

**Show Transcript**  
**Deconstructing Dinner**  
**Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY**  
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**Title: Natural Pastures Cheese / Agritourism / Salt Spring Island Apples**

**Producer/Host: Jon Steinman**  
**Transcript: Jane Logan**

*Jon Steinman:* And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly one-hour radio show and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio, CJLY, in Nelson, British Columbia. Deconstructing Dinner is currently heard weekly on 32 Canadian stations and many more around the world. I'm Jon Steinman.

On today's episode, we'll cover a wide range of topics, but all of them share a common thread, and that is that they are all about successful and innovative farmers producing uniquely flavourful foods.

Launching the show we'll travel to Vancouver Island, and more specifically the community of Courtenay, which is home to Natural Pastures Cheese Company. The small business produces an increasingly popular line of cheeses available throughout British Columbia and the success of the company is proving that it is indeed possible to successfully produce cheese while maintaining strong social, ethical and environmental values. We'll then move up the road to DKT Ranch – where Dan and Maggie Thran have diversified their farm to incorporate a growing yet controversial solution to struggling farmers – agritourism. And then we'll head off of Vancouver Island and onto another, Salt Spring Island, where in September 2008, correspondent Andrea Langlois attended the Salt Spring Island Apple Festival. Andrea met with Harry Burton, one of the festival organizers and an avid promoter of red-fleshed apples – that is an apple that is either green or red on the outside, but red or pink on the inside, not white.

You can stay tuned for that and more on today's broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner.

**increase music and fade out**

*Jon Steinman:* If you miss any of today's broadcast, it will be archived on our website at [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca) and posted under the December 11<sup>th</sup> 2008 broadcast. Also a reminder that if you are not yet subscribed to our weekly podcast, which is an online version of our weekly radio show, you can do so by linking to our podcast feed also posted on the site.

And for those of you who have not yet thought of a unique gift for your family, friends and co-workers during the upcoming holiday season, you could choose to make a

donation to the Deconstructing Dinner radio project and we'd be happy to extend a thank you to a person of your choice either online or through the mail. Donations are an important tool to help keep this program on the air, and support of our efforts results in no wasteful packaging, and produces no negative social or environmental impact. Instructions on how to donate and give Deconstructing Dinner as a gift can be found on our website, again at [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca)

### **soundbite**

*Jon Steinman:* Now before we meet with those behind Natural Pastures Cheese Company, I do have a short and personal story to share with you that is cheese-related.

Now as is probably no surprise to those of you familiar with the content of this show, I for one strive to eat a diet that is as local as possible, and carries with it the least environmental, ethical and social impact. And so of course one of the outcomes of trying to maintain such a diet is that, inevitably, I consume very little if any processed foods, that is, food that comes in maybe some form of packaging, and foods that often contain ingredients that cannot be pronounced and/or understood.

And another outcome and downside of this diet is that the options available at restaurants become pretty limited, and as a result, I don't eat out nearly as much as others do, and when I do eat out, it's almost always at restaurants whose values correspond with my own, or whose practices in the kitchen I know to be responsible.

Now as for food safety, this is a pretty safe diet, because hardly any of the foods that I choose to eat originate from within the industrial food system – a system that is breeding the ongoing stream of food recalls that we hear about almost every week.

And so if all of these factors are put together, and if I did choose to dabble in some processed foods or, perhaps enter into some unknown run-of-the-mill restaurant, I think it's pretty fair to suggest, that statistically, I should have one of the lowest chances of suffering from a case of food poisoning. I'm never exposed to the highest risk foods and restaurants and so therefore run a pretty low risk of coming down with any food-borne illness.

And so there I was, just a week before this show now goes to air, in a small community here in British Columbia, when I was invited to do dinner with a group of people who I was visiting with. Now being a small town, the restaurant options were limited and the options to be picky with what to eat would have all but led me to go hungry. So, I put my food philosophies aside, and placed the social importance of sharing food with the people I was visiting as the priority. Once I sat down and looked through the menu, I decided that my safest bet was to order a pizza with tomatoes, olives and cheese. My pizza arrived, I sprinkled some parmesan cheese on it and devoured about half of the pizza and took the rest back to the Bed and Breakfast I was staying at.

Now I'm not going to mince words here, because what happened next needs to be shared exactly as it unfolded, because I spent the entire night puking out every last bit of food that I consumed that evening. All of it ... and did so on about five occasions for a prolonged period of about 8 hours.

Between the vomiting, I lay in my bed; I trembled from the chills that were rushing through my body. And as I lay there in between trips to the bathroom, and being unable to sleep, I of course had time to think. And I think the most important thing I said to myself that night was, "This is it." This is exactly why I choose to sit here in front of this microphone once a week and share with all of you what is wrong with our food system and what we can all do, either individually or collectively, to ensure that our food is safe, healthy and responsibly produced. Because if someone like me, who likely possesses, like I said, one of the lowest chances of contracting a food-borne illness from a restaurant can indeed walk into a restaurant and walk out sick, well something is no doubt wrong with our food system.

Now you're probably wondering what was it that caused the illness, and I've pretty comfortably concluded based on what other people at the table ate and did not eat, that the culprit was the parmesan cheese that was sitting on the table in one of those standard shakers.

And of course, this isn't some revelation of new news that our food system in restaurants are not safe... The problems with our food system are discussed constantly here on the show almost every week, but what my food poisoning incident did do, was further fuel my own efforts to continue to share with you what the mainstream media fails to: and that is why our food system is unsafe and *how* we can all go about being part of the creation of new food systems.

