

Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
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Title: Biofuel Boom: Greenwashing and Crimes Against Humanity (Part 2)

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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. I'm Jon Steinman, and today marks part II of the Biofuel Boom series launched here on the program last week. The full title of this 2-part series is Biofuel Boom: Greenwashing and Crimes Against Humanity. Last week on part I we spent most of the full one-hour examining the greenwashing taking place within industry and political circles with respect to the rapid emergence of biofuels derived from agricultural crops, and today, we examine the accusation that biofuels are a crime against humanity. We will also spend the remainder of the broadcast exploring the controversy on the campus of the University of California at Berkeley where on February 1st of this year, a biofuel research deal worth half a billion dollars was announced between BP (British Petroleum) and the University. On today's broadcast we will hear more segments from my recordings compiled at the September CropLife Canada conference in Saskatoon, and those voices will include JoAnne Buth, the President of the Canola Council of Canada, Len Penner, President of Cargill Canada. And we will hear once again from Jean Zielger the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Darrin Qualman of Canada's National Farmers Union, and from Eric Holt-Gimenez of Food First. We will also hear the voices of chancellor Robert Birgenau, student Ali Tonak, and professors Igancio Chapela and Miguel Altieri of the University of California at Berkeley. And we will hear some segments of BP Chairman and CEO Robert Malone and California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

And a reminder that if you missed last week's part I of this series or miss any of today's broadcast, it will be archived on our web site at cjly.net/deconstructingdinner

Increase Music and Fade Out

For any of you who weren't able to catch part I of this Biofuel Boom series, I will quickly recap what biofuels are for anyone needing an introduction. On a broader scale biofuels refer to many different technologies that convert what is often plant based materials into fuel. While some technologies are more efficient than others, and with many still in early stages of development, the biofuels being focused on for the Biofuel Boom series are those that are receiving the most political attention and investment and those are Ethanol and Biodiesel products derived from agricultural crops. These biofuels are more appropriately referred to as agrofuels.

Last week we played for you the announcement by Prime Minister Stephen Harper that 1.5 billion dollars will be put towards the start-up of a Canadian biofuel industry. We heard recordings of US President George Bush and Brazilian President Lula speaking on their commitment to growing their biofuel industries. In all three cases we heard a message of green, clean, renewable and sustainable fuel, but as became quite clear on part I, such a message is misleading, and in many cases not true at all. With every politician and company now scrambling to paint an environmentally friendly image, there has been quite the glaringly apparent lack of understanding on environmental issues, with many of these influential figures and companies throwing around words that may *sound* good, but it's clear that they have little idea what the words really mean.

Agrofuel crops require numerous *non*-renewable resources throughout their cultivation, they contribute to soil erosion, greenhouse gas emissions, air pollutants, water degradation and impacts on surrounding ecosystems, and so there's no debating that agrofuels are *not* sustainable as they exist today, yet the words renewable, clean and green are thrown around in such ways as to imply that biofuels *are* sustainable. But even the *word* sustainable is being used indiscriminately to describe the emergence of biofuels. Now such misappropriation of language presents an

opportunity for those of us listening in on these messages, as we can now more easily deconstruct the real agendas being carried out by politicians and industry alike.

soundbite

Environmental issues aside, what has become quite apparent around the world since interest in biofuel production increased substantially in the past year, is that food prices have risen dramatically, and this is of special concern in developing countries. Now what has caused this rise in food prices has become a debatable issue. Biofuel proponents suggest that rising energy prices are to blame, while those opposed to biofuels are certain that the rising food costs are indeed a result of the increased value of the same crops for biofuel production.

On last week's part I of the series, we listened in on the announcement made by Jean Ziegler – the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. On October 25, Jean Ziegler spoke to the UN's General Assembly on Human Rights and called for a 5-year moratorium on the expansion of biofuels, in particular the fuel composition mandates that governments such as ours here in Canada are setting to come into effect as early as 2010. The reason for such a moratorium? Well Jean Ziegler refers to biofuels as a crime against humanity. And to introduce the focus of the first half of today's broadcast, here he is once again speaking to the press on October 26 in New York City.

Jean Ziegler: The second point was agrofuel, you know that President Bush and President Lula, when they came together here, proclaimed that within five years 26 million hectares of agricultural soil will be effectively transformed to the production of agrofuel and agrodiesel for the sake of climatic salvation, for the sake of reducing the foreign debt of Brazil and for President Bush, which you can understand, to reduce the dependence of America from the oil producing countries in the Middle East where there is political resistance. So the ineffectual motivation of President of Brazil and of President Bush are completely legitimate. You can understand this argument, it is not cynicism. But the effect of transforming hundreds and thousands of tonnes of maize, of wheat, of beans of palm oil into agricultural fuel is absolutely catastrophic for the hungry people, totally catastrophic. Let me give you some examples, the world price of wheat doubled in one year, the price of maize more than augmented four times.

JS: Also on last week's broadcast, we heard Jean Ziegler make the comparison of what filling one's gas tank up with 50 litres of ethanol could instead provide to those in need of food. Let's take a listen once again.

