

Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY
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Title: GE-Free Zones: A Community Response To Genetically Engineered Food

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Transcribed by James Braun

Jon Steinman: And this is *Deconstructing Dinner*, a syndicated weekly one-hour radio program and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman and throughout the next hour we'll be continuing on the same stream that has been helping launch this 2008 season, and that is on the topic of genetically engineered food, but more specifically, GE crops. Last week's broadcast concluded with a collection of audio clips from a meeting that took place here in Nelson, BC back in November 2007 when twenty-three local residents and politicians gathered together for the first time to discuss the creation of a GE-Free Kootenays region. And on today's broadcast we'll continue in more depth and explore more of the dialogue that took place during that meeting and in doing so, better understand how communities in Canada, and really around the world, can begin working on the creation of GE-Free zones. We'll spend quite some time hearing from Tom Rudge, an organic farmer in Whitehorse, Yukon, who has been the driving force behind the GE-Free Yukon initiative taking place there. We'll hear the voices of the Deputy Leader of The Green Party of British Columbia, Angela Reid. Nelson City Councillor Gord McAdams, Greenpeace researcher Jessica Stevenson, and we'll listen in on the GE-Free song produced by British Columbian musician Phil Vernon.

sponsorship announcement

JS: Just a quick note that on last week's broadcast I did mention that today we would air a short segment of our ongoing series "Conscientious Cooks", but because of timing, that segment will be postponed to a later broadcast.

The title of today's broadcast is "GE-Free Zones - A Community Response to Genetically Engineered Food." Now, the importance of today's topic was elevated after a recent event that took place here in Nelson, and it was an event designed to raise awareness of the Security and Prosperity Partnership (the SPP) being forged between Canada, The United States and Mexico. The SPP is being referred to as "NAFTA on steroids", and most importantly, is being discussed behind closed doors between the executive branches of the three governments and a handful of corporations affiliated with the North American Competitiveness Council. Now this was a topic covered during the June 7, 2007 broadcast of *Deconstructing Dinner*, when we explored how NAFTA has already hindered our ability to encourage and foster more responsible food systems. The show

examined how the SPP will enhance and accelerate these impacts, and we also looked at the recent trade agreement known as TILMA, also signed behind closed doors between British Columbia and Alberta.

And so the event that just took place here in Nelson was hosted by the New Democratic Party of Canada, the NDP. The NDP has taken on the SPP as a major issue, especially leading in to what appears to be looming federal elections, and has labeled the campaign quite clearly, "Stop the SPP". This information is front and centre on the NDP web site at ndp.ca.

Burnaby-New Westminster Member of Parliament Peter Julian was the primary speaker at the event as Julian is also the NDP Critic for International Trade, and his message was quite clear: that the SPP is undemocratic and infringes upon the rights of Canadians in literally every facet of our lives, and that the NDP agenda is quite clear in that they are working alongside civil society groups and labour unions to hold the Conservative government to account and to increase pressure on the Harper government to stop SPP implementation until there is a meaningful public consultation and a full debate and vote in Parliament.

A number of people throughout the region from Grand Forks to Trail to Castlegar and Nelson were invited to speak on a panel and provide a more local context to how the SPP will impact our communities. And speaking on the topic of food security was me. And I chose to focus on one topic and one topic only, and that was biotechnology, and the reason I chose to do so is because the word biotechnology is littered throughout all of the SPP documentation on food and agriculture that can be found both on the Canadian and American SPP web sites. And those websites are SPP.gov and Canada's is spp-ppsp.gc.ca.

Now, each country has launched working groups, which in the US are called "prosperity working groups", and one of these groups is the "Food and Agriculture Working Group". And their mandate reads as follows: "The Food and Agriculture Working Group will work towards creating a safer and more reliable food supply while facilitating agricultural trade by pursuing common approaches to enhanced food safety; enhanced laboratory coordination and information sharing; and increasing cooperation in the development of regulatory policy related to the agricultural biotechnology sectors in Canada, Mexico and the United States, through the work of the North American Biotechnology Initiative (NABI)."

Now what about in Canada? Well here's another mention of biotechnology in the Canadian SPP literature. The Food and Agricultural Regulatory Systems working group, will "work toward developing common approaches for regulatory policies related to products of biotechnology," and to "cooperate and share information on international biotechnology activities."

Common approaches for regulatory policies? Well, what does that mean for Canada? We've already seen that the SPP has led to the process of harmonizing pesticide residue limits with those of the United States, and as our limits were more rigorous, the

harmonizing of these standards has instead of making the US standards fall in line with ours, has made ours fall in line with theirs (and hence more pesticide residues on our food). A 2006 SPP report referred to Canadian residue limits as a "trade irritant". Well, given our regulatory system for the approval of GE foods is more rigorous than that in the United States, it seems clear that our system of regulating GE-Foods is indeed a "trade irritant" too. It can be noted that the US Department of Agriculture has not denied a single one of over 5000 applications for genetically engineered crop field trials submitted by industry.

