here, and it comes out here." And there's no recognition that, in fact, it's always going two ways at every stage.

So some of our words that we use I want to just pick up on a bit, because as Dawn mentioned, we sometimes speak of the right to food. And I've been haranguing people about rights and the fact that rights are about power relationships. And the minute you sort of demand a right, you are making a demand of somebody else, or a claim that somebody should give that to you – the state or somebody else. I don't want to put myself in that position of dependency. And the same thing in a sense with food security. I've had a problem with that one because, again, it's kind of saying – well, it's the fortress mentality basically. And somehow, I'll gather my own food, thank you very much, and I'll put it in the cellar, and I'll put in the freezer, and I'll put it in the attic, and I'm okay. But again, it's a notion – a very individualistic notion – that my security is what counts, and I can achieve that in certain ways. This is what we're now experiencing globally as the pursuit of the US government, in the name of security, of destroying everything that gets in its way. It's not a very healthy procedure.

So then you come to Food Sovereignty. And again, it's interesting. There was an article passed between us this morning, or yesterday, on raising questions about

sovereignty. And where does it come from? So again, we use words because we have to. But then on the other hand, every time we use one, we say, “Oops, wait a minute, maybe that means something that I didn’t intend it to mean.” So we have to continually elaborate. And as for, I think, the way you come back to maybe a criteria is: does language establish good relations, or does it cause something else to happen that we weren’t thinking about? Whether, as I say, it’s my security, but I don’t have to worry about – “I’m alright, Jack” was the whole British thing with Margaret Thatcher – and you don’t worry about the other guy. I’m okay.

And I think when we talk about Food Sovereignty – and my understanding, what I’ve gained in terms of reading and trying to understand globally and experience other cultures, I’ve become acutely aware of how individualistic our Western civilization is. The individual’s supreme, and therefore the whole rights language seems appropriate, because it’s highly individualistic. But it seems to me that when we talk about sovereignty, and in a tone that Dawn has mentioned, that we’re talking about something quite different, and that we’re talking about interdependency. And it comes down and really to a question of self-understanding. I think we have a lot to learn from the Indigenous peoples everywhere, because I think one begins to sense that the white Western civilization really is a bit of an anachronism. And it’s quite unusual in its individualism, because most people and most societies that have survived have found that’s not a very good basis to build a society on. Rather, it’s the understanding of the self as a social being, not as an isolated, autonomous individual, but as a social being. And so the notion of recognizing all my relations, and it’s not simply those of us in a room, but it is all the other creatures of which are part of our family.

JON STEINMAN: And you’re tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner, a weekly one-hour radio program and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. Today’s broadcast explores a group of speakers, all of whom introduced the recent gathering of the BC Food Systems Network. And that gathering took place in Sorrento, a community located in the Shuswap region of the province. As we continue listening to Brewster Kneen speak on reclaiming local food systems, he addresses the difficulty in overcoming the concept of ownership – that is, of owning and controlling food. As Brewster has been very outspoken on the topic of genetic modification of food, he uses this as an example of how the food system that has been constructed here in North America – one that is based on ownership and control – has all culminated to this current state, this state where life itself is now owned.

BREWSTER KNEEN: And so that it becomes much more of a – I say of us understanding ourselves as social beings, and of the quality of our relationships, as absolutely crucial and the most important thing. And that changes then the notion of sovereignty – not to “we’re okay,” or “we’ll do this, we’ll achieve this, collectively.” And there is some push within capitalist thinking to talk about



commons as collective property. But it keeps getting reduced to the notion of ownership and property – as if that was the issue. And that carries over in terms of thinking about food and sovereignty and so on, of whether this question of ownership – and that's the other issue that, I think, is highly problematic when we think about land and food, and that, again, the culture is so stuck on the notion of ownership, that the notion that you don't commodify food any more than you commodify your genes. You don't own your genes, you don't own your food, you don't own the creatures. But if we really let ourselves think along that track, we're really kind of at odds with the culture around us. And it's very difficult then, I think, for people to sort of cross over the line to seeing that the notion of ownership, the language of ownership and property, is really quite inappropriate, is a whole construct, so that you have this combination of individualism and ownership that I think just wreaks havoc with our notion of Food Sovereignty, of sharing, of good relations, because there is basically a contradiction there.