JZ: If you have a car that goes by ethanol and you fill up your reservoir with 50 liters of bioethanol. To make 50 liters of bioethanol you have to burn 232 kilos of maize. From 232 kilos of maize a child in Zambia or in Mexico, where maize is a staple food can live one year. So it is a crime against humanity to convert agricultural productive soil into soil that is producing foodstuffs that will be burnt into biofuel, it is a crime against humanity. And I ask to create a moratorium that the UN prohibits for five years this transformation this substitution. Why five years? It is realistic because the scientific research is progressing very quickly and in five years it will be possible to make biofuel and biodiesel from agriculture waste.

JS: And again, that was Jean Zeigler – the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food presenting his concerns on the idea of using agricultural land to grow fuel instead of food.

Back in September of this year I traveled to Saskatoon to record the CropLife Canada annual conference. CropLife is the trade association representing the major agricultural corporations involved in the biotechnology and pesticide industries. Speaking at the conference was JoAnne Buth, the President of the Canola Council of Canada whom we heard from on part I of this biofuel Boom series. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has proposed a 2% mandate to come into effect in 2012, whereby all diesel engines in Canada will require a 2% biodiesel component. The Canola Council of Canada is setting themselves up to meet such a mandate, and JoAnne Buth spoke about this food vs. fuel debate in light of such a proposed mandate.

JoAnne Buth: Part of the discussion around bio-diesel is how much; part of that gets dragged into the food versus fuel debate, how much of the food crop in Canada is essentially going to move into biodiesel. So let's look at where we are at today. We've got three companies up and running with 70 million liters of canola biodiesel, not a lot. We have ADM in Velva, North Dakota that is in start up phase, it is producing, I don't know at what capacity but its capacity will be 320 million liters. That works out to about 1 million tonnes of canola seed. In terms of

announcements there are nine companies that have announced 1.8 billion liters of canola biodiesel, this is just canola, which could equate over the long run obviously if they were all up and running to 4.7 million tonnes of canola seed. That is not likely to happen, because there is going to be competition in the market place and we are not sure which companies will actually see this as a viable financial initiative. So we could also take a look at how much canola would be used if we were able to fill 70 percent of the mandate, so if we had a two percent renewable content in on-road/off-road diesel by 2012. Then if we used 70 percent of that was canola biodiesel we would be looking at 1.6 million tonnes of canola seed. It is unlikely that the Canadian petroleum industry would exceed this mandate, I mean they are going to move up to it. There has also been talk about what about into the U.S? Well, if we see canola production increasing in the U.S. they may very well be able to fill their mandate with what they want to us in the U.S. So part of the food versus fuel debate is that this is very close to our carry over, yes we need carry over every year because we need to fill the supply chain but this is not much greater than our carry over and when you are looking at the increases in production that we have seen, we can do both in Canada.

JS: Now a few issues raised in that clip deserve to be addressed. For one, JoAnne Buth argues that the amount of canola that would be required to fill the mandate, is the extra carry-over that is produced each year, and would thereby not interfere with the ongoing production of food. But such an argument lost its meaning when as her presentation proceeded, she said this.

JB: We will also be pushing for a higher mandate by 2015.

JS: So the agenda seems to be quite clear. Now as listeners of Deconstructing Dinner may recall, back in January of this year we heard from Darrin Qualman who summarized how in 6 of the past 7 years, the world has consumed more grain than it has produced, thereby cutting into surplus supplies. Now while the *distribution* of food around the world is one of the major barriers for those in need to access food, an effective system of distribution does not currently exist, and with such dwindling supplies of grain around the world, it certainly presents a concern that not only will agricultural land be used to grow fuel, but that an agenda is also in place to gradually increase the cultivation of such fuel crops.

Following JoAnne Buth's presentation, I posed this very concern to her during the ensuing media scrum.

JS (from interview): On this food and fuel balance, one concern when looking at this balance is that globally right now we are looking at one of the fastest fuel supply draw downs in the past 45 years and the past seven years, six of them we have actually consumed more grain than we produced. Is this the right time to be switching food crops over to a fuel and now these other technologies as well?

JB: So, we get dragged into the food versus fuel debate and one of the things that we have to say right up front is this is about oil, it is not about wheat. It is about canola oil, soya bean oil, etc. And so the two production systems the two commodities are quite different. Wheat is a commodity and a staple crop especially for food for a lot of countries throughout the world. Canola and what we are talking about is really a biodiesel industry in Canada. There is enough production of canola right now to satisfy the mandate that is coming and in the past few years we have had a fairly large carry over in canola; canola that couldn't be sold because there was no market demand. So we see this as an opportunity to use that canola that wouldn't have been sold. Do we sell to other countries? Of course we do, we sell to the U.S. Japan but we also sell to other countries that are developing countries, Mexico some of the South East Asian countries, but canola is not a commodity based on low prices, we sell it on the basis of value. So between the fact that we've got some carry over there, there is the supply that we need, that is it not drawing down from other parts of the world, we are pretty confident that this is not an issue in terms of canola biodiesel.

JS: Now I did send that last audio segment to Darrin Qualman – the Director of Research of the Saskatoon-based National Farmers Union, and here's his response to JoAnne Buth's comments.

