

## **Show Transcript**

**Deconstructing Dinner**  
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### **Theme Music**

*From the studios of Kootenay Co-op Radio, this is Deconstructing Dinner.*

Jon Steinman: And, welcome to Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly radio program and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm John Steinman. Each week on this program we explore those moments of our day that can often go unnoticed: those moments when we eat. And if its these fundamental moments of our life that pass by without much thought, what critical information about our food are we then missing out on? And here on Deconstructing Dinner we hope to answer that question and foster more educated eating. But attention paid to what one eats was probably most enduring for James MacKinnon and Alisa Smith, the two Vancouver journalists who spent one full year eating only food that originated within a one hundred mile radius from their home. And if that's not enough to consume one's life in an age where most of the Canadian food supply is located nowhere near urban centers, they even found time to record their adventure on the online news resource known as The Tyee. It was this column that gained James and Alisa worldwide attention for completing what to many would appear as an impossible feat here in cold and wintry Canada. And having completed their one-year adventure, it was fitting for them to share their story with the very people around the world who are working towards creating an environment where eating within a one hundred mile radius will no longer warrant such widespread media attention. And they did this at the October 2006 Bridging Borders Toward Food Security Conference held in Vancouver, and Deconstructing Dinner was on hand to record their presentation, segments of which will be featured on today's broadcast. And those segments will be followed by some additional presentation clips, also recorded by Deconstructing Dinner, in September of 2006 in the gathering of BC Food Systems Network held in Sorrento, British Columbia, and those clips will present some ideas and insights into how Canadians can begin fostering local food systems that allow for a one hundred mile diet to be consumed at ease. And those voices will be those of Heather Prichard of FarmFolk/CityFolk and Brent Warner of the British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, who also spoke on behalf of Kathleen Gibson of GBH Consulting Group. [music]

John Steinman: Back in October here on Deconstructing Dinner, we did feature highlights from the Bridging Borders Toward Food Security Conference and a few short clips of James MacKinnon and Alisa Smith's presentation were heard during that broadcast. But those brief clips certainly did not do their one hundred mile diet any justice, and so before we begin exploring clips from their presentation I will provide a brief background on James and Alisa for any listeners who have not heard about this one hundred mile diet. For one, and as is often discussed on this program, North Americans, on average, consume food containing ingredients that have typically traveled at least fifteen hundred miles. Now, for some of us in Canada, that number has been said to be around forty five hundred kilometers on average. And it was this that inspired both Alisa and James on the first day of spring 2005 to confront this unsettling statistic with a simple experiment. For one year, they would purchase or gather their food and drink from within one hundred miles of their apartment in Vancouver, British Columbia. And in this age of climate change, questionable supplies of oil, chemical agriculture, unethical treatment of workers and animals, and the list could go on, eating food from within 100 miles makes sense for so many reasons. Alisa Smith is a freelance writer who has been a member of the Cypress Community Garden for five years, and James MacKinnon is the author of *Dead Man in Paradise*, which won the 2006 Charles-Taylor Prize for literary non-fiction, and he has worked as contributing editors for a number of Canadian magazines. As Alisa Smith welcomed the audience at the 2006 Bridging Borders Toward Food Security Conference, a gathering of individuals from around the world who were involved with food security work, she first introduced their inspiration for the one hundred mile diet, and why two Canadians chose to not work in kilometers.

Alisa Smith: I think I should explain first because this is a really amazing crowd of people – all your credentials, I'm sure, are stacks of letters and organizations after your names that are very impressive, and have been the inspiration for what James and I did this last year. We did a local eating experiment for one year, starting on the first day of spring last year, and it really was because were all the people in academe, and in policy, and long-time activists who have been doing stuff on food security and the importance of local eating. All those ideas are out there, and we seized onto them and we decided to make ourselves human guinea pigs for all your great ideas. So what we did was we set ourselves a big challenge. We decided we would only eat, for one year, foods grown within one hundred miles of our home. And, a lot of Canadians give us trouble for that, because like, "Why isn't it one hundred kilometers?" [chuckle], but one hundred kilometers – we looked at a map, and we wanted to go by what the landscape told us. So what we did was, for the first time really think about what our local area mean, and for us we have the big Fraser River coming through a mountain range, and that's all the great farmland we have around here, is the Delta of the Fraser River. And that is really blocked off behind us by the coast mountain range, which is the town of Hope, is where that begins. And that is a hundred and sixty kilometers, approximately, away from our home in Vancouver. And we thought a hundred and sixty kilometer diet wasn't very catchy. So we went with the old imperial which someone of my age, that's what we used to use in Canada. So we went with the miles, the one hundred mile diet.

Jon Steinman: As both Alisa and James embarked on their long, one hundred mile diet, they questioned or not it would be possible. Alisa also describes their discovery that

eating within a one hundred mile radius of their home is indeed radical unto itself, as it challenges the dominant food system that we are a part of everyday.