I'm not going to say much more, I think, 'cause it's really the point that I wanted to make, of one other issue that I think is sort of the demon that we have to exorcize. And that is this business of control, 'cause I think if we talk about the right to food, food security, or even Food Sovereignty, we're apt to think that "Oh, we have control over our food system." And then once we start using that language of control, we're in trouble, and we have to realize what we're working against in all this is precisely the issue of control – that is, our sense that our food system is now controlled by a handful of multinational, transnational corporations, and that's not a good thing.

But I think we can bring that anxiety and concern about that notion of control down to sort of the biological level of control where we're up against all of Western reductionist science and the notion of controlling nature, and that that is so at odds with good relations. I mean, I can't seek to control nature and then talk about all my relations and our good relationships and the quality of our life together. You can put those two at the same table. It creates havoc with your thinking, 'cause then you start using words and I – this goes back for me long ways to when we were farming and I'd get going to a meeting, and I was always getting into these political structures. And farmers would go to a meeting – first of all with their neckties on, and then they would talk about profit. And I said, "Look, guy, you're not even making a living, much less a profit." But when you use the word profit, you're turning your brain into that of a businessman, not a farmer. You're thinking different; you're starting to talk about commodity food and making a profit and so on.

So I've been playing around with this language business ever since then. I say, "Wait a minute, let's be careful about the words we use." So I think it's not control that we want; it's precisely what we feel – maybe we haven't put that word on it – but what causes the problem, because we know what control means, is control, increasingly centralized, and out of our hands. So I think, again, Dawn has given

us a term of responsibility for our relations with creation and all of its inhabitants and what supports us.

Let me leave it at that. I'll just lead into Patrick, because clearly the question of control is what genetic engineering is all about. It's not about feeding the hungry; it's about corporate profit via control. And the control as we've seen and object to – I think most of us – is the implementation of that control through genetic engineering in the seeds themselves, that you put the agenda of the corporation into the seed via genetic engineering, and you've got really good control.

JON STEINMAN: And that concluded the speech given by Brewster Kneen at the recent gathering of the BC Food Systems Network. As there was also a question and answer period that followed this session of the conference, Brewster had the opportunity to further expand on the topic of genetic modification, and how the issue of genetic contamination to gain further control of food and life itself was a deliberate move, and had been intended all along.

BREWSTER KNEEN: And I would want to add at this point – particularly because of what's emerged in the last couple of weeks – that I think the question of control through genetic engineering has been pursued so vigorously that Monsanto has in fact succeeded in what it intended to do, and that is to contaminate all food around the world. So that when we talk about genetic gene flow, or the discovery of transgenic corn in Mexico, in Chiapas, it was no accident. And the transgenic soybeans in Argentina that went over the border to Brazil – that was no accident. That was Monsanto's deliberate tactic, and I didn't bring it with me, but somebody supplied a quote saying – from a Monsanto person – saying of course that's what we always intended. And looking back on it, having been involved in this for fifteen years, it's obvious to me is that the only explanation for what you've seen is that this is a deliberate exercise in gaining control. And there's nothing accidental about the global contamination of genetically modified crops – the latest being rice, which is turning up everywhere in the world as having an unapproved genetic sequence in it. There is no point in being naïve about the game that's being played. It's our food.

JON STEINMAN: And that was Brewster Kneen who, along with his wife Cathleen, publish "The Ram's Horn," a monthly newsletter that analyses food systems. And their website is [www.ramshorn.ca](http://www.ramshorn.ca), and there is additionally a link to a number of books written by Brewster, some of which are now available online in their entirety. And be sure to check it out again – that's [ramshorn.ca](http://ramshorn.ca).

*soundbite*

The last speaker to feature here on this broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner is Patrick Steiner. Patrick launched a seed company in 2002 located in Sorrento, British Columbia, called Stellar Seeds, and he now supplies certified organic seeds through retail outlets and through his website. All seeds are grown using

techniques that maximize soil health and biodiversity, and many of their seeds are heritage varieties that can yield very unique farm or garden vegetables. As seeds represent one of the primary components of any food system, Patrick Steiner addresses the concept of Food Sovereignty by introducing the reliance we place on others for our food. As he indicates, the food choices we make are a way we exercise to what degree we wish to be self-reliant.