Darrin Qualman: I think three things need to be said around that. First of all she tries to characterize this canola oil as somehow not being food but of course it is. It's what we make our margarine and our cooking oil out of, and it is a significant calorie source in our food supply and an integral part of the way we eat and prepare food in Canada. The second thing she does is somehow contrast canola oil, saying well its not wheat, we are not talking about wheat so somehow we are not talking about food, but in the whole bioenergy realm of course we are talking about wheat. The

big plants in Western Canada for instance, the two big ones out here are going to use wheat and wheat acreage is being contracted right now so, it is food in that way too. And the third thing that I think even cuts across those two arguments is it's really not a question of this crop versus that crop, it is a question of acres and the acres on which those fuel crops are going to be grown are acres on which food isn't going to be grown and we are in a world where the crop land area in total is either static or shrinking depending on whose data you accept. The UN for instance says that we have less crop land now than we did five years ago. And as population goes up crop land per capita goes down.

JS: Darrin Qualman of the National Farmers Union. I did also present Canola Council of Canada President Joanne Buth's comments to Eric Holt-Gimenez whom we also heard from on last week's part I of this Biofuel Boom series. Eric is the Executive Director of Food First, also known as the Institute for Food and Development Policy. Food First was formed 32 years ago and is based in Oakland, California. I asked Eric if anything stood out from JoAnne's comments.

Eric Holt-Gimenez: Either the phenomenal ignorance or just a not so deft slight of hand. I mean it is not a question of a food crop versus a fuel crop per-se and so in other words you could grow a fuel crop which was not previously a food crop and everything would be fine, that is absurd. This is about resources and the amount of land and water and inputs that go towards producing food or that go towards producing fuel and right now farmers in the North and increasingly in the South are using those resources for fuel because the market is telling them they are going to get a better return on their investment. So whether they grow corn or cane or jatropha or canola has nothing to do with it. It is whether it is a food crop or a fuel crop and where the resources are going. You folks up in Canada might hear a giant sucking sound; that's Iowa and a lot of the mid-west sucking up grain from outside the states. I mean Iowa is going to become a corn importing region very soon because of all the ethanol plants that are being built and the state itself doesn't have the capacity to supply them.

JS: Now on last week's broadcast Eric introduced the disturbing inability for the Canadian and American proponents of biofuels to recognize the impact the government-set mandates for ethanol and biodiesel are going to have in the global south. Canola Council of Canada's JoAnne Buth failed to acknowledge how the very involvement of canola in the greater biofuel picture, lumps it in with *all* global impacts created by the booming biofuel industry. Taking a look at the mandates in both Canada and the United States, statistics show that at current rates, the mandates will not be able to be filled by domestic crops alone. I asked Eric to speak on these government set mandates, and the impacts they will have here and abroad.

EG: We can't possibly grow that much fuel crop so we have to import it, we will either import the fuel crop itself or we will import the fuel. The minute Canadian farmers can get a good price on their canola because it is going to be going for fuel to the U.S., they will plant that and they will plant that instead of corn or they will plant that instead of wheat if they can; so their will be a substitution and in fact that is already happening. Even the International Monetary Fund has warned in their last report about worldwide fuel crops displacing food crops and that causing inflation and that inflation of course affecting the poor much more than it affects anybody else. In all likelihood Canada and the U.S. for the most part, won't allow the agrofuels boom to completely upset their food and fuel systems. We won't plant all of our available land to corn in the U.S., you won't plant all of yours to canola, you will grow some food, but what will happen is that we will force the global south to plant their land to fuel crops and then we will buy it cheap from them, so while they may not like being dragged into the food and fuel debates, fact is they have dragged us into a food and fuel contradiction that is playing out very inequitably between the north and the south.

JS: Eric-Holt Gimenez of Food First. And this is Deconstructing Dinner and the second broadcast of a 2-part series titled Biofuel Boom: Greenwashing and Crimes Against Humanity. Now in that last clip, Eric-Holt Gimenez referred to the International Monetary Fund's recent report that pointed to the rising costs of food being attributable to the biofuel boom. Such influential recognition of this phenomenon is not just coming from the IMF, but was also the focus of a recent joint report from the FAO (the food and agriculture organization of the UN) and the OECD (the organization for economic cooperation and development). We also can't forget the segments we heard just earlier of United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food calling for a 5-year moratorium on the expansion of biofuels as he refers to them as a crime against humanity. But some proponents of biofuels dismiss these reports and dismiss these allegations and disagree with the call for a moratorium.

On last week's part I we heard from Robin Speer, the Director of Public Affairs for the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association. The association represents the major companies who are invested in the biofuel industry here in Canada, and I did speak with Robin about the food vs. fuel debate. Robin comments on the recent suggestion at the United Nations to implement a 5-year biofuel moratorium.

Robin Speer: It is quite unfortunate actually because the comment is misguided. The reason that food prices are rising, certainly domestically they are rising slightly above average rates of food inflation, so nothing to get too concerned about, but over all the reason that food prices are rising are because of energy costs. This afternoon, oil right now is at an all time high, over \$94 a barrel, so we are approaching \$100 oil and the reality is that energy prices dictate food prices more so than the actual grains themselves. Whether that is domestic grocery store prices, you know when you are talking about a box of corn flakes you have four or five cents worth of corn, four or five cents worth of wheat in a loaf of bread, one cent worth of barely in a bottle of beer. Ninety-five percent plus of the cost of these foods are based on the costs in the supply chain such as advertising, transportation, processing, storage, retail etc. These are where the costs lie for food prices.