So you can be assured of many more in-depth investigations and reports in to 2009, as Deconstructing Dinner proudly heads into its fourth season of programming.

### **soundbite**

*Jon Steinman:* Keeping on the topic of cheese but now hopefully reinvigorating your trust in cheese as I know this next story does for me, we arrive in Courtenay, British Columbia, a community located at about the middle of the eastern coastline of Vancouver Island in what is known as the Comox Valley. In October of this year I attended the annual conference of the Canadian Farm Writers' Federation where about 150 agricultural journalists and communicators from across the country converged for a couple of days of tours and a day of speakers and panel discussions.

One of those tours was to Natural Pastures Cheese Company, a small business whose cheese I had long appreciated after first tasting their products a few years ago. The story of Natural Pastures is an inspiring one, because it's a story of how one farming family was able to preserve the heritage, social and environmental values of their dairy farm by diversifying into becoming a commercial cheesemaker, who now distributes their cheeses

throughout the province. Natural Pastures now sources their milk from a number of traditional farms on Vancouver Island, including one farm that raises water buffalo. While most of Natural Pastures cheeses are made with cow's milk, they are the only cheesemaker in Canada producing a variety of cheese that uses the milk of water buffalo.

In this next segment, we'll hear from Natural Pastures President Edgar Smith, Head Cheesemaker Paul Sutter, Administrative and Distribution Manager Leslie Shann and Monty Python's John Cleese.... that's right, Monty Python.

### **soundbite**

[fade in laughter]

[ring of doorbell]

*Michael Palin:* Morning, sir.

*John Cleese:* Morning! I was sitting in the public library on Thurmon Street just now, skimming through "Rogue Herries" by Horace Walpole, when I suddenly came over all peckish.

*MP:* Peckish, sir?

*JC:* Esurient.

*MP:* Eh?

*JC:* 'Ee I were all 'ungry-like!

*MP:* Ah, hungry!

*JC:* In a nutshell. So I thought to myself, "a little fermented curd will do the trick," so I curtailed my Walpoling activities, sallied forth, and infiltrated your place of purveyance to negotiate the vending of some cheesy comestibles!

*MP:* Come again?

*JC:* I want to buy some cheese.

*MP:* Ah!

*Edgar Smith:* It was an interesting story for ourselves. My brothers and I are third-generation farmers on Beaver Meadow Farms here in Comox, on Vancouver Island.

*Jon Steinman:* Edgar Smith, president of Natural Pastures Cheese.

*Edgar Smith:* And we have produced dairy products and had a dairy farm since the 1950s. We got into certifying our farm so that it was a certified heritage farm, one of the first ones in Canada. And all our milk is produced from pastures that have no pesticides or herbicides or GMOs or chemicals added to the soils or the animals. And we had this wonderful quality milk, but it was just going into the normal Class One milk sales for fluid milk. We belong to a cooperative here on the island, and the cooperative that processed and marketed our milk got into financial difficulty, and was bought out by a dairy company from Montreal. We thought that we would not have a home to process our milk. So with the assistance of the provincial government, and ourselves, and three other dairy farmers, we did some market studies on Vancouver Island: What would be an alternative way of marketing this special type of grass-fed quasi-organic milk? And all the answers pointed to artisan cheesemaking. That's how we started. None of us were cheesemakers. We had been in the dairy industry for three generations. So we obtained a cheesemaker via New Zealand and South Africa to get us started up with some used equipment, and once the plant was operating, we then obtained the services of our master cheesemaker from Switzerland, Paul Sutter, who remains with us today, and makes all our artisan cheeses. Since we started in 2001 the sale and marketing and range of our cheeses have just continued to grow every year since then.

### **soundbite**

*Speaker:* It's down a little bit following the route we came in, and then up a big hill that goes toward North Island College. We'll go a little ways up there. We'll turn onto what's called the Back Road, and we'll climb up and we'll have a good view of Courtenay and the Flats. On a clear sunny day, you'd get a view of the Comox Glacier, which is directly behind us, and some of the mountains in the background.

*Speaker:* Okay, so here we are. We're going to split into two groups. The most important concern this morning in the next few minutes as we get in, is just with the respect that we've been to a farm, and we're going into a production facility, so if you're getting a pair of boots, and we say, "Step in the sanitizer," please do that. It's important. We'll all be getting you to wash your hands, wearing the hairnets, and you're going to look great.

[laughter]

*Speaker:* So can I take the first half of the bus please?

*Speaker:* Stick to the side.

*Visitor:* Cameras okay?

*Speaker:* Once we get in the front door, I'll come back and get the other half of the bus.

*Leslie Shann:* Okay, good morning, everybody. Welcome to Natural Pastures. My name is Leslie Shann. I'm the manager of Natural Pastures Cheese. While you're waiting to go

out into the production area, I'm going to take you into the shop for a tasting, so follow me.

We've been in production for seven years. In the first ten months of production we were lucky enough to take out three gold medals at the Canadian Cheese Grand Prix. They went to the Boerenkaas, the Camembert, and the Verdelait Cumin Seed. Since that time we have also taken out a gold medal at the same competition for the Cracked Pepper.

*John Cleese:* So, my good man, some cheese please.

*Michael Palin:* Yes, certainly, sir. What would you like?

*JC:* Well, how about a little Red Leicester?