PATRICK STEINER: I'm the local guy who lives up the road and farms here, and I am a seed grower. And as we all know, seed is the basis of food. I'm actually going to talk more about food tonight than about seeds. I'll get into seeds a little bit. But I was thinking about this notion of Food Sovereignty, and just looking at what the three of us were sort of speaking about, and looking at this title of "Farm Food Sovereignty" beside my name, and thinking, "Well, what do I have to say about that? Do I have much to say about it at all?" 'Cause I do think of myself a lot as a seed grower, and sometimes you can forget that that actually relates to food. You get so focussed on just the seed.

And so I challenged myself to think about it in the context of food again, and to think of myself as – because we all are people who eat food. And what I decided Food Sovereignty means to me is the ability of ourselves – we the people, our communities – to determine how our food is produced, how it's distributed, how it's sold in our stores, how it gets onto our tables, how it's presented in our restaurants, and beyond that, how even the very basis for creating that food. And actually, I really liked, I really heard what you said about – with Indigenous Food Sovereignty – there's that recognition of stewarding the land and the forest and the rivers that provide that food to us. And I think that's an integral part of Food Sovereignty, is that it's not just about the food, but it's about all of the landscape and the environment and the culture of our people, our communities that are required to put it together.

And I think a lot of people when we talk about Food Sovereignty, there tends to be an emphasis – and for good reasons – I think there's an emphasis on local production, local distribution, and local food consumption. We tend to look at Food Sovereignty from a very localized perspective, and it's very different from – as Brewster was pointing out – these larger, international, multinational, sort of, corporate-industrial approaches to food. And then I started thinking, "Well, what does that kind of food system look like?" And I pictured in my mind things that we all see in our communities, those ubiquitous fast food chains that we all have in every single city across BC and across North America, the same big supermarket chains whether it's Overwaitea or Loblaws or Safeway, IGA. If all of our communities, if that was how we got our food, was through these fast food chains and through these big supermarkets, then we wouldn't have Food Sovereignty.

So I came to realize that what Food Sovereignty is, when it plays out in our community, I think, it's what makes our communities unique from the point of view of just food, I mean. It's the local cheeseries and the local bakeries that we

go to – that there's only one. There's one in Sorrento, BC, and there's a different one in Prince George, and a totally different one Cawston. And to me that was what Food Sovereignty was about – is these different faces, the things that make our food unique in each different community.

And again, that's about local things, and I thought, "Well, so is Food Sovereignty just about local? Does it mean that local is good and imported is bad?" And I don't think that that's necessarily correct either. I think it's just that with Food Sovereignty, we place the emphasis on our ability to determine to what extent we want to be self-reliant. And every community and every person makes that choice in their food choices. But it doesn't necessarily mean that we don't have trade, and this comes back to that thing with Indigenous Food Sovereignty. There was always trade among the different Nations. Just like it's not a bad thing to get up in the morning to drink coffee – and if it was, I'd be a bad person, because I like coffee and we don't produce it here. But it doesn't mean that I only drink coffee; we drink lots of other things, and we eat lots of other things that are locally based as well.

So it's not saying, "Don't have trade." But I guess it's saying that sometimes, in order to have Food Sovereignty – in order to have a really vibrant and viable local food system and local food economy and primary producers and farmers and people who are gathering food and then the processors – in order to have that, sometimes we need to do certain things to protect it from other forces that maybe can be so powerful that they make it hard for a local food system to be sovereign. And that's where maybe sometimes we have to have some kind of – from a policy perspective – some kind of food protectionist policies, 'cause many countries subsidize food production, and then they dump cheap food into other countries. And that kind of thing probably happens here in Canada.

JON STEINMAN: And this is Deconstructing Dinner and today's broadcast, titled RECLAIMING OUR FOOD. We are currently listening to Patrick Steiner of Stellar Seeds as he speaks to participants at the recent gathering of the BC Food Systems Network. As we continue to listen to Patrick address the theme of the conference, he emphasizes the importance of supporting local farmers and local producers. But while the push to buy local is receiving a notable amount of attention throughout the media, local food is still very much connected to the global food system.