JS: Robin Speer of the Toronto-based Canadian Renewable Fuels Association.

I did present this response to Eric Holt Gimenez of Food First, and he said this, "it's ironic that an association that deals in "oil" knows so much more about food than everyone else, including the UN Rapporteur for Food Rights." Robin Speer's comment is even more questionable given the President of one of the largest agriculture and food corporations in the world, also agrees biofuel production is having a significant impact on food prices. Len Penner, the President of Cargill Canada was speaking at the September CropLife Canada conference, and I spoke to him following his presentation.

Len Penner: The dynamics of the industry change. When you have something like this come in, and so the value of feed for the animal which would drive up the value of meat for a consumer, all of that will have an impact on that piece. There isn't a right or wrong answer, in my mind it is all about balance. There's huge value in having a renewable source of fuel and how do you balance that against the need to continue to produce food. I think there is no question, the point I was trying to make is that I don't think we are going to run out of food, I don't think that is the issue on this debate right, it may be much more of where you are at and your comment that says what is the value being created doing to the food side and will that comeback around, and I think it will come back around but we are going through a cycle now where feed prices, corn and therfor other feed prices like barley are really being drawn up which makes it difficult. It puts a fair bit of stress on the livestock industry in Western Canada or in Canada in general.

JS: Now if even the President of Cargill Canada one of the largest traders of corn around the world recognizes that the interest in biofuel is causing food prices to rise, one must wonder where the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association has been for the past few years. The Mexican tortilla crisis has received considerable media attention, and no one who looks at the numbers could possible correlate energy prices to such increases.... in January 2006, one metric ton of yellow corn cost US \$69.00. In March 2007, the cost was US \$148.00—an increase of 114% per ton in just a year. Other countries have experienced similar increases for a quintal of corn: In the seven months between January and July of this year, Guatemala saw a 30% increase, Honduras a 57% increase, El Salvador an 82% increase and Nicaragua a 23% increase. In all of these countries, the price of tortillas, a staple food, has risen so dramatically, that politicians have declared a state of emergency. In January, Mexican President Calderon announced an agreement with business leaders to cap tortilla prices at less than half the highest reported prices at the time. But because of restrictions caused through free trade agreements, the announcement has no force of law, and a spokesperson for Cargill's Mexican division referred to it as quote, a gentleman's agreement.

But coming back to the questionable position of the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association, they do have on their web site (at greenfuels.org), a section titled Myth Busters. Underneath the heading is *one* myth, and that myth reads this, "Using food to create fuel – making ethanol from corn, for example – will drive up my grocery bill and perpetuate hunger in the developing world." So again, the association is calling this a myth. Now scrolling down helps further reveal the complete ignorance of the association, because located below is a justification for such an idea, and part of that justification reads this, "Currently, only about 10 per cent of corn ends up as a consumer foodstuff. Most corn grown in North America is used as livestock feed, either domestically or overseas."

So the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association hasn't yet recognized that growing corn for livestock is too, creating consumer foodstuffs including meat, dairy and eggs. Absurdity aside, I did present the presence of this so-called biofuel myth on the CRFA web site to Eric Holt-Gimenez of Food First, and here's *his* response.

EG: I find that statement remarkable. You could only make a statement like that if you chose not to read. I mean just read the FAO, read the OECD report, read the IMF report for crying out loud. The prices are already rising, look at what happened in Mexico, there was a lot of speculation going on but the tortilla crisis was real and it was set off by the agrofuels boom. When prices rise, you only need a 1 percent rise in food prices, in stable prices globally, to bring about 16 million people into being food insecure. The poor already spend 50 to 80 percent of their total household income on food and this is going to affect them the worst. And so I would refer the Association to the International Monetary Funds' latest report.

JS: I did present the presence of these reports to Robin Speer of the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association, and he dismissed those as well. But herein presents what was introduced on last week's broadcast whereby the proponents of biofuels are unable to recognize how the industry as a whole is impacting other parts of the world. We heard Robin Speer speak earlier on how much of a food's total cost is derived from the crop itself, and while it may be true that here in Canada that total cost is small, that is far from being true in the developing world where incremental increases in food prices are far more significant than they are here. But, there is, located on the CRFA's myth busters web page, reference to the developing world. And it reads this, "This could help farmers in the developing world build and strengthen their businesses and, in turn, their national economies." I asked Darrin Qualman of the National Farmers Union to comment on such a statement.