Alisa Smith: When we started it we had no idea would it be possible or not possible. We're the kind of people who try to ride the bikes or the bus and reduce our use of fossil fuels and try to be as conscientious as we can be, living in our modern world. But then when we started hearing, drifting around these ideas of food miles, how many miles each ingredient in your meals has come from, and we were so shocked to find out that fifteen hundred miles, is the figure we've heard a lot in Canada, up to forty four hundred kilometers, each ingredient in a meal has come from. We thought, "Well why are we bothering getting wet on our bicycles in the winter riding around if our food is merrily flying around in an airplane from New Zealand." That just didn't seem right. Then, we really wanted to say, "Okay, well, how could we apply this?" That's why we made such a strict rule. And it had to be everything, not that it was baked one hundred miles from our house, but that the grain was grown one hundred miles from our house. So, when James – he was really the one to propose this in the first place, and he sort of said, "Let's do this, let's start on the first day of spring." It was maybe early March. And I sort of was like, "That sounds impossible, what are you talking about?" Because the first thing that I could think of that wouldn't work was sugar. That was just obvious to me. These bags of white granulated sugar, they go into every delicious cake, or jam, or probably anything you buy in a store that comes in a box has sugar in it. I was like, "Well, what are we going to do just about sugar?" but James was like, "Honey, honey," [chuckle] so I was rolling my eyes going, "Okay, I don't even know if jam..." I wanted to make jam that year of course, out of fruit that we planned to pick ourselves, "I don't know if that's going to work, I've only made it with sugar, fine." And of course, there is the whole issue, when you really start thinking about it, sugar is a bad product anyways, when most of it comes from sugar cane in the Caribbean, and the labor conditions there are terrible, which James had the opportunity to see firsthand, when he was down in the Dominican Republic, researching his previous book. And these are people who spend their whole lives cutting sugar cane, and they wear themselves out, certainly by their fifties, they can't function anymore, for physical labor. And he met an old man who, all he had for a lifetime of labor was a small backpack with a broken zipper with one change of clothing. So, your sugar may be cheap, but somebody is paying a price for that. So, when you think about that, like, "Okay, I'm willing to try my jam with honey." That was kind of step one. That was the first thing I thought about that was an obvious challenge for where we live. And then, as we got into it, we thought merrily, "Well, the first day of spring, that sounds so lush, and things are going to be growing, this is going to be great, all the lettuce will sprout in our garden." We live in a one bedroom apartment, but we do have a small community garden plot, which we're very grateful for, five blocks from our home. But it's only about four feet by twelve feet, so we're somewhat limited by what we can do. But again, we thought to ourselves, "This is hard, but we were becoming the typical demographic, I suppose," because most people now live in cities, so we thought it's of course much easier to live off the land or within one hundred mile radius of your home if your home is a farm. because you can grow whatever you need or want if you have the skills and the inclination, and of course, lots of nerve for that too, that's still hard. But in a city environment we're much more at the mercy of what the system is offering us, I guess, what's available in our grocery store. But we definitely were too hopeful and starry eyed

when we thought up our little garden plot, because as soon as I agreed to do this experiment, I knew I was going to do it as soon as I found myself flipping through the Garden catalog looking at, “Okay, what are the – that wacky vegetable that sprouts the earliest and takes the least time to come to maturity, that's what I'll plant.” I realized that as soon as I'm looking at things like, mizuna and swiss chard and spinach and things like that that I had committed in my heart to do this.

Jon Steinman: You're tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner, a one-hour weekly radio program and podcast produced Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. A quick reminder that today's broadcast will be archived on our website, where there will also be further information on the people and topics heard on today's broadcast. That website is: [cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://cjly.net/deconstructingdinner). As Alisa Smith of the one hundred mile diet society continued her presentation, she highlighted how, by eating locally, she developed a heightened sense of the seasons, and that cantaloupes are actually grown in Canada.

Alisa Smith: But unfortunately, it was a very cold spring last year, and we sort of felt like mini-farmers all of a sudden, because even though we only had a four-by-twelve foot plot, it really mattered to us what the weather was doing. And we paid a lot of attention to it, and we really had a sense of the seasons as the year went through. The microseasons, even, because we were paying so much attention to when the first strawberries came ripe in June. It was two weeks earlier. The weather all of a sudden turned around, very warm all of a sudden. It was huge early crop of strawberries, we were out there on the first day we heard about it at the farm, with our buckets, going, “We are going to pick fifty pounds of strawberries, today.” [chuckle] because it was our first really fresh fruit of the year, because of course, we just went into a cold, we hadn't stored up anything, we just wanted to see how it would go as the year progressed. And certainly by the time it was summer, we went from this sort of hard phase of really only eating beets, and potatoes, and rutabagas, and spinach, things like that. The cold, hardy, and the storable vegetables. To, all of a sudden, really making an effort to go every week to the farmer's market, just simple things like that, which before we had done once or – we had done it a few times during the summer, and it was a nice day out, but we didn't really make it part of our shopping schedule. And this is what we did last year. And we're lucky because Vancouver has had a farmer's market, I think for twenty years or so. So we went to the East Vancouver farmer's market and we also discovered how amazing it was that up at the University of British Columbia they have a farm, which used to be their agricultural program, used it as their training ground. But, those kinds of programs seem to be on the wane, at least, at UBC. So, their farmland was in danger of becoming condominiums or something like that, but five years ago they made a big argument for trying a market garden and seeing how that would go and involving the community and making it part of their curriculum. And this, of course, is all stuff we learned after the fact. I'd just heard vaguely – I'd moved to Vancouver just five years before - “Oh, there's some kind of farmer's market up at UBC”, but I'd biked around the campus a few times myself and I was like, “I don't see a farm, where on earth is the farm?” and put it out of my mind, but then this year, was like, “We must find that farm, because whatever they're growing, we want to buy it, so we did find it, and its an amazing urban oasis. Its the only farm in the urban core of Vancouver, but they have about a sixty acre parcel, its less than five acres they have in production, but of course they have just the great variety of produce, which

turned out to be, some things we never even knew grew here before, such as a cantaloupe. I always thought of that as something from California, because that's if you go into something like a supermarket – that's where it all comes from here on the West coast, so I had no idea cantaloupes grew here, and how much better they were when they were picked fresh.