PATRICK STEINER: I actually was just talking to a friend of mine who's a farmer just outside Salmon Arm, and I'll give you a real-life example. This guy and his family, they grow produce just on the outskirts of Salmon Arm, so they're literally two kilometres from downtown Salmon Arm. They produce a number of different things; they market almost all of it locally. One of the things they produce is garlic, so right now they're in the midst of selling their garlic. And he approached our local supermarket, which is – well, we have quite a few supermarkets, but we have one that's an independent supermarket, so they'll actually buy things from

local farmers and other ones don't, 'cause they get all the stuff shipped from a central warehouse somewhere. But this one local supermarket agreed to take his garlic. And so they're selling his garlic right now on the shelves, and they've given him a fair price for it; he's getting \$4.50 a pound, which is a pretty good wholesale price for a farmer to get for their local garlic. So he was really happy – he's got a garlic in there – but then he told me, well, they're not just selling his garlic; they're also selling some garlic that's coming in from China. And he talked to the produce manager, and produce manager was just straight-up and told him, "Listen, we pay \$1.40 for the stuff from China, a pound. We're going to pay you \$4.50 'cause you say that's what you need and we'll do that." But what it means is that the price on the shelf to the consumers is pretty darn different. It's going to be three times as much for the local garlic.

Now I don't know if that Chinese garlic is produced with subsidies – whether it's dumping, and I have no idea, maybe it's just produced that cheaply, though it is hard to imagine something produced so far away, and then having all those food miles and all the costs entailed, that it can be that cheap. And to me it's a real sign of the kind of battles that we're up against when we talk about creating Food Sovereignty, 'cause we're up against a larger food system that is multinational in scope, and that works on scales of production that are very large. That makes it difficult for us to have a local food system.

And I was having dinner, talking with Abra today, and she said that the big thing she's talking to about people right now with local food systems is that we the consumers who are buying that food have to support the local stuff. And if we don't, we won't have Food Sovereignty. We've got to support the local stuff. And I was also telling Abra that sometimes, that's a tricky business. And I'll give you another local example here of something that has very much to do with Food Sovereignty. And it relates to Seed Sovereignty, and then I'm going to talk to you a bit about what I do with seeds.

In agriculture here in the Shuswap in North Okanagan, we've got a lot of dairy producers, we have a lot of people raising cattle for beef; these are very common things in agriculture here. And all of those dairy producers, all of those cattle producers, many of them are growing some of the feed that they produce for those cattle; they're growing corn, and they're growing barley and wheat, and things like that. But most of them are not going to grow all of the food that they need for their cows that'll last throughout the entire winter. So they also buy feed grains from the local feed store. And here in the North Okanagan, we've got – we had two of them for a while – we had Unifeed and we had Sure Crop Feeds, and they would pretty much provide all of the feed grains and also all the seed for the local farmers who grow stuff out in the summer. And so there was a range of different choices that farmers could get, 'cause they didn't carry the same lines of seeds and stuff like that. But about – I don't know what it was – a year-and-a-half ago or so, the one bought out the other, so now we only have one; we've got Sure Crop Feeds, is the only one left that farmers can get their feed from here

and get their seeds from. And with that sort of conglomeration, the choices in actual varieties went down as well.

I was talking to a local farmer at the Seedy Saturday this winter, a grain farmer in the North Okanagan. He told me, "Well now, Sure Crop Feeds, with their corn and with their soybean, only provide GM – genetically modified – corn and soybean varieties. They do have more than one variety – there's a couple kinds of corn and things like that – but they're all GM. They're all genetically modified. And I happen to know that all these farmers are having to buy this, and this is the stuff that's going into our local food like a lot of these dairies. And so you think that really what's happening is we the final consumers, without even knowing it, are taking products that include these genetically modified foods. And the farmer didn't have a choice about it. That was the only thing they could take. And so we don't have a choice about it down the line. And what I realize is we've lost our Food Sovereignty; we've lost our ability to decide how our food is going to be produced in this community – in certain areas. But when it comes to this corn and soybean, which is a prime thing for the dairy and also for the people raising cattle, so now when you go to our local butchers, where a lot of people get their local meat from, that's what it's being fed with. So in that respect I realize we've lost that Food Sovereignty.

And this concept relates to seed too – because there's a concept or a phrase called Seed Sovereignty – relates to the same thing. It's about our ability to make choices about what kind of seeds we grow, what kind of food we grow with what kind of seeds. And these farmers don't have that Seed Sovereignty; they don't have the choice to look for those non-GMO corn or soybean seeds for the feed for their animals, or that they're going to plant on their land this year. And that's a worrisome thing to me.