*MP:* I'm afraid we're fresh out of Red Leicester, sir.

*JC:* Never mind. How are you on Tilsit?

*MP:* Never at the end of the week, sir. Always get it fresh first thing on Monday.

*JC:* Tish, tish. No matter. Well, four ounces of Caerphilly then, if you please, stunt yeoman.

*MP:* Ah. Well it's been on order for two weeks, sir, been expecting it this morning.

*JC:* Yes, it's not my day, is it. Bel Paese?

*MP:* Sorry.

*JC:* Red Windsor?

*MP:* Normally, sir, yes. But today the van broke down.

*JC:* Ah. Stilton?

*MP:* Sorry.

*JC:* Gruyere? Emmental?

*MP:* No.

*JC:* Any Norwegian Jarlsberger?

*MP:* No.

*JC:* Liptauer?

*MP:* No.

*JC:* Lancashire?

*MP:* No.

*JC:* White Stilton?

*MP:* No.

*JC:* Danish Blue?

*MP:* No.

*JC:* Double Gloucester?

*MP:* [pause] No.

*JC:* Cheshire?

*MP:* No.

*JC:* Any Dorset Blue Vinney?

*MP:* No.

*JC:* Brie? Roquefort?

*MP:* No.

*JC:* Pont l'Eveque? Port Salut? Savoyard? Saint-Paulin? Carré de l'Est? Boursin? Bresse Bleu? Quelle de Champagne?

*Jon Steinman:* This is Deconstructing Dinner, in a segment on Natural Pastures Cheese Company in Courtenay, British Columbia. I toured Natural Pastures in October 2008.

*Speaker:* Just as we're about to go through the packaging room, and then we'll go into the aging room, if you can just do your hand sanitizer again by the door before you step through.

*Leslie Shann:* Hey! Come on in, it'll be a little bit of a tight squeeze.

[The staff exchange hellos with some of the visitors.]

*Leslie Shann:* This room is where all of our soft cheese is wrapped – the Camembert and the Brie. And the staff are Karen, Brenda, Kate, and Chris. They can spend quite a few hours in here, three or four times a week. They're wrapping a large Brie at the moment. And I'm going to take you this way, just to show you – [gasp] sorry.

*Staff:* Okay.

*Leslie Shann:* ... Here but then it's all stored in here, and it ships straight out.

*Visitor:* Yep.

*Leslie Shann:* All right?

*Paul Sutter:* Welcome to Natural Pastures. My name is Paul Sutter. I'm the master cheesemaker and production manager. So in here you see all the semi-hard cheeses or semi-soft cheeses we make, the different flavours, and also some experimental products going on. It's always something. We won't bring out the new product yet, but as a cheesemaker I always like to experiment, sometimes just one wheel, and then I end up eating it myself because it's so good, and it's not enough for everybody else, or between the staff and us. So I will get you into the make room, where I make my semi-soft cheeses, and then you see the equipment, and I'm also in the middle of making a little batch of experimental cheese, and I can show you there.

*Jon Steinman:* Paul Sutter was born in 1972 in Sonnetal, Switzerland, where he spent much of his time on his grandfather's dairy farm. In 1991 he earned his certification as a Master Cheesemaker, and in 1995 responded to a job posting in a Swiss newspaper, and moved to Canada to become a cheesemaker here. Paul joined Natural Pastures in 2002. While visiting with Paul and his cheesemaking facility, it was clear that his passion lies in drawing out the unique flavours of the milk he uses, and showcasing these flavours through his cheese. The uniqueness of his cheeses has earned Natural Pastures a wide assortment of awards, and their success is proof that there is indeed an economic value in local flavours and local food.

*Paul Sutter:* So the cheeses that we produce in here, you've tried: the Verdelait, with different spices in it, the Boerenkaas, the Amsterdammer, we do make fresh curds, and the buffalo mozzarella. It's the only one made in Canada, you've probably heard about it. And it gets made in this room here. You see different equipment behind you. You see this vat, where I make the different cheeses. It's a big one, it holds about 4,000 litres. We do about 12,000 to 15,000 litres a week, between the two rooms we have here. Four days a week, we produce in here, and four days a week, we produce soft cheese in the other rooms: Camembert and Brie. Milk's coming from different farmers in the valley, who do the farming like we believed when we started up, having a heritage style of farming. It gives me a great product to start, so that I can put into an artisan type of cheese where I make everything by hand, and it just gives us the natural flavour in the cheeses. You sometimes don't get any more if they're mass-produced, and if the company only produces for profit, you have a tendency to lose that, because you want to have a long

shelf life. Well, then your cheese can't age. You won't have a lot of flavour, because as soon as you want to put natural flavours from the bacteria in it, your cheese will age. And after 60 days, my cheese is too aged. It might smell even like ammonia. You get that. But I find that's the nice part about making cheese, if you can work with the natural bacteria. So what I've done here is I have the milk, added some bacteria – I buy different types for different types of cheeses. I usually have two cheesemakers with a special work visa from Switzerland here helping me make the cheese so we can keep up production and then I have local guys to assist and now I have actually a local guy who's interested to learn the trade a bit. So we train him a bit more intensely.

So what I did: I had the milk, I added the cultures, I added the rennet – it's a microbacterial enzyme – I had to coagulate it, and then I cut it with the first group. So now what you see here is curds and whey.