Jon Steinman: Alisa Smith remarked earlier that the idea of eating within a one hundred mile radius is in itself a radical one. James MacKinnon further explains in this next clip.

James MacKinnon: I think Alisa is effectively starting to demonstrate what complete idiots we were when we walked into this. We did get better at it, and we did start to develop some deeper insights than just the shock and horror of living without Fruit Loops. So I wanted to talk a bit about how we came to conclude that this idea of eating locally is in fact a radical idea, and we sort of argued a little bit this morning about whether we should use that term, whether we should use something like “common sense idea” or “effective idea” or “important idea”. But really, this idea of local eating is radical and we shouldn't be afraid of that word. It's a classic – what we found was that the hundred mile diet is a classic kind of trojan horse idea, where on the surface it seems very basic and very simple, old-fashioned even, quaint even, and it's this quaint gesture of eating locally. But if I ask myself what makes an idea radical, then the answer is “A radical idea is something that, if it were embraced by a lot of people, it would transform society in a major way.” From our experience, that really is the case with local eating. So I'm going to give a couple of examples from our experience. The first thing that we realized was, the one hundred mile diet really does directly challenge an enormously powerful industrial food and agriculture system. And, to picture how great a change the hundred mile diet represents, you have to start at this standard point of intersection, for most people, and the industrial food system, and that's the supermarket. The very first day of the hundred mile diet Alisa and I wandered hopefully off to the supermarket to buy our groceries, and of course found aisle after aisle, after aisle, of products that we couldn't purchase. It was sort of the first really concise lesson of the whole experience was walking into these mammoth supermarkets with literally thousands of products and realizing that we would walk out of there with maybe two of those products. I think we walked out with potatoes and, it was probably rutabaga or something like that, but these aisles filled with processed products, none of which come from the landscape that surrounds us, none of which come from the people in our community who produce food.

Jon Steinman: This supermarket experiment conducted by James and Alisa is a striking one, given for most Canadians, the supermarket is our primary source of food. As James and Alisa embarked on their one hundred mile diet, they discovered such an endeavor required a difference sense of community, one that is not found within a supermarket.

James MacKinnon: If we tried to imagine what the supermarket would look like if there were demand for locally produced foods, then it would be a totally transformed supermarket with a completely different delivery systems, completely different systems of the production of processed foods, a complete reorganization of international trans-shipment, a radically different use of the land base in every community, genuinely a radical concept. The second concept that we ran into in a personal way was that the

hundred mile diet requires a different sense of community. We, like most modern, reasonably young [chuckle], urban people, we had no real idea how to can food, or pickle food, or preserve food for winter. I think we're with the majority on that one. And we found ourselves desperately trying to figure out how to do this from books, and from the internet, and really wishing that we had an army of grandmas and grandpas with the accumulated knowledge of a hundred years to show us how to do this. All of the people who hold that knowledge are the people who are pushed furthest to the margins in our society now, and their knowledge is not the kind of knowledge we embrace in this age of information. And we found that the internet was not a substitute, really, I attempted to make cheese with a friend of mine using the Dr. Fankhouser cheese page, which I actually recommend really strongly, but Dr. Fankhouser has done a – he's a chemist and a cheesemaker, but he's done a really brilliant site, with very effective description, photographs. It's about as good as you could hope to do on the internet. We still managed to screw up our cheese. We made an error in terms of how we treated it with salt. We had friends over to sort of celebrate the great cheese eating, and it was described by one of them as tasting like salty cheese with salt on it. [audience laughs] So we started to see these links to community that we lost that we suddenly wished we hadn't lost. All people, I think, in the modern world have a network of relationships that we rely on – we might have a personal hairstylist or an accountant or libel lawyer or whatever. In our case, we now have - we have a beekeeper, we have a wheat farmer, we have a walnut grower, we have a fisherman through CSA's, Community Sport and Agriculture, other box programs like that. More and more people have a farmer as part of that list, and that's a radically different development in our sense of community.

Jon Steinman: You're listening to Deconstructing Dinner as we listen to clips of James MacKinnon of the One Hundred Mile Diet Society as he presented to an audience in October 2006, in Vancouver, and Deconstructing Dinner was on hand to record the presentation. Following clips from this presentation, we will then be exploring some more recordings from yet another conference on this subject, and those voices heard will be that of Heather Prichard of Farmfolk/Cityfolk and Brent Warner of the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands. But first, as we continue hearing clips of James MacKinnon, he describes the sense of community created through their one hundred mile diet experiment. And he also indicates that his new relationship that was created with the environment was one that saw him looking beyond the idea of stewardship, into that of restoration.

James MacKinnon: This hundred mile diet involved this very different relationship with our environment. We lived here, essentially, on the banks of the Fraser River, and yet when it came time to buy salmon and put them in the freezer for the winter, we couldn't get Fraser River salmon, because the fishery was too weak, and the fishing had been curtailed for that year. So we turned to the Cheakamus system, which is a smaller river system to the north, and we thought, "Well, there's no fishery on that, but we could go up and catch fish with a fishing rod [chuckle]." Unfortunately, a train derailed over a trestle up there and dumped a tanker of caustic soda into the Cheakamus River in August 2005, and completely, and effectively eliminated all life in the river below the trestle, completely shut down the Cheakamus river fishery. That was a pretty minor news story, it made the headline for a couple of days, but then it faded away. But for us, we really felt

the shock of that, the shock of realizing that we lived in one of the greatest salmon producing areas historically on the planet and we could not get local salmon. Experiences like that hit home very hard, and really started to push our minds towards a stewardship model. We feel the same way when we ride the bus out to the ferry in Victoria and we see the agricultural land loss, the paving over and the replacement of this incredible Fraser river farmland, with suburbs and condominiums. I think we feel that same sense of shock now, and we're pushed beyond even a stewardship viewpoint, but actually towards a restorationship viewpoint.