DQ: The second thing that is sort of deceptive in their logic, it is true that higher grain prices will benefit farmers and rural communities and rural areas and rural economies but in a world where free trade and the industrialization of agriculture has pushed billions of people off the land and into mega-cities, we have created a world in which a lot of people have to work to buy food and it is difficult for them to adapt to rapidly rising food prices. So when they say that higher grain prices won't hurt people who are hungry in the developing world and then quickly change the topic to talk about farmers there; they are correct about the farmers and people who have land and access to land but wrong when it comes to the vast majority of people in many of those countries who are the working urban poor.

soundbite and audio promo for biofuel by musician Willie Nelson

JS: And this is Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly one-hour radio program and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman and today marks part II of the 2-part series titled Biofuel Boom: Greenwashing and Crimes Against Humanity. This series is exploring the recent attention being paid to the economic prospects of ethanol and biodiesel production derived from agricultural crops such as corn, soy, canola, sugarcane and palm to name just a few. Part I of this series has been archived on our web site and I encourage you to take a listen to that broadcast if you haven't done so already.

But moving on from the food vs. fuel debate, the last segment we just heard helps introduce another suggested benefit of the biofuel boom, and that is the benefit to farmers and rural communities here in Canada. Now while there isn't much debate that farmers will benefit in the short term, there is much skepticism around whether farmers will benefit in the long term. At the September CropLife Canada conference in Saskatoon, Canola Council of Canada's JoAnne Buth stressed how the money generated through biodiesel will be spread out over the entire chain, implying that farmers will receive their fair share. Such a suggestion runs in opposition to how the agriculture sector currently operates, and Darrin Qualman of the National Farmer's Union believes such an idea is unlikely.

DQ: It seems very unlikely, we have heard this before whether it was hog mega-barns or increased livestock production, value-added crops, new generation co-ops. What we see is that farmers are in the middle of an agrifood chain dominated by very powerful trans-nationals who are very good at using their market power to scoop up all the profits in that chain. Somebody recently said that profits are not made they are taken and they are taken by those who have the most power to take them and I think that is what we will see in the biofuels, the very large players will get in between the fuel pump and the farmer and scoop virtually all or all the excess profitability there.

JS: There has also been ongoing reference to biofuel production plants in both Canada and the United States being under the ownership of farmers. Such reference is made to convince both farmers and the public that there is money to be made from the processing of their crops as well. But recent trends suggest the complete opposite, and Eric Holt Gimenez of Food First comments.

EG: You know, out of about 119 of the currently operated plants in the U.S. 49 are still owned and operated by farmer-owned associations. That accounts for about 30 percent of capacity but in terms of the future trends, out of almost 90 plants under construction, almost 90 percent of those are owned by large corporations and when they come online, the farmer-owned percentage of ethanol plants in the U.S. will be below 20 percent.

JS: Darrin Qualman of the National Farmers Union also comments on the suggestion that these ethanol and biodiesel plants will benefit farmers.

DQ: The ethanol and bio-diesel industry will be owned by a tiny number of powerful players whether they are agribusiness firms like Archer Daniels Midland or just oil companies. We see out here in Western Canada that we have a mandate for ethanol and Husky Oil swooped in, built two big plants and is set up to supply the entire amount mandated by the provincial governments effectively tumbling out all of the proposed farmer co-op ethanol plants. They try to pretend these are going to be locally owned and community-based but there is really no will on the part of the government to stand in the way of the big agribusiness and oil companies to really discipline them and hold them back and make room for local farmer co-ops.

JS: Now such a prediction should deeply concern Canadians, because as we heard on last week's part I of the series, Prime Minister Stephen Harper has announced 1.5 billion in incentives over the next 10 years to help the biofuel industry get started. While a lot of this money will first end up in many small start-up companies and farmer-controlled plants, there's little reason to believe that multinational oil and agricultural interests are not going to swoop in and buy them up once the incentives are spent. So essentially, it's safe to say that Canadian taxpayer money will eventually end up in the hands of the companies who are all currently making record profits, and we're talking billions of dollars in profits.

Now this ongoing argument that biofuels will benefit farmers ignores another important piece of the farm income crisis, and that is the volatile prices that farmers are often faced with. If biofuels were seen as a real possibility to provide a steady and healthy transition away from fossil fuels, then volatile prices may not be as much of a concern, but even the companies who are set to make a lot of money off of the biofuel boom are warning their industry cohorts that the biofuel boom will be short-lived. Here's the President of Cargill Canada, Len Penner, sharing his views to Canada's agricultural corporations at the CropLife Canada Conference in Saskatoon.

Len Penner: Biofuels are a great source of revenue for us today. They have driven our commodity prices largely to where they are today with the exception of wheat. We need to take advantage of this particular short term situation, however this is not the basket we should put our eggs in for the long haul. The greater value will continue to be on the food side of the equation.

JS: Len Penner of Cargill Canada. Cargill is one of the world's largest grain traders. The company was profiled here on Deconstructing Dinner in a 2-part series back in February. But two concerns come out of that comment. For one, Len Penner's prediction is far from being one that supports the idea of environmental sustainability. He clearly stated the opportunity for the industry to quickly profit in the short term. But his predictions also suggest that volatile prices facing farmers may even increase in the coming years, and Eric-Holt Gimenez comments on such volatility.