[sound of curds plopping into the whey]

*Paul Sutter:* And when you make a soft cheese you have big curds and soft curds. You don't stir it a lot, you don't cook it. When you make a hard cheese you make small curds, you stir a lot, and you cook it on high. That's basically the difference. The basic is always the same. You start out with similar temperature of coagulation, and making it curdle, and then you change, as you work with the cheese afterwards, what you want to produce. So for the demonstration, when the time is ready – what happens here now is I put in the bacteria to break down the sugar into milk acids. As they break down the curd shrinks and it settles. So what I can do then is just take the cheese, put it in a basket, and again there's different ways of doing it. One is just like I did now, scoop it out, or you can pump it into the forms, or you can push it together in a big block and pre-press it. That's what I do with my semi-soft cheeses. I pre-press in the big blocks, drain the whey off, and then I cut it in blocks, I put it in a round bowl, and I press that with the press that you see over there, with the blocks, the mould, the round ones standing. So they sit there for about two or three hours like this. I turn them once. Then they come out. They go into tanks over here; that lasts for two days, then I take them out, and I put them on the shelf. And I let them dry off like you see – I don't know if you noticed when you came in, we have the batch from last Monday just drying off a bit, so we can wrap them easily with the plastic. So Monday they get wrapped, they go into the maturing room, and they take between 40 and 60 days to mature. For the Boerenkaas, it takes up to 120 days to mature.

*Jon Steinman:* This is Deconstructing Dinner, where you're listening to Paul Sutter speak about his work at Natural Pastures Cheese in Courtenay, British Columbia. We often speak of the importance of genetic diversity here on Deconstructing Dinner. And often we learn of how lacking in genetic diversity our national and global food system is. In the case of dairy cows, 91% of the over 1 million dairy cows in Canada are of one breed, Holstein. But as has been shared here on the show before, there are many other breeds out there producing very different styles of milk.

*Paul Sutter:* We have some Guernseys. A lot of them I believe have a mix – there's the Holstein black-brown, but even then, they're putting in different mixes of Brown Swiss

and all different kinds. There's even one farmer, when I get the high fat milk for triple cream, he has the Guernsey. Jersey – there's no real Jerseys in the valley. But there's this one farmer who has Guernsey and he has Simmentalen, and a whole bunch of mixes. I don't even study really – I know they are red and white, instead of black and white. [crowd laughs] And there are so many mixtures out there, like I know the president had his own dairy farm. He told me, "To me they all looked like Holsteins, but I have this mix." And he showed me the fat. In school we had to learn a bit about cows, but it was the main groups of Holstein, Simmental, Brown Swiss, and Jersey. And then, as I came to Canada 13 years ago, I just studied a bit what they have. But there are so many mixes you can do, and in the way you feed them, and the way you pick your breed too, you can pick through; it's the farmers' own process too, and I think they're doing a great job here.

*Jon Steinman:* And just as the breed of cow can determine the taste and qualities of the milk, so too does the climate. In the world of wine, the French word *terroir* is often used to capture the characteristics that the land and climate can lend to a wine. And *terroir* can also be used to describe milk and cheese. Natural Pastures President, Edgar Smith.

*Edgar Smith:* Well, the way I interpret *terroir* as it applies to cheeses, it's this unique flavour and taste that our milk and cheese obtains from the soil, and the nearness to the ocean, the salt-laden rain, our West Coast lush green herbal grasses and herbs that take in this unique flavour. Our soils here on Vancouver Island are very young coastal forest soils; they have not been farmed for more than 30 years in lots of cases. And the glacier melted and left very rich soils along the seacoasts here. Because of the lushness and the heat that we get, we get this unique flavour, and the judges in the Grand Prix competition said that these are flavours that they haven't tasted in cheeses for years and years. For example, one judge came from Britain, and he recognized that seacoast flavour in our Comox Brie and Comox Camembert, which won gold and silver medals in Canada. And when we sent our Comox Camembert to the World Cheese Championship in Madison, Wisconsin, the comments from the judges were again that our flavour was unique and different. It stood out amongst other cheeses, and so we believe it's got something to do with how the salt air, the rain, the soil, just seems to give a flavour to the herbal-ness of our milk. I know it's used in the wine industry, perhaps a little differently, but the flavours are sort of created by what the cheesemaker does with the original milk, and we believe our milk just carries this uniqueness that you just can't find in other parts of Canada.

*Jon Steinman:* If the *terroir* isn't enough to diversify one cheese from the next, how's this for differentiating? Among the many cheeses produced at Natural Pastures, in one instance, the business sources a locally grown plant to use in one of their cheeses, and takes *terroir* one step further.

*Edgar Smith:* One cheese that we think we do uniquely in the whole world is our Wasabi Verdelaït. Wasabi is a Japanese horseradish, and it's often used in cooking of sushi as a condiment, and it grows wild in Northern Japan, and is cultivated in Japan, and into Taiwan. We started growing wasabi in the forest in our farm here about 15 years ago, and it thrives in the West Coast climate here, with our wet soils and our unique climate that

we have. So my wife in her culinary talents put together a recipe where we used the whole plant of wasabi, the rhizomes, the roots, the stems, and the leaves, and then we incorporate it into this wasabi cheese, which is a very neutral-flavoured cheese, and just takes and builds flavours. Wasabi has a little bit of heat to it, but it has a sweetness, and it combines exceptionally well with West Coast seafood: smoked salmon, oysters baked in the half-shell. We find that the chefs here love combining this wasabi cheese with seafood. And lately we're having artisan sake-makers making rice wine, and combining the sake rice wine with our wasabi cheese. And it's a combination which is probably a first in the world: nobody in Japan, where they make sake, had ever thought of combining it with the wasabi cheese. And here we've made the cheese for several years, and all of a sudden we have this brand new gourmet taste: wasabi cheese with sipping sake. And it's just one of those flavours that is just unique in the world.