Jon Steinman: A newfound relationship with the seasons, with farmers, and with community, a new relationship with the environment. All from simply changing one's diet. As our culture creates a new diet craze on what is seemingly a monthly basis, it becomes quite evident that the diet with the greatest impact on health and well-being is the local one. But James MacKinnon and Alisa Smith's relationships did not end there, as the one hundred mile diet also challenged how it is they use time.

James MacKinnon: And finally, the Hundred Mile Diet challenged how we use time. Harvest season, for us, was quite a challenge. We both have full time jobs as writers, and suddenly we had to put away food for winter. So it was like adding a part-time job's worth of effort on top of already full time lives. And that pushed us to think about, well, what if we actually provided more for ourselves? What if we had spent less time working for money, and more time working just to meet our basic needs ourselves. And again, it extends into this idea of community. One of the theories developed over the hundred mile year was developed by a friend of mine named Reuben, who developed what he calls, "The theory of the perogy party". And its this idea that a night spent prepping food with your friends will always be more fun than a night spent watching a blockbuster film. Always. And, we've tested that, seems to be true. Helps if there's hundred mile wine involved. But we're always being asked how people can fit this into our lives culturally. And, the statistics keep pouring in, most people watch 2-4 hours of TV and films a day. There's time, we have the time. But the more radical answer is probably, "Work less for money. Work more for your basic needs." So we have this potential for radical transformation of the food system, relationship to community, relationship to time, relationship to environment. These were all things that we experienced. These were really felt experiences for us rather than learned experiences through the hundred mile diet.

Jon Steinman: What is perhaps the greatest discovery made by James and Alisa were the new foods that they were forced to explore and consume. Foods that are native to British Columbia or can just simply grow in this climate. And here's Alisa Smith.

Alisa Smith: We discovered so many foods, and in fact, we still are. Just a few short weeks ago, we had a lady email us to our website, which is [100milediet.org](http://100milediet.org), and she said, "I saw an olive tree growing in East Vancouver," and I was so excited, because that was one of the things that we had never found, although we suspected. We had talked to a winemaker on Saturna Island, which is near here, and he said, "The wine industry here is relatively new. Its maybe only the last 15 years in the Fraser Valley that things have been done in any serious way." And he said, "Well, we have got this great vineyard going, and the climate of the gulf islands is different from here. We're very rainy all the time here,

but the gulf islands can actually be quite dry all through the summer, and warmer, sunnier. And its called the Mediterranean climate.” So that's a hint, perhaps, that you could grow olives there, but no one had tried. And he said, “I think we're going to try some olive trees here,” and I just wanted to shake his hand endlessly when he said that, but they hadn't started them yet. We didn't find out about these olives in time for our hundred mile year, so we didn't have olives all that year, olive oil, that was stuff we just had never thought of. But we're getting all these neat surprises as we go along, and hear more and more from people who are just walking around and telling us what their great-aunt maybe grew in her garden. Because that's where some of the really neat and experimental kind of vegetables come from, those older times, when the first Europeans settlers arrived here and thought to themselves, “Well, I guess I'll just try it.” And they threw whatever into the ground and saw if it would grow, and the things often do. There was fellow on Salt Spring Island, the island seemed to be very experimental, I guess they have less to do, [chuckle] in the evenings there, but there is a fellow there, Dan Jason, the Salt Springs Seed Company, he tries everything like, like seeds from Zimbabwe, or a thousand year old tobacco seeds, maybe he's pulling our leg, but apparently that did grow. And we did learn that, historically, there was a certain kind of tobacco plant on the Queen-Charlotte Islands, which is quite far north of here. So some of the pleasures are wondering to ourselves what is possible. A farmer that we met last fall when we were on our desperate search for wheat. That was another thing that took us forever to find. At first we thought, “Well, I guess its this cold, grainy climate, wheat just doesn't like it here, so nobody bothers.” But it just turned out, its true, nobody bothers, but its more because of the industrial food system, sort parcels up the landscape. And all of the prairies in the midwest, that's wheat country. And that's the sort of thing decided by the agricultural experts a hundred years ago, here on the West Coast. “Don't bother so much with fruit, fruit is for the Okanagan.” That's the interior of the province. “Don't bother with the wheat. Wheat is for the prairies. Focus on the dairy industry.” That's something we focused on here and we still have, luckily, we enjoy it, all the cheeses we had this year. There were tons of great local cheeses here, so we were glad of that, but it just meant that to the exclusion of almost everything else. I had often wondered why there was so much corn grown here, I had thought, “Ah, people like corn maizes, corn rows, whatever.” But it turns out that's really mostly for the cows, so I'm not totally sure how I feel about that, during that hundred mile year when I was like, “Damn you, all that corn when you could be growing olive trees or wheat or something like that.” Because we finally did find a farmer on Vancouver Island, which is again, like the gulf islands, a somewhat drier summer climate than here. And he said it was easier to grow wheat there than on the prairies. He had been a prairie wheat farmer for a number of years, and he sold us some flour. And we were very excited about that. We basically said, “We will pay you whatever you ask for this flour,” and then we went on a binge of making homemade pasta. James did that. He was the cook all last year, as he usually is. [chuckle] I do the dishes. [chuckle] So James made homemade pasta for the first time, and it was so much better than the stuff that you get dried in the supermarket. You kind of wonder to yourself, “What am I doing here making pasta when no one I know has done that unless maybe they subscribe to Martha Stewart magazine?” [chuckle] But it was so worth it. You don't have to do it everyday. It's just one of those things you could try, but going back to the idea of the experimental nature of people around here, another farmer we met