EG: Agrifuels have been presented as the solution to the farm crisis. At the moment agrifuels have stepped in to solve the problem but it is not going to solve the problem in the U.S. or in Canada of the volatile prices of grain; that is what really hurts farmers and the fact that we have no reserves, that really hurts us all, so instead of enacting real policies to stabilize our food production, we are allowing a boom market phenomenon to step in and take over. Everybody wants to believe it is going to be alright but I believe there is enough evidence to show that it is not going to be all right. You still have to take responsibility for grain prices; for agricultural policy, and in this case for fuel policy and how food and fuel are going to be affecting each other over the next decade.

JS: And this is Deconstructing Dinner and part II of our Biofuel Boom series. That was Eric-Holt Gimenez of the Oakland California-based organization Food First. Their web site is foodfirst.org.

In wrapping up the Canadian component of today's show I'd like to revisit with one more clip I recorded in Saskatoon last September, and this was yet another announcement made by JoAnne Buth of the Canola Council of Canada. The council has been inspired by the Molson Canadian "I am a Canadian" marketing campaign, and intends to rebrand the idea. JoAnne introduced the campaign with a photograph of two canola farmers.

JB: I just want to end on a few things about innovation and the size of the crop. This is Warren and Roger Keading from Churchbridge Saskatchewan and they are part of an initiative we are going to be launching called I am a canola grower and it is about spreading the word about what canola growers think about canola and the impact they are having on their farms and on health and why they are in the business.

JS: Now I sent this audio clip to Darrin Qualman of the National Farmers Union. Darrin used to be a canola farmer, and he comments on the upcoming I Am a Canola Grower campaign.

DQ: Whether it is bioenergy or some other thing that agribusiness wants to do, genetically modified crops come to mind, at some point in the debate when things start going bad for them they bring out some farmers and say, well no matter what you think about the energy balance, or the economics or the public policy we gotta do this for the farmers, it helps the farmers. And farmers are not happy with this approach, this is an industry that is heavily dominated by agribusiness interests and farmers may or may not benefit. It is offensive when the big players in the system, who are going to take most of the profit, trot out the farmer as their public save and implicitly ask policy makers and citizens to somehow set aside their doubts on this because we have to do it because it is good for farmers.

JS: Darrin also pointed out the irony that arises from using the I Am a Canadian idea that first spawned from Molson Canadian, because since that ad campaign ran across the country, Molson is no longer a Canadian company, and nor I might add, is much of Canada's agriculture sector.

soundbite

For the remainder of today's broadcast we travel south of the border and more specifically to Berkeley California where the expansion of biofuels has caused quite the controversy at the University of California at Berkeley. What is this controversy I speak of, well here are segments from the February 1st official announcement. And pay attention to the amount of money the announcement is in reference too, a figure that helps explain why California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger was in attendance.

Robert Birgeneau: Good morning, I am Robert Birgeneau, Chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley. Today is a historic day on the Berkeley campus, one which we share with BP, one of the world's largest energy companies. It now gives me great pleasure to invite Robert A. Malone, chairman and president of BP America Incorporated to the podium to make the exciting announcement all of you have come to hear.

Robert Malone: Today it gives me great pleasure to announce a ground breaking partnership that we believe will have an immense positive impact on our world. Six months ago we announced BP would establish an institute to perform ground breaking research aimed at probing the emerging secrets of bioscience and applying them to the production of new and cleaner energy. I am pleased to announce our search is over. BP has entered a strategic partnership with the University of California at Berkeley and its partners the University of Illinois at Urbana and Champagne and the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory to establish the Energy Bioscience Institute. BP will invest \$500 million over the next ten years in the institute and its programs. The Energy Bioscience Institute will perform ground breaking research aimed at the production of new and cleaner energy, initially focusing on renewable biofuels for road transport. Up to 50 BP staff will be located at the UC Berkeley and at the University of Illinois campuses. They will work in partnership with the faculty and the researchers and BP and its partners will share governance of the Institute.

Arnold Schwarzenegger: It is great to be here today and I can't tell you how excited I am that BP has chosen UC

Berkeley and California for this new \$500 million energy biosciences institute. This is great news for California and great news for America because it is the world's first research lab dedicated to long term productions of alternative fuels and it is right here in California. I am very proud and honored that BP recognized California's leadership and commitment to clean energy.

JS: A recording from February 1st at the University of California at Berkeley. Now the controversy arising out of this announcement raises a number of issues, the first of which is the company putting up the 500 million dollars to create this biofuels research centre. BP is better known as British Petroleum, a company who epitomized the definition of greenwashing when in the year 2000, changed their name to BP and adopted the tagline Beyond Petroleum. The use of such a tagline has faced much criticism because of the deplorable environmental and social impacts the company has had worldwide. Now there isn't enough time to get into the human rights violations the company is connected to, but there will be a series of links on our web site with more information. But most recently, on October 25, BP was ordered by the US Justice Department to pay \$373 million in fines and restitution to settle accusations of environmental violations that led to the fatal explosion at a Texas refinery in 2005 and to leaks of crude oil from pipelines in Alaska. The settlement also covered fraud allegations related to conspiring to corner the market and manipulate the price of propane. Now if that's not enough of a concern to the reputation of a public institution like UC Berkeley, then perhaps what takes the cake is that this settlement included the largest criminal fines ever imposed for violations of the Clean Air Act. If UC Berkeley can't recognize this as enough of a reason to question the environmental messages of the company, then I can agree with opponents of the deal who suggest that the public institution should be renamed University of California - BP.