*Jon Steinman:* This is Deconstructing Dinner. Now much of this segment has been void of the politics of the dairy industry, which here in Canada can get rather complicated with the supply management model that governs all dairy production in the country. In an upcoming episode, we'll be learning about the politics of milk and cheese when we visit with a veteran dairy farmer and rookie cheese maker in the Creston Valley of the province. And while there is indeed much to celebrate with Canada's supply management system – after all, dairy farmers are likely the most financially successful of any sector – there are however some downsides. For one, if a cheesemaker, who is sourcing milk from another farm, wishes to pay those farmers more for their milk, they are unable to do so. I found this out when asking cheesemaker Paul Sutter whether the farms they source from are getting more for their milk from Natural Pastures.

*Paul Sutter:* No, because of a by-law of the Milk Marketing Board. They set the price and for me, if it were just my farm, and the Milk Marketing Board were out of it, then maybe we could pay a little bit extra, but the way they have set it up, with the whole quota, it's impossible. We got the price for cheese milk like anybody else who makes cheese.

*Jon Steinman:* Perhaps a system in need of reform? Again, stay tuned for an upcoming broadcast, when we'll learn more about the politics of milk and cheese in Canada. You can also listen to previous broadcasts on the topic by visiting our website at [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca), and selecting the "Dairy" category on the page titled, "Recent." As mentioned earlier, Natural Pastures is an award-winning business, with cheese often receiving the same kind of attention that wine receives when it's judged. At the 2008 World Championship Cheese Contest in Madison, Wisconsin, Natural Pastures came home with a gold and silver in two categories. And to give you an idea of how impactful receiving such awards can be, here's the response to one question from someone on the tour, who asked how much cheese the company produces.

*Paul Sutter:* That really all depends. If you win an award, like we did in April, that tripled our sales overnight. And we actually knew about it before we let it out to the news. And I produced three weeks in advance three times as much, and we still ran out of it. And then we just kept on going until we had to say, we can't keep up, we just have to go back down a bit with production, and fix the kinks. Because you're kind of pushing the button

to see what you're capable of, and then you realise, "Yeah, I have to be a bit more careful" until you can grow slowly back into it. And it generally keeps up the sales, you know what I mean? It's a big buy over a two-month period, and then it drops back down, but definitely it increases your sales by 20-25% minimum.

*Jon Steinman:* As the tour of Natural Pastures Cheese came to a close, I did ask Paul Sutter if he had any new cheeses in store for the coming year. And he very strategically answered the question.

*Paul Sutter:* Nothing particular [laughs] ... I want to put on the news [laughs]. Like I said, I like to experiment, and the beauty of it is you can actually take this cheese and you let it age with mold, you get a Camembert. You wash it, you get a Providence. And you wash it with wine or herbs ... the sky's unlimited. You can create so many different cheeses, and just take the same basic. And that's all I do, is actually I take a cheese, like a Camembert, and just wash it once, and just see how it turns out. And then I take a Borenkaas and wash it, and have my Swiss guys from Switzerland, when they come here for the 12-18 months work experience, they're fully trained, so they like to experiment. And what they see here, I have the time or I take the time, and they like that I basically say, "Whatever you want to experiment, you can." So that basically gives us an idea, and one day when we're ready to have a new product put in place, we kind of did the background work of it and we just have to produce it.

#### **soundbite**

*Jon Steinman:* And that was Paul Sutter, the Master Cheesemaker at Natural Pastures Cheese Company in Courtenay, British Columbia. I toured the company in October 2008 along with delegates from the annual conference of the Canadian Farm Writers Federation. The interview segments with President Edgar Smith are courtesy of the Pursuit of Pleasure podcast produced by the Dairy Farmers of Canada at [allyouneedischeese.ca](http://allyouneedischeese.ca), and the comedic segments were of actor John Cleese and his role with Monty Python.

#### **soundbite**

*Jon Steinman:* You're tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly one-hour radio show and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman. If you miss any of today's broadcast or would like to explore archived episodes, you can listen to them online through our website at [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca).

Also on the series of tours that conference delegates participated in was a trip to DKT Ranch, also in Courtenay. Owned and operated by Dan and Maggie Thran, DKT is an 80 acre farm which was purchased by Dan's parents in 1927. His parents turned it into a dairy farm in the early 1940s and the farm was passed on to Danny in the early 1970s. Since then, the farm has primarily become a beef operation along with pasture-raised poultry, lamb and eggs, but what separates this farm from others is how Dan and Maggie

have saved the farm from the demise met by many other farms of similar size. Located just off of one of the area's major thoroughfares, the farm operates a small market store, where their meats and eggs are sold, and where some of the vegetables and fruits grown on theirs and neighbouring farms are also sold. The couple also produces a line of preserves that they sell in the store. Moving towards the back of the farm is another innovative revenue generator, two off-the-grid cabins that can be rented for either short or long-stays. These efforts to diversify the farm is what is known as agritourism, and we'll come to that in just a moment. But first, let's look at some of the challenges that DKT Ranch faced (and faces). In our recent July 2008 series titled *Livestock Lost*, we explored new meat inspection regulations in the province that have created incredible difficulty for small-scale farmers wishing to process their animals. While Dan is thankful that he has a processor nearby, the regulations have nevertheless increased their costs enormously.

*Dan Thran:* What it's done is it's increased our costs just enormously. Just as an example, a steer that will dress out at about 500-600 pounds will cost between \$500 and \$600 for processing. And that's just out of pocket expenses. I have to haul it for nothing, and that's just what it's costing. We've done a herd bull the other day. The herd bull dressed out at 1369 pounds. We had it made into hamburger and sausage, and I just wrote a cheque last week for \$1200 for the processing of it. And so we have to get that \$1200 back, plus what the herd bull was worth if we'd shipped it to Vancouver, which may not have been worth that much, but you can see how the costs are there. And with that in mind, the beef trade ... well, people still eat beef, but they don't eat near what they used to eat, whether it's a health issue, or whether it's a cost issue. But at the present time, we've cut back on our herd. We used to have about 35 cows, and now we're down to 15. And we can sell hay for horse people, which pays the bills, but it doesn't necessarily do anything for next year. So those are some of the issues there.

*Jon Steinman:* Now as a quick aside, I am compelled to play a clip here from British Columbia's Minister of Agriculture Stan Hagan. Hagan spoke on two occasions throughout the course of the Canadian Farm Writers Federation Conference as his home and riding was conveniently in the same location as the conference. Now of course it was the province who in October 2007 implemented the new meat inspection regulations that in part led to the difficulties that farmers, like Dan Thran, now face. And so even though it's indisputable that the province's implementation of the regulation changes was flawed and has since dealt a strong blow to the availability of locally produced meat in the province, Minister Hagan chose DKT Ranch, as an example of how he himself supports local food. Of course the Minister chose to not address the struggles that the Thrans and others are currently enduring.

*Minister Stan Hagan:* I know you had a chance to get around to see a lot of the products that we produced this morning. I took some time and drove out to Danny Thran's turkey farm and ordered my fresh turkey for next weekend. I enjoy going around to the farmers' markets and to agriculture bays around the province. It's such an important thing of what agriculture is about in the province, because we're so diversified, as I mentioned last night.

*Jon Steinman:* British Columbia Minister of Agriculture, Stan Hagan.

Now while Dan and Maggie Thran continue to struggle with the challenges of keeping a small scale farm afloat, delegates were invited into the farm's market store where the public is able to purchase their products. The Thrans are grateful for having diversified their operation to now manage this store, because as Dan told conference delegates, the health regulations at farmers markets were hard to meet, and the store works around those concerns.

*Dan Thran:* Anyway, welcome to our market. We built this market. We're in the sixth year of operation now, so I'd like to say it's working. You know, I think it's safe to say it's working. Now with the real trend toward direct marketing, and a lot of the consumers are really picking up on that, now the real – it's not a problem, but the real effort has to be into maintaining it. Because now we're starting to find that we can't do enough farming to almost keep it going. So what we do is we sell our beef, chicken, pork, our eggs, our canning, our jams and jellies, our pickles, our squash, and then there's other things that we don't do. Fortunately we have a lot of other people around here who are very adept or who enjoy gardening. And they bring us product, fresh veggies every Friday, like they'll start coming in tonight. And we only do local stuff, very local – except for the suckers, and they come from New Brunswick, but they're to die for. [laughs] Those are for the kids! Some of the locals will come, and we will buy their product off them, and sell it here as their product, not as ours. Or in the case of one, Marcie and Jeff, who are from out the Campbell River way, they have a fantastic love for gardening, and they bring us some of the best product you could ever think of. People will line up for their product, and we swap. They take their beef and the chicken and the turkey and the lamb, and we keep a running tab just like in the old days, and usually we owe them money, because they have some really lovely product. And then we have a few crafts. We stay away a lot from the crafts, because food is something we need all the time, and so people come back all the time. And we find that if we just have good product for them, they'll be back. And so that's what's kept us going for us for six years. So if you've got any questions, feel free.

*Visitor:* So it's a real strong local returning market, that's your clientele? It's where people get their vegetables from.

*Dan Thran:* Yep. We used to sell down at the farmers' market, and we got to the point where – we were selling beef at that point, and it's hard to pack down enough beef, and to meet all the health regulations and everything, so we've decided to go this route. And the people that come to the market, in a lot of cases they're from about Courtenay to Black Creek, like a radius of about six kilometres. And they're our bread and butter. We do get people from the town, like from the cities, like if you want to call Courtenay a city, I guess, and from Comox. And once they find it, yeah, they do come and they support it. And it's been really good. And this is what I honestly think is going to keep us – like our farm is 88 acres that we own, and I think that's what's going to keep the small farm going. Otherwise I don't know.

*Jon Steinman:* Now the market that the Thrans operate on their farm is only one of a number of options that the family has pursued to keep the farm in business. While agritourism is often looked down upon by many who believe that farms should be able to sustain themselves as farms, the Thrans recognized that clinging on to such principles would have spelled the end of farming. In this next segment, Dan Thran describes the two cabins that were constructed on the farm to accommodate overnight visitors. In the segment Dan uses two acronyms, BSE (which is also known as Mad Cow Disease) and ALR (which is in reference to British Columbia's Agriculture Land Reserve) – a reserve that the Thran's farm is located within. When the Thrans chose to construct the cabins, the rules governing the ALR did not easily permit the construction of the cabins, and Dan Thran explains.