while we were trying to find wheat. He said, “Oh, I tried wheat last year.” His quest was actually beer, and that is a noble quest. He wanted a hundred mile beer [chuckle]. He wanted to grow his own barley, and his own hops, but he had an unfortunate disaster with his barley as farmers often have these disasters. Again, as James was saying with the Fraser River fisheries, you realize how important it is to care about all that stuff. You do care, when all of a sudden who would ever have thought to care after some single farmer who leases a few acres of land; his crop didn't work out. That wouldn't have even crossed your mind. This pained us when his barley crop did not work. [chuckle] And he showed us some bags of flour and he had tried some of the really old grain varieties, the emmer wheat, the mayan corn, which are around seven thousand and nine thousand years old. They worked fine, but unfortunately he got some weevils in his flour, which he was very upset about. But this year, another thing we didn't find, oddly, was hard beans – like black beans, pinto beans, kidney beans. They grow here perfectly well, but again, no one's much bothered because you can buy them bulk anywhere for about 19 cents for a small bag, pretty much, so they don't bother to compete. When farmers like him learned that we were interested in that, and that we would pay more for that and that other people would, too, he was very excited and he was willing to try growing stuff like that.

Jon Steinman: You're tuned into Deconstructing Dinner as we listen to clips of Alisa Smith of the One Hundred Mile Diet Society as she presented to an audience in October 2006 in Vancouver. Deconstructing Dinner was on hand to record the presentation. As Alisa wrapped up her presentation, she spoke of the creation of community that their one hundred mile diet helped foster, and how they further discovered how affordable eating locally can be. A surprising discovery when many often argue that eating locally is just far too expensive.

Alisa Smith: Something I should say as well, that was a pleasure to us to discover, was how affordable it could be. But you just have to spend your money differently, because we were somewhat shocked during the harvest season when we were doing things like buying eighty pounds of tomatoes. We're like, “Oh my goodness, we just bought like a hundred dollars worth of tomatoes! This is insane!” But then we realized it lasted through the winter. By the time we were cooking our late fall and winter meals, we barely had to go shopping. We would just open our cupboards, open our freezer, and almost everything we needed was there, and we weren't spending very much money. In fact, I met up with someone in Minnesota who independently was doing her own local eating experiment, and she had kept very careful records of the cost of her food over the year, and hers came under the American federal welfare allowance for food, which you can imagine isn't terribly generous, something like \$273 a month for a family of two. So it just shows that its not just something that you can do if you can afford to go into fancy, upscale, organic grocery stores, but just, if you're willing to spend a little bit of time on it, then it can actually be cheaper than buying the pre-packaged pizza in the freezer aisle.

Jon Steinman: Perhaps the greatest concern facing Canadians when it comes to food is health. And in a recent poll conducted by Decima research on what issues are most important to Canadians, the environment is now at the top, followed by healthcare. And local eating is perhaps one of the most effective tools through which Canadians can help mitigate the destruction to our environment. A healthier environment will also, of course,

lead to healthier Canadians, and less of a need for healthcare. What about on a nutritional level? Is local eating more nutritious? Well, James MacKinnon decided to find out.

James MacKinnon: ...Further to Alisa's point about how whether or not it was nutritious, we chose mid-winter to bring that question up with a dietician, because we thought that would really test it. So I called this woman, Cynthia Sass, who's a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association. Here it is, mid-winter, and I start talking to her about: was a hundred mile diet nutritionally acceptable? So I was describing it to her and was like, "Well, for last year, all we've eaten is the freshest foods picked in season at the peak of ripeness. Mainly a vegetable-based diet, only whole grain or near whole grain wheat products, mostly organic food, mostly from places where we're aware of the farming techniques that were used – didn't buy any white sugar, didn't buy any bleached flour, no processed foods, period. Eating a greater diversity of foods than ever before," I'm starting to realize that I'm sounding ridiculous, and finally I asked her, "Cynthia, as a dietician, would you say that the hundred mile diet is likely to be healthier than the typical American diet?" [audience laughs] We both kept straight faces until that point. We just collapsed and laughed, the answer was so obvious, it was ridiculous. We were always being asked, though, by reporters, "How do you feel?" and we're always trying to go, I just want to ask him, "How do you feel?" [audience laughs]. So, the last major, the last thing that we wanted to talk about the hundred mile diet was how it acts as a gateway. We have the pleasure of seeing other people start to make the same sorts of discoveries that we did, and I have a friend who was quite a sceptic at the start of this, last year, I guess. And this point, he came to me the other day and said, "Well, I have to admit you started to affect me and I started to buy some things at farmers' markets," and he was talking to me about how he never understood where people must have gotten the idea for grape-flavored products. You know, like grape-flavored cola, because he said it doesn't taste anything like grapes. The grapes I buy don't taste anything like the grape-flavored cola. And then he bought some grapes from the local farm this year, and he said, "These grapes taste like they're grape-flavored." [audience laughs] So, it's just a beautiful thing to see people having these sorts of eye-opening experiences.