Actually, you know what? I kind of got off on the wrong foot here. It's very depressing. I just gave you all the bad news. I gave you all the bad news and I didn't want to give you the bad news, 'cause there's a lot of good news going on when it comes Food Sovereignty and Seed Sovereignty – locally here in the Shuswap, and I'm sure across BC and Canada. I know there's all kinds of fantastic initiatives, and that's actually what I meant to focus on.

I've got two minutes? Noooo!

Yeah, so I'm going to turn around, because there's a lot of really good local Food Sovereignty things going on. And one of the things that I hope you'll hear about – the Shuswap Eat Local Food campaign. I think it's a fantastic idea. It's challenging people in the Shuswap to eat local foods. But it's not just saying you need to eat local and leaving it at that. There's a lot of support behind it. They're telling people where they can get all those local foods. They've had displays of all the local food made and processed around here. And so there's a lot of support: so here's what you can do to get local food, here's the retailers that have it,

here's the farmer selling it directly at the farm gate. So those kind of things are happening in this community and many other communities when it comes to Food Sovereignty.

Same thing with Seed Sovereignty. I can't speak for the grains and things like that. But I'm a vegetable seed producer, and I can tell you that there's a lot of local vegetable seed production going on in BC. There's a lot of small-scale, local, and even organic seed companies out there. Probably there's one very close to the community you live in. You can find out about them by going to local Seedy Saturday events that happen usually in the spring around February and March. Maybe people have heard about those. A good way to find out where a local event is in your community: visit the website [www.seeds.ca](http://www.seeds.ca). Simple to remember – [seeds.ca](http://seeds.ca). There's a list of all these local seed events that'll go on in a community close to you, or maybe in your very own community. They're very popular. They're lots of fun to go to – the whole family.

So these kind of things are happening; there is a movement to do stuff. And it takes supporting those producers, and it takes being a part of it to make it happen. That's the only way if local food and Seed Sovereignty's going to happen. We all need to get to know each other and know what we're providing to each other, know who wants what, know where to buy, what retailers have those things. And the neat thing about local foods or about Food Sovereignty is that if we get it – and the process of making Food Sovereignty is the process of building really strong communities where we all know each other, we know what we produce, we know who the people are in our community. That's what I think is neat about Food Sovereignty. It builds a strong community of people who care about each other and actually get to know each other. That doesn't happen all that often if you're in the Overwaitea isles. Sometimes it might if you're in a small enough community. But when you're at the local retail shop, your local butcher or baker, you run into the people who you know; you get to know people. So that to me is what Food Sovereignty is about: communities.

JON STEINMAN: And that was Patrick Steiner of Stellar Seeds, located in Sorrento British Columbia. And you can find out more about his company by visiting their website – [www.stellarseeds.com](http://www.stellarseeds.com).

*soundbite*

And again, you're tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner – a weekly program that addresses the impact our food choices have on ourselves, communities, and the planet. This broadcast will be archived on the program's website, and that website is [cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://cjly.net/deconstructingdinner). And there will be additional information to explore from this particular broadcast, and that will be located on the page for the September 21<sup>st</sup> broadcast.

A couple of ways in which to end today's broadcast. And the first is to announce how this conference marked the last of which both Cathleen and Brewster Kneen will be a part of. They will soon be relocating to Ottawa after spending roughly ten years here in British Columbia. And as Cathleen spoke to participants about their departure she commented on how local food systems are not just applicable to communities in rural areas, but how urban centres are just as able to foster such systems.

CATHLEEN KNEEN: This whole process of leaving here and going to live in the city is just such a mindbender for me, because Brewster's quite right – I'm a squirrel. I've got a freezer full, and I've got a cold room that's full of jars of things, and it's going to be more of them yet. And what am I going to do when I live in the city and I've got a little backyard, you know? Because here, I have control of what I eat. And he says, "Oh yeah? No you don't." And it's been just really wonderful to hear that deconstructed about how, first of all, I don't have control over what I eat, because of all the things that Patrick was just saying about how things are interconnected. But also, what's wrong with living in a city, growing a little garden, and building relationships with all the farmers around and buying their food and trading for things that I can give – whether it's those pieces of paper with the Queen's picture on or other things – and having that kind of interdependent relationship? This has been really wonderful.