soundbite

Now the history of BP isn't the only concern among students and faculty at the University. The *process* leading up to the announcement of the deal was accused of lacking transparency. It was this that led to the March 8, 2007 Faculty Forum whereby a panel of faculty were compiled to speak on the proposed 500 million dollar deal, and one of those faculty members was Ignacio Chapela. Chapela is an Associate Professor of Microbial Ecology in the Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management. And it was Chapela in 1998, who criticized a similar \$25 million dollar deal between pharmaceutical giant Novartis and UC Berkeley. In the year 2000, Chapela along with one of his students, discovered that Mexico's corn crop had been contaminated with genetically engineered varieties that had been banned in the country. If the BP deal goes through, the biofuels project will no doubt be experimenting with genetically engineered crops, and Ignacio Chapela included such mention in his presentation to the faculty forum.

Ignacio Chapela: For those of you on the camera, this is being webcast, I have to apologize for not being camera ready; I had to peddle really hard on my biofueled vehicle. (*laughter*) Things are often not what they appear. This session for instance will be portrayed as the latest expression of the vibrant democratic system of shared governance for which Berkeley was once known. Far from it; this session is the last minute, hurried afterthought of an administration caught asleep at the wheel. A session convened only because of the rising outrage and opposition to the presence of British Petroleum on our campus. May nobody claim that eight minutes of my clumsy words represent any kind of reasonable and legitimizing discussion. May nobody leave this room thinking there is anything like a legitimate process in place to guarantee that this Faustian deal with a British transnational corporation is not what it pretends, the last, and I believe the final *cous de gras*, to the very idea of a university that can represent the best interests of the public. I have tried to size the word prostitution as best describing that for which the chancellor and his associates would like us to sign. When faced with this concept I have heard the proponents of this deal simply shrug and say 'at least we can agree that it is a lot of money and even perhaps some science will come out of it.' So leaving prostitution aside why not glance at the science. What would certainly come out of the BP-Berkeley facilities would be a large number of genetically altered reproducing, living organisms to be released in the public environment, in Berkeley in the mid-west and around the world. Genetically modified or GMO grasses, trees, algae bacteria, viruses destined for international large scale release in the public environment. These organisms do not represent science, if anything they may represent our failure as scientists to assume the deep inadequacy of our understanding of living organisms and the ecology of our planet. Despite the third of a century and more than \$350 billion invested in the trinket, a hurricane remains more predictable and a wild fire remains more controllable than GMOs. Meanwhile they have proven to be a disastrous economical proposition not to speak of their environmental and social consequences. BP Berkeley proponents wish to deny it but the proposition that more energy can be extracted from a process than what is invested into it does not follow the phony rules of the stock market or the wild

eye predications of venture capitalists. Biofuels may be convenient because they show the tragic aspects of our insatiable consumption to the invisible corners of the third world. Do we need a solution to the consumerism bench of the short two centuries we have spent burning our fossil fuel accounts, certainly. If we do not find a solution soon, the solution itself may come and get us and we may not like it. But does the BP Berkeley proposal address any of the questions necessary to find that solution? I believe not. At least there are very legitimate and reasonable concerns growing by the day in the last few weeks, here and abroad that the idea of the biofuels embodied in the BP-Berkeley proposal is not only short sighted but fatally flawed. As a measure, Indonesia, without biofuels used to be close to the 20th place in the world for the production of CO₂, in a few years with bio fuels it is now third, only behind the US and China. Signing the contract with British Petroleum would ilk the university to a flawed and potentially very dangerous route, at least for the next decade. Because of the investments and commitments made and the roads not taken, most probably much longer.

JS: A full transcript of Ignacio Chapela's presentation will be made available on the Deconstructing Dinner web site.

Of the six panelists at the faculty forum, Ignacio Chapela was the only one criticizing the BP UC Berkeley Biofuel project, but with that said, there wasn't a limit on audience members who opposed the deal. In this first case, this professor of geography criticized the panel itself. He also makes some important comments that illustrates the danger of placing climate change responses so quickly into the hands of corporations, when there have been many academics and groups around the world who have long recognized the threat of climate change and have been working on alternatives ever since.

Audience Member/Geography Professor: First I want to say I came here expecting to learn a lot more than I did and I am disappointed with this panel and how it is constituted because first of all there really was only one voice of criticism, that is not enough, and secondly, the speakers addressed very vague generalities about whether we like BP or general industry-university relations that really didn't get to the questions we all have about this project and exactly what it has and how it was passed and how it is going to be administered and so on. We need a forum for that discussion or more. (*applause*) So this was very disappointing. Secondly, I am still very disappointed about the narrowness of this project. \$500 million is a great deal of money, and it is one thing to say that well we want to do other things but what you are doing is biofuels. I am not convinced that we are doing all the other technologies like solar and wind and so on that we should be doing much less a social science component that was introduced here as a subline there, and you may say Dan Caymen is not here but there are a lot of us social scientists that don't know anything about this project and we need projects about energy conservation more than we need projects about biofuels. (*applause*) Like political scientists could help understand how the Bush administration could suppress all discussion of climate change for ten years or more and how people in the United States could be so in the dark while in Europe there is a lively discussion about this. What about that? What does that have to do with political will, us helping the public generate the political will to see that we do something about climate change. Academic freedom is one part of this issue, but a bigger issue I would argue is academic wisdom, what are we here for, what should we be doing, what should we be researching? \$500 million is a lot. I'm in the geography department, I have been listening to talks about climate change for 20 years I was convinced 15 years ago that climate change was a major global problem, we did that with very little money. It is amazing how much wisdom you can generate without \$500 million. (*applause*)