Jon Steinman: You're tuned into Deconstructing Dinner. As James MacKinnon of the One Hundred Mile Diet Society wrapped up his presentation, he ended with an inspiring example of how an entire community, here in British Columbia, created a five-week, one hundred mile diet project. And the response was not only overwhelming, but the community discovered that if they continued on their path, that they would be faced with not having enough farmers to meet their needs. Perhaps one of the most concrete examples of the vulnerability of our Canadian communities that rely on food grown and produced thousands of kilometers away.

James MacKinnon: Probably the most inspiring thing that's come out of it for us, ultimately, was an experiment that followed on ours that happened on Palo River. And there a group of people came together, inspired by the hundred mile diet, writing what we've been doing, and decided to see if they could get fifty people in their community to commit to five weeks of local eating. They actually shrank the circle down to fifty miles, so, kind of one-upped us. [audience laughs] They had no idea what would happen with this, whether they'd be able to get fifty people. I went up for their opening potluck and

they had signed up more than two hundred and fifty people to try this. And this is a small town in British Columbia. Like many small towns, it's increasingly abandoned by a globalized economy. And here was a group of people who could immediately see that they had the power to completely transform their community. They knew right away that their farmers were actually scared, were anxious about whether or not they'd be able to produce enough food for the two hundred and fifty. Four restaurants started serving at least one 100% local food meal per week. The local butcher and the local fish shop got involved. And, it's very clear to the people in Palo River now, that if they continued to follow along with this experiment, at the level that they have so far, or even build on it, new people will be able to open farms. People from their community will be able to stay there and work in agriculture rather than come down to Vancouver and serve coffee. [audience chuckles] Thanks very much for listening. [applause]

Jon Steinman: And that was James MacKinnon of the One Hundred Mile Diet Society speaking in October 2006 at the Bridging Borders Toward Food Security Conference held in Vancouver, and you can find out more about the One Hundred Mile Diet Society by visiting their website, [100milediet.org](http://100milediet.org). And located on the Deconstructing Dinner website will be an archived version of this broadcast along with some more information about the conference. And that website is [cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://cjly.net/deconstructingdinner). [Music]

Jon Steinman: You're tuned into Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly one-hour radio program and podcast produced in Kootenay Co-op Radio at Nelson, British Columbia. In the remaining part of today's broadcast, titled "One Hundred Mile Diet: Local Food Strategies", we will explore what is in essence the evolution of the local food movement. As the one hundred mile diet is an idea that many have begun to incorporate into their daily lives, we have now collectively begun to recognize the barriers that exist to adopt a widespread movement of local eating. Overcoming these barriers was the recurring topic at the September 2006 gathering of the B.C. food systems network, held in Sorrento, British Columbia, and Deconstructing Dinner was on hand to record the conference. In this following clip, we hear a presentation by Kathleen Gibson, who is the principal of GBH consulting group, based in Victoria, and who is also involved with the B.C. Food Processors Association, and their meat inspection enhancement strategy. Kathleen was unable to attend this recorded session, and Brent Warner, who we will also hear from just shortly, provided the voice for Kathleen Gibson, as she wrote about the need for local processing, to facilitate local farming and local eating.

Brent Warner (reading the writing of Kathleen Gibson): Kathleen Gibson couldn't be here today but she did email me a quick summary of her presentation. As eaters, we understand a lot about where we grow, acquire, or purchase our food. We appreciate the value local farmers play, and value local farmers. But collectively, we don't understand much about the other links in the field-to-plate chain, i.e. processors, which is where her passion is right now – distributors and wholesalers. So what's working right now, and almost all of B.C., the appropriate scale for local production and processing is very small. We have very small localized processing. And farmers can, and sometimes often do wish to serve distant markets. So the system needs to allow for direct, local, as well as distant product sales. First we need to have some kind of consistent definition of local, which I'm sure could tie up most of the rest of this conference. [audience chuckles] She suggests,

“Is it grown or raised within two hundred kilometers of here?” Some infrastructure we know is effective, for example, farmers' markets also build community relationships. Restaurants that feature and talk about local foods, and feature local farmers are growing all over the world. That is a huge trend. And there's a distinctive push now to have the uniqueness and the taste of the regions, so that regions are developing their own food that people travel for. Some promotional support we also know is effective is campaigns like the hundred mile diet, has got a lot of mileage this year. Food miles shown on products labels. Spud does this. Local food articles in magazines, buy local campaigns, direct farm marketing organizations that promote their own membership. Where do we go next? So far, the infrastructure pieces we are working on are one-offs. This is a good way to build, brick by brick, but it's slow. At the same time, the bulk of food people eat is being delivered by very large, distant corporate suppliers. Producers and processors of many products are totally interdependent. How can they work together to serve local markets? So let's look at institutional procurement. Universities, hospitals, loggings, mining camps, highways, highway restaurants. People responsible for purchasing often want to support the local suppliers, but it's not easy for them to do. While many such contracts are in the hands of catering giants, not all of them are. The challenges of doing institutional purchasing, which is where a lot of us have run into some problems. There are three good reasons why this is still uphill work. The nature of regulation: agriculture and food regulation is driven by international pressures. National government sets the playing field for the provinces. These small-scale processing plants are essentially at the same level as a multi-million dollar processing plant. The health regulations are the same. And, for a lot of us in the industry, that's a problem. That is how to put us out of business in small-scale processing. Canada's vision for agriculture: bulk single commodities per export. Bracket: not a good fit. Mandatory food standards are being developed on large-scale, industrial models. They do not apply in most of B.C. And that's true of where we are with the meat situation. To make the economics work, you have to be able to supply all the hospitals in the health authority, or all the stores owned by a major grocery chain, or build a poultry processing plant, you have to be able to expand your bird supply ten or maybe a hundred times. The amount of regulation, and the number of agencies - farmers, processors, marketers, and others involved with food - must make their way through a maze of regulations that includes but is not limited to property assessment, the assessment authority taxes, environmental standards, health and safety standards. All these areas that are important, and there's good reasons to address these issues. However, the folks subject to the maze find the officials disagree or contradict each other both within and between agencies. Canadian Food Inspection Agency inspectors can be in conflict with the CDC inspectors, Center for Disease Control, when they're telling you what you have to do. One'll tell you one thing with your septic field and/or your processing floor, and another one will tell you something else. The difference between the two could be \$50,000. So, who trumps who? In conclusion, expanding our effectiveness, farmers and food providers often need assistance from outside and inside government to navigate the maze, before they go broke, or give up in despair. In fact, there has to be not just navigation, but pushback to nationalize how some of the regulations are applied, which is why we need government partners. This is why our organizations like the B.C. Food Systems Network, Farmfolk/Cityfolk, small-scale B.C. Food Processors can apply themselves.