Now at the SPP event in Nelson, I used the biotechnology example because as mentioned on last week's broadcast, Nelson and Creston residents are teaming up with farmers this year to encourage them to grow grains as part of a Community Supported Agriculture model. Now one of these grains will be wheat, a crop that because of pressure from farmers and the Canadian Wheat Board is not yet available in a genetically engineered form in Canada. And so as the SPP agenda seems to suggest that the introduction of GE wheat may now be more likely, there is an elevated importance for Nelson-Creston area residents to look at other ways to prevent this new presence of local non-genetically engineered wheat from becoming contaminated by genetically engineered varieties.

And here of course introduces such an alternative - a GE-Free Kootenays zone, whereby residents are beginning to take matters into their own hands, and ensure that GE crops never make their way into the region. After last week's introduction to this topic, a stream of emails have even poured in from people around North America who are now, too, interested in creating their own GE-Free zones, and perhaps the comments heard on last week's broadcast and those heard today, will provide a resource for communities wishing to do the same.

soundbite

JS: On November 10, 2007, twenty-three West Kootenay region residents gathered in Nelson to strategize around how a GE-Free Kootenays campaign could be launched. In the room were organic farmers, federal and local politicians, and environmental and food security groups. *Deconstructing Dinner* was on hand to record the full day of discussion, and if you missed last week's broadcast, we have already listened in on about seven minutes of introductions from those in attendance who shared with the group why they believe creating GE-Free zones is so important. We also heard from NDP Agriculture Critic and Member of Parliament Alex Atamanenko, on how his efforts in Ottawa to challenge GE foods in Canada are being met without much support from other political parties.

Hosting the event was Nelson's Community Food Matters, Greenpeace, The Green Party of BC, and the Society for a GE Free BC, and support also came from the Kootenay Country Store Co-operative.

One of those travelling in from out of town was Vancouver's Jessica Stevenson - a researcher with Greenpeace who shared with the group what a GE-Free zone is, and how the community of Powell River, has already implemented their own GE-Free zone.

Jessica Stevenson: GE-Free zones, now we've talked a lot about the concept of implementing one here, but not really about what it means to have a GE-Free zone. There was mention of Colin Palmer in Powell River and how he has defined what a GE-Free zone is, and I'm going to use that. It was stated that any community, municipality, area or region that is free from propagating, cultivating or raising genetically engineered organisms by persons, firms or corporations can be deemed a GE-Free zone. And these areas are mostly supported and maintained by community citizens that are concerned, like yourselves. But it is the municipal governments that implement them. Most GE-Free zones are only declared once legislative initiatives are in place, and are made in banning GE foods; moratoriums on the cultivation and sale of GE foods is another instrument in paving the way to implementing a GE-Free zone. So first, the Canadian Council suggests that you first gather a group of concerned citizens, like what is happening here today, and also to survey the city or the town council and identify potential allies in implementing a GE-Free zone, and opponents at the same time. Who are you going to come up against? And realize you are going to have to work with these people, and work together. It is important, though, to mention that GE-Free zones are not regulated at this point. They are a supported statement, and they are used to ensure that seed supplies remain in the public domain. And that's Colin Palmer right there, stating that. If you have a GE-Free zone, and if that GE-Free zone were to become contaminated, you then have the legality to implement a by-law. But the GE-Free zone is not a by-law in itself, it is a declaration and a statement that is supported by the community.

JS: While the idea of GE-Free zones is a rather foreign concept here in North America, in places like Europe where there are far more precautionary approaches being taken regarding such crops and food products, there are over 3500 municipalities that are GE-Free, and Jessica Stevenson describes how public opinion can help drive their creation here in Canada.

J.Stevenson: First and foremost why you should probably implement a GE-Free zone is public opinion and support for it. In Europe there are over 3500 municipalities that are GE-Free, and according to a 2004 poll 83% of all Canadians want mandatory labeling, but 58% of all Canadians support GE-Free zones. Something that Tony brought to my attention that I didn't mention in this paper was the PEI Initiative, and the support behind that. Two surveys were released by Greenpeace to show that 62% of PEI residents want a GE-Free declaration, and 14% of the population are undecided. So that's 14% that could potentially support a GE-Free zone as well. In Quebec you have support for GE-Free zones that reaches up to 64%, and 17% undecided on the issue. So there's a great opportunity there to gain momentum and support for a nation-wide campaign. Even though we are focused on the Kootenays it's good to keep a perspective of where this could potentially lead to.

JS: Now what is often the most difficult concept to understand is the legal nature behind the creation of such a zone, and in closing out these clips of Greenpeace's Jessica Stevenson, she uses Powell River's GE-Free zone as an example.

J.Stevenson: In 2004 the Regional Board of the Powell River Regional District declared a genetically engineered-free crop zone. And it should be understood that this GE-Free zone acts as a policy of the Regional Board which sends out a message and a signal to seed companies or farmers who have become contracted with them. If the situation deteriorates, the policy makes it legal for the Regional Board