*Dan Thran:* Over the last – we went through BSE. And that was just a killer. I mean, you may as well have shot the cows and buried them. Fortunately, we had our cabins going, and we started that in the early '90s. And Niels can attest to this, we fought with the ALR. It wasn't considered farming at that time, and it wasn't agricultural use of the land. And we kind of did it anyway, and then we got it okayed. And that really helped. And now the nice thing is that it's low up-maintenance cost on that. So the income from that is generally a lot more than –

*Visitor:* What's your share of revenue, your share of profit?

*Dan Thran:* I would say about 40% of our revenue comes from those two cabins.

*Visitor:* But far more than 40% of your profit?

*Dan Thran:* Yup, I would say probably close to 80% of our profit, because our inputs are so large on the farm aspect.

*Jon Steinman:* Are other farmers coming here to see what you're doing, and are inspired to do the same?

*Dan Thran:* Well, some do and some don't. I'm being honest here: some won't grace it, because agritourism wasn't one thing that a lot of people – I can remember we had a farm day here, back in the early '90s, and at that point we had a lot of people from all over Vancouver Island here. And some of them thought that agritourism is not a farming thing, like you're not a farmer if you've got agritourism. Farmers raise cattle, chickens, whatever, and so some people aren't gonna, and that's the truth.

*Visitor:* Too short-sighted.

*Dan Thran:* Yeah, well, I don't know if they're still in business either [laughs]. Twenty years ago, when I started with cattle, I would never have dreamt of having a sheep on the place [laughs]. That was the furthest thought from my mind. And I never ever thought of having a log cabin, and that someone from the city would just love to be able to light a fire, and whether it's sit outside next to a fire, or no TV, no phone. We're close enough to

town that they feel secure enough, but they feel like they're really [laughs] really roughing it. And I never thought we'd be doing that. And so it's evolved. I think our main concern is to be able to pass it on as a going concern, and be able to keep it as a farm. And Niels may not like this, but I've just got to throw this in. I agree with the ALR in principle, but I think it needs to be revisited.

*Visitor:* In order to make it work!

*Dan Thran:* Yeah. And I think the Swiss cheese effect would really be good. And I'll leave it at that. [laughs] Sorry Niels.

*Visitor:* What exactly should we change?

*Dan Thran:* Well, no, today's not the day to go into it. There's lots of –

*Visitor:* Put your tape recorders away!

[laughs]

*Dan Thran:* But anyway, I know it's raining, but we can't get the bus down to where the cabins are. So if you'd like to go for a walk, it's about a five-minute walk, and we can do that, and it goes down the farm.

*Jon Steinman:* This is Deconstructing Dinner and a recording from an October 2008 visit to DKT Ranch, a small-scale mixed farm located in Courtenay, British Columbia. Dan and Maggie Thran hosted delegates from the Canadian Farm Writers Federation and shared with them how they have chosen to diversify their farm in order to stay in business.

*Dan Thran:* Are we all here?

*Visitor:* I think so.

*Visitor:* Yup, so far.

*Dan Thran:* Okay, this is called the bunkhouse. The log cabin is under the trees behind the sheep over there.

*Visitor:* Okay.

*Visitor:* Oh, yeah, the sheep!

*Dan Thran:* The important part about where the cabins are is the environmental footprint. They do not subtract or detract from our farming enterprise. We use the same laneway to haul hay, we use the same laneway to chase the cows up, and that was really important to our land commission and myself as well. The cabins are also situated so that you can't

see one another, so it gives you a lot of privacy. They're also situated so that you get a decent view of the mountains, when it's not raining. [laughs]

*Dan Thran:* And the last thing is they're solar-powered. The heat is wood heat, and the hot water is a demand hot water system, so they're very efficient in that respect. Before we put the demand hot water in – I gotta tell you this – we'd had people staying in the cabin, and they wouldn't have a shower for about four days, because they didn't want to run the generator to heat the water because that wasn't environmentally friendly. People, if they're given the option, will really go out. We ran out of power once in this cabin, and that was when we had a family of seven in here for a week over Christmas. And Granny used a hair curler. And at that point we ran out of power a little bit. But other than that, people are very, very conscious about power, so it's a great tool for them to learn. And we've had to show people how to light fires. So we've become quite removed from out in the country, you might say.

*Visitor:* Did you build it yourself?

*Dan Thran:* This cabin here, I traded \$600 worth of hay for the logs. We just pulled them out of the neighbour's, we peeled them, and we built the cabin. All the inside, other than the countertop and the toilet, is recycled. And the bedding, of course. So it's all recycled, same with the windows, they're all recycled. As I was saying on the way down, when we built the cabins, we were really kind of scared, because we didn't want to turn it into a hotel/motel business. We wanted to stay a farm. And so we didn't want to be busy every night. We didn't want to be washing and changing sheets. Like I told that one guy on our PA when we had the tours and they built the cabins, some people weren't happy that this was an agricultural thing. But I told them that it took me less time to change the sheets on the bed than it did to slaughter a steer. And that's still the truth.

*Jon Steinman:* And that was Dan Thran of DKT Ranch in Courtenay, British Columbia. A link to the farm's website will be posted on the Deconstructing Dinner website under the December 11<sup>th</sup> 2008 broadcast.

And to round off today's diverse broadcast, we'll leave Vancouver Island and head down the Strait of Georgia to Salt Spring Island, home to the Salt Spring Island Apple Festival. The Island's apple history dates back to 1860 and the Island is now said to be home to over 350 varieties that are being grown organically.