Jon Steinman: And that was Brent Warner reading segments of the presentation prepared by Kathleen Gibson of GBH consulting and the B.C. Food Processors Association. The next session at the gathering of the B.C. Food Systems Network was Heather Pritchard, who, among her many roles, is the executive director of the Vancouver-based Farmfolk/Cityfolk, a not-for-profit organization that looks to see farm and city working together to create a local and sustainable food system. Heather spoke to the group on the topic of the agricultural land reserve, and a new cooperative model through which Canadians can begin taking hold of land, and taking hold of food.

Heather Pritchard: So what we're going to talk about today is land. If we want to relocalize our food system, we really need land to do that. I wanna say that I think we have lots of land: it's all over the place. If you live in the city, the very first thing we can do is to, of course, grow our own gardens. Our balconies, on our rooftops, in our backyards, in our community gardens, everywhere in the boulevards and whatever. So if we were like Cuba and we needed to do that, we could do it pretty quickly. And I would say - I'm not going to talk about that, but I would say that that's the first priority, is to get the food happening as close as possible to where we live. Secondly, is to look at the farmland that we have around the city centers, and to protect that. And if you have been following, as I have been following very closely, what is happening with our agricultural land, its very threatening, in terms of development and housing. We've won a few things, but even as we do that, we know that, I think its about 60% of all the proposals that come to the Agricultural Land Commission are actually approved. And, we've won a few. Those of us who worked hard on Barnston know that that was when we thought we would win, and we did. We thought if we didn't win then, then that going to be the end, because that was the trend. But, more surprisingly, we actually also won the Garden City in Richmond. Just last week. And that was one that I thought was going to go under for sure. [audience applauds] But one of the things that I know about land is that it's far too expensive to buy to farm. So, though we protect it and keep it in the farmland, very few people are actually able to farm it. And all around the world, there are people with money, so they can buy the big farmland, put their big house in the middle of it, and they don't need to farm. Or they could be a developer and buy the farmland and really hope that they can pressure to get it out of the ALR and then it's just like, better than buying a lottery ticket. So, we've decided that we want to do something about that, and a group of us who actually are on cooperative farms have formed an alliance, and we're calling it the Collective Farm Community Alliance. The primary members of this alliance are founders of this alliance, are TLC, which is The Land Conservancy, Farmfolk/Cityfolk, and Ecovillage. First of all, we have to secure the land and make sure that there is no speculation on it. It will never be sold. Secondly, we have to make sure its farmed. And thirdly, if we're going to do this, we have to live on it. There's no point in living a long way away and having to drive to where we work and the farms we have to live on. The TLC is really basically a land trust. Farmfolk/Cityfolk is very much in the support of the farms and the farmers. What we are trying to do is to make sure that the land is either owned by a cooperative, society, a church – somebody who will say that we are never going to sell it. The farming can be done cooperatively. Now that might be like on our farm, where the cooperative, Glorious Organics Cooperative, actually is the primary and only grower. Or it might be on Keating Co-op where it's licensed out to individual people, but managed by a cooperative society. So there's lots of different kinds of ways

this can go, on lots of different models. And then with the Ecovillage there, of course, is all kinds of ways in which we can build housing on it, where young people can actually buy the housing if they want to, or farmers can buy the housing or not. The cooperative can own the housing and rent it out, or people can purchase it. So while we're doing this, trying to build a model which will be attractive to the new farmers that want to commit themselves to that. If they don't have to pay the two million dollar mortgage on the land, they have a possibility of being able to farm it and make some kind of living, or at least a livelihood. And, if they're able to kind of purchase their place, they might have some possibility of equity. So what we're saying is take the equity out of the land. The land doesn't belong to us. The land is our planet. We need to steward it. Let's take the equity out of it. But let's make sure that we keep some kind of equity in our system, which will allow people to basically make a living and have a future.

Jon Steinman: And that was Heather Pritchard of Farmfolk/Cityfolk speaking at the September 2006 gathering of the B.C. Food Systems Network. And you can find more info on Farmfolk/Cityfolk through their website, [www.ffcf.bc.ca](http://www.ffcf.bc.ca), and more info on the Collective Farm Community Alliance can be found on the Deconstructing Dinner website. And the last voice we will hear from on today's broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner is Brent Warner. Brent is an industry specialist with the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, and he was featured during our February 16, 2006 broadcast. Brent addresses a very fundamental question, of how it is we as British Columbians and Canadians have arrived at this moment, where local eating is seen as a radical experiment, and where local eating has become more difficult than it should be.

Brent Warner: So how did we get here? I think Cliff hit it on the head with the second world war. And the politicians after that created this cheap food policy in North America. Economically we spend about 10% of our disposable income on our food. Europe spends over 20%. That alone would solve our problem, right there. If we were to capture that other 10%, we would have incomes for our farmers and things like that. So keep that in mind, that our government drove us down to that level. Another big thing that people don't realize: in 1944, the first refrigerated truck rolled down a highway in North America. 1944. Wasn't that long ago. Everything changed since then, so that's when local food systems really came under attack, and the invention of the shopping center in the mid-fifties. That wasn't what our grandparents were used to. And everybody flocked to them – they were cool, they were new, and all that stuff. The other thing we did, we took Ag education out of the school system. Gone. Kids don't learn about agriculture, they don't learn about their food system – it's no longer important. And, everybody's moving to the city. Right now, less than 2% of our population in North America has any direct relationship to agriculture. And that's falling. As more and more of our continent urbanizes, less and less people are two generations from a farm, they may be three generations. Most of us at my age category would have been on the farm or maybe one generation away. You see kids in the city now, they may be three and more generations away. So how do we fix that? My one goal is to get agriculture back, mainstream in the education system. I think that is huge to address a lot of the issues we're talking about. We've got some little projects like B.C. Ag In the Classroom, which is a phenomenal project, but of course it's not fully supported, economically, so you don't get the kind of impact. But it should be curriculum. It should be in the curriculum. Anybody here that's

old enough to remember 1972, a Canadian folk singer named Murray MacLauchlan did a song? Anybody remember the farmer song? They actually made a song about farmers, in 1972. That is so wild. That would never get on radio today because you wouldn't know what it was, the farmer songs. But in there, he said, "These days, when everyone's taking so much, there's somebody putting back in." And that was what it was about. I use that song on some of my powerpoints and my daughter thinks I'm crazy because she's 17. But, she doesn't mind the music. Health is another huge issue that we can use to our benefit. We've got a massive health crisis in North America and it's about food. If that's what it takes to wake people up, then I'm all for it. Let's get out there and link up with health, show the connections which we've walked away from. People don't realize what they eat somehow affects their health. [audience chuckles] It's rocket science to them, they've forgotten about it. So, we've got to get back into that. Ten percent of the populations in developed countries have diabetes. That's expected to double within the next twenty years. That number will collapse healthcare budgets worldwide. In this province, by 2016, our government revenues will entirely be devoted to healthcare. 2016. Not 2066, or 2166. Two zero one six, ten years from today. There'll be no other revenue in this province for anything except healthcare, without projecting for the increase in diabetes. So that's just taking our current 8% every year in healthcare budgets. We are on a massive collision course. As important as global warming is, this is going to hit us upside the head a lot faster than global warming.

Jon Steinman: Wrapping up Brent Warner's presentation and wrapping up today's broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner, Brent speaks on the subject of organics versus local, and where he believes the collective message should be concentrated.

Brent Warner: I think we have concentrate our message on local, whatever that is, whatever your collective definition of that is. Concentrating on organic scares me, and I'll tell you why. Because organic is moving offshore. It is a commodity, and unless you can somehow relate that to your local food system, if you're simply talking about organic, the average consumer is uneducated enough to think and look strictly for organic and bypass the fact, wherever that was sourced, and did a farmer get paid for that? Was it fairly traded? Whatever. If they're strictly looking for organic, you have a problem here, as far as sustainability goes, because we, in North America, will not produce that product if its strictly being sold because its organic. The Agricultural Land Reserve, Heather mentioned some important cases, pieces coming out of the ALR, that's one issue that gets all the press. My issue gets no press. I don't even care about the farmland, on one hand, because there's no farmers on it. ALR in this province, twenty years ago, was fifty percent farmers. Its probably down to twenty percent. And I mean farm. I don't mean a cow or a horse in the middle of a ten-acre pasture with a twenty thousand square foot house on it. That's not farming to me. And yet we have been usurped by the media, that all we read about is this piece from the ALR. Where are the stories about all of the farmers that have gone? On Vancouver Island, south of Duncan, when I started this job in 1980, there were thirty dairy farms. There's two left, and by next year, there'll be one. Where's the story on that? That land's all still there. Every one of those pieces of dairy farmland is still in the ALR, and it still has some kind of grass on it. It has no dairy farm. That's an issue I think we should think about.

Jon Steinman: And that was Brent Warner, an industry specialist with the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands. Brent spoke at the September 2006 gathering of the B.C. Food Systems Network in Sorrento, British Columbia. And you can learn more about the network by visiting [fooddemocracy.org](http://fooddemocracy.org). [music]

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, John Steinman. I thank my technical assistant, Diane Matenko. The theme music for Deconstructing Dinner is courtesy of Nelson area resident Adam Shake. This radio program is provided free of charge to campus community radio stations across the country. And financial support for this program is received through donations and support from businesses, organizations, and listeners. And should you wish to contribute to the ongoing success of this program, I invite you to offer your support through our website, at [cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://cjly.net/deconstructingdinner), or by dialling (250) 352-9600. Till next week. [Music]