JS: One of the faculty members at UC Berkeley who has long been generating the kind of wisdom just referred to is Miguel Altieri. Miguel has authored a number of articles on biofuels with my guest Eric Holt-Gimenez. Like Chapela, Miguel Altieri is a Professor in the Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management, but Miguel's research focuses on agroecology – a field of research that looks to obtain a deeper understanding of the nature of agroecosystems instead of looking to manipulate them as would the research being proposed in the BP Berkeley Biofuels project. Miguel Altieri was in the audience.

Miguel Alteri: The climate change, basically I don't have time to go into it, but we just published an article in which it shows that at the scale that this is going to happen, the biofuels they are talking about, it is not going to be grown in the United States, you need six times the amount of land for corn that you have in the United States to produce all the ethanol you would need to replace petroleum so this is going to happen in developing countries where I come from. It is going to cause more devastation, it is going to cause more CO₂ emissions, it is going to promote the growth of synthetic crops the use of fertilizer which also produce emissions of greenhouse gasses and so on. But my main point

here is that with the seven FT's which they have authorized without consulting the budget committee, plus the 50 scientists from BP that are going to be here with the same rights of professors, with access to students, they are going to be skimming off 200 years of publicly funded university, are actually going to distort the research agenda. The fields that I represent and Professor Chapela represent on alternative agriculture are going to die on this campus. When I retire, no more research is going to be done in agroecology, which is actually the alternative to climate change; to industrial agriculture.

JS: And that was Professor Miguel Altieri. Now the controversy that this BP Berkeley deal has generated, has even led so far as to inspire the creation of a STOP BP-Berkeley campaign, and their web site is stopbp, hyphen, berkeley.org. One of the organizers of the campaign is a student of Ignacio Chapela, and his name is Ali Tonak. Ali was in the audience at the March Faculty Forum.

Ali Tonak: Hi, my name is Ali Tonak, I am a PHD student of environmental science policy and management. I agree with David, I think the academic freedom argument is totally absurd. We are talking about 50 BP scientists coming to Berkeley and changing the curriculum and teaching students. That limits my academic freedom, (*audience comment/interruption*)... yes it is in the proposal, I don't know if you have read the full text. BP scientists will influence curriculum, mentor students, partake in seminars, all of these things. That limits my academic freedom because I did not come to this university to be lectured on climate change or energy by British Petroleum, who is in this to make a profit. This is a serious concern for me. Second of all, the lack of transparency that this thing has gone through with is really mind-boggling. The dean of the college of natural resources, the person who went to Illinois to be at the press conference was having a conversation with the students of that college. He said that he was told that there isn't going to be any genetic modification within this proposal. Anybody who turns to any random page of this proposal knows that this is not the case. How can he say this with a straight face, does he really believe it, is he trying to trick somebody? Other people, whose names I won't mention because I don't want to embarrass them, their names are in the proposal, they said they haven't seen the proposal. They didn't even know their names were in the proposal when I brought it up to them. This is another incredible lack of transparency. Maybe some of you saw my pictures on the back page of the Chronicle last Friday underneath the headline saying sticky situation for UC Berkeley, I promise you the situation is going to get much more stickier than it has so far. It has only been two weeks that we have been organizing so brace yourselves and also I think the misdemeanor charge I received is very illustrative of what is going on right now which was trespassing to obstruct business.

JS: Ali's final comments are in reference to a theatrical protest that was staged in front of the chancellors building during the week prior to the forum. Ali was arrested shortly after the protest which consisted of a mock oil spill of BP oil in front of the building of the University's chancellor Robert Birgenau. A video of the protest and Ali's arrest will be linked to from the Deconstructing Dinner web site.

Before wrapping up today's part II of the Biofuel Boom series here on the program I do want to highlight that there are many more issues relating to the recent global attention on biofuels that were not covered on today's broadcast, and the most important one not covered is water. There is a global crisis right now around the world over the availability of freshwater sources, and future predictions in light of the growing population of the planet *will* provide the basis for an upcoming broadcast. But needless to say, the crops currently being used and proposed for biofuel production are heavy users of water, and the nitrogen fertilizers required to grow such crops have significant impacts on water quality. In essence, those using agrofuels such as ethanol and biodiesel are also filling their tanks with water. Another issue not sufficiently covered on today's broadcast were the human rights violations associated with the rise in biofuel production. Located on our web site we will have more information on both of these issues, and additional audio not heard throughout this 2-part series will also be available there.

soundbite

JS: 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 John Ryan.

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

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