Correspondent Andrea Langlois took a trip to the Island in September, to meet with festival organizer Harry Burton. Harry is a farmer at Apple Luscious Organic Orchard where he grows 23 varieties of red-fleshed apples – a unique apple that has somewhat of a cultish status among those who know about them.

According to an article by Ram Fishman, the red-fleshed apple's origin is undocumented but is suggested to have originated in what is now Turkestan. Red-fleshed apples were reported growing in the London Horticulture Society's gardens around 1830 and became known in England, and later North America, as the surprise apple. The apple is said to

have arrived in the United States in 1840. Some of the varieties of the apples are named Hall's Pink, Almata, Pink Pearl, Burgundy, Mott Pink, Webster's Pink Meat and Baldwin Red Flesh, among others.

[sound of biting into apples]

*Harry Burton:* I'm Harry Burton and my wife and I run the festival, we organise it, and we're one of the participating orchards in the festival.

I guess it was sort of taken from a few ideas running down in California, up in the mountains where they have festivals, and we said, "Gee, we need a festival here. It's a perfect way to connect people with apples." And so we started in '99. Probably the main goal is to get people excited about apples again, because apples are something they should be excited about, but they've been sort of brainwashed into thinking apples are pretty boring. So we tend to try to reverse that trend by giving them exciting apples.

*Andrea Langlois:* And how many visitors are you expecting?

*Harry Burton:* Last year we had 700 and it was an awful, rainy, miserable day, so we're hoping for something better than that.

*Andrea Langlois:* The theme of this year is the "red-fleshed apples." I think most people don't even know that red-fleshed apples exist. Could you comment on that?

*Harry Burton:* Red-fleshed apples are the apples of the future. I had a little old woman from Vancouver, calling me wanting to know where she could get them. She called every store there. They are a marketer's dream, because they're incredible tasting, they look good, they're good for you, and we haven't even talked about the Chinese market, where red is an incredibly important Chinese colour.

*Andrea Langlois:* Most people, if you ask them to name a few apples, they would name Gala, McIntosh. It seems like there's heritage varieties that are being introduced or that people can taste here today. And the heirloom tomato market has kind of exploded over the last year. Do you think that's what might happen for apples?

*Harry Burton:* Definitely, yeah. It is happening, it's part of the trend there for all these varieties of apples. We had 309 varieties on display at Fulford, all grown on Salt Spring, so that was pretty incredible. And all grown organically as well.

*Andrea Langlois:* What's the benefit of having such a diversity of apples? Maybe you could start by saying how many different varieties of trees you have in the orchard we're standing in right now.

*Harry Burton:* This orchard has 200 varieties plus, and all sorts of values. Number one, you don't have to worry about pollination because there's always something here to cross-pollinate. Number two, you've got apples all the way from August through to

November, and you've got apples to cover every niche. And so one of the very important things about marketing apples now is diversity. You give people a real diversity. The Okanagan is trying to sell one apple right now, they're trying to sell Ambrosia, as if it's going to save them. One apple isn't going to save anybody. People want diversity. They want all the different apples.

*Andrea Langlois:* And your orchard here, I've noticed it doesn't quite look like the orchards someone might picture. Could you maybe draw a picture for our listeners about your type of growing?

*Harry Burton:* Well, we call this a wild orchard. We mow in February. So everything gets mowed down in February, and then we let it grow up. And the rule is it can't touch the tree, so we cut the vegetation back from the tree. But what we've got here is six-foot-high blackberries, and it's an incredibly important way to grow, because the soil is shaded from the sun, all the leaves collect the dew every morning – I can still see dew on this, and it's almost noon now. For insects, it provides an incredible diversity of insect habitat. Ladybugs, for instance, love the stinging nettle, which is right in there. And so again it helps give you a wide population of insects. All that, when it gets mowed, goes back into the soil. So it's almost like it's obvious, you know?

*Andrea Langlois:* If I was to do one thing today on my apple tour, what should I do?

*Harry Burton:* Enjoy apples. Taste all you can. Taste every apple you can.

[sound of biting into apples]

#### Watching the Apples Grow, Stan Rogers

It's early up Ontario farm, chicken crow for day  
I wish I grew Annapolis apples up above Fundy Bay  
Oh it seems so far away

On the ridge above Acadia's town to the valley down below  
The evening shadow falls upon the families listening to the radio  
And watching the apples grow.

#### (CHORUS)

Down on the farm, back among the family, away from Ontario  
Hear the ladies singing to the men, dancing it heel and toe  
And watching the apples grow.

Ontario, y'know I've seen a place I'd rather be  
Your scummy lakes and the City of Toronto don't do a damn thing for me  
I'd rather live by the sea.

I've watched the V's of geese go by, the foxfoot in the snow

I've climbed the ridge of Gaspereaux Mt., looking to the valley below  
And watching the apples grow.

(Repeat chorus twice)

*Jon Steinman:* The late Stan Rogers and his tune Watching the Apples Grow. Stan Rogers was born in Hamilton, Ontario and later grew up in Nova Scotia.

That last segment featured correspondent Andrea Langlois as she visited the September 2008 Salt Spring Island Apple Festival. Andrea spoke with Harry Burton of Apple Luscious Organic Orchard. More information on red-fleshed apples will be linked to from the Deconstructing Dinner website.

### **ending theme**

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

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

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