JON STEINMAN: And that was Cathleen Kneen. And in wrapping up today's broadcast, it is of great importance to connect the recent North American-wide incident involving E. coli contaminated spinach to the topic of today's broadcast. As many of you are probably now aware, all bagged spinach or salad mixes containing spinach have been pulled off of shelves across North America. And the reason: because a vast amount of spinach originating in California was contaminated with E. coli. As of September 20<sup>th</sup>, there have been 146 reported cases all across the United States, and one death. E. coli contamination can originate from a number of sources, but most commonly, it originates from feces, or manure. As the industrial methods of producing food see water sources becoming polluted with a multiple amount of dangerous components found in livestock manure, this very water is also used to irrigate vegetable crops. As our industrial food system looks to produce food as cheaply as possible, this particular incident with E. coli contaminated spinach is perhaps a sign of things to come. And to further emphasize the impact that such an incident can have, the company responsible for the contamination is California-based Natural Selection Foods, and they provide spinach to over 30 brands of bagged salad greens. And here in Canada, some of those brands include President's Choice, Dole, and most interestingly, Earthbound Organic Farm. And I say the latter brand is interesting because Natural Selection Foods and Earthbound Organic Farm are the same company. As organic foods have risen in popularity, many of the chain grocery stores exclusively stock only Earthbound Organic products, and while the company promotes itself as an environmentally conscious one, the company nevertheless is a major distributor of non-organic foods as well. So here is a



prime example of how the purchase of many brand-name organic products also contributes to the success of farming practices that organic principles oppose.

This incident, coincidentally enough, occurred during the conference in Sorrento – a conference with the theme of reclaiming local food systems. As the conference was held at a retreat centre, the kitchen at the centre was very quick to ensure that the salad greens for the lunch that day would not land on anyone's plate. One of the major Canadian companies affected by the E. coli incident was Sysco – one of Canada's largest restaurant and institutional food distributors – a company who is also the regular supplier to the retreat centre. But being aware of the centre's purchasing policy, the conference organizers made a special effort to ensure that all food at the conference came from sources within British Columbia, and therefore the salad offered at the conference posed no risk of being contaminated. But the incident did not sit well with the conference centre, and they decided that never again will conference organizers be able to bring their own food. And why would that be the case? Well, because if anyone became sick at the conference centre, ordering from a distributor like Sysco would allow the centre to look to their insurance policy to cover the incident. It certainly was ironic that a gathering of people from all over the province to discuss reclaiming local food systems would be faced with such an incident that of course only reemphasized the importance of such a gathering.

#### *soundbite*

I did recently follow up on this story with conference organizer Cathleen Kneen, and she pointed to a recent comment made by Lee Riley, a professor of infectious disease and epidemiology at the University of California at Berkley. And as he stresses – and I quote – “We don't see E. coli in India, Africa, China. We only see it in highly technologically advanced countries, and the reason is because of this highly centralized food processing system.” There will be a link to this article from the Deconstructing Dinner website.

And so what is a secure food system? Is it one that sees the centralization and close control of food, or is it one that is fostered at a community level? Here in the community of Nelson, while supermarkets and restaurants pull spinach and bagged salad mixes off of their shelves, there is now only one place where residents can purchase spinach, and that is at the one grocery store that carries locally grown spinach.

CNN: ...E. Coli strain at work is found in animal waste. Industry experts say it could be introduced at any time of the growing process. The most likely scenarios, experts say, are from tainted water or unsanitary conditions during harvest or processing.

The FDA is calling this a significant outbreak – the numbers increasing over the weekend, 109 cases now of E. coli infections in people who ate spinach, 19

states now affected. A 77-year-old woman has died in Wisconsin. There's also unconfirmed reports that a 23-month-old toddler may have also succumbed to infection by the E. coli bacteria.

*ending theme*

JON STEINMAN: And that was this week's edition of Deconstructing Dinner, produced and recorded at Nelson, British Columbia's Kootenay Co-op Radio. I've been your host Jon Steinman. I thank my technical assistant Dianne Matenko.

The theme music for Deconstructing Dinner is courtesy of Nelson-area resident Adham Shaikh.

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 and organizations.

Should you have any comments about today's show, want to learn more about topics covered, or would like to listen to previous broadcasts, you can visit the website for Deconstructing Dinner at [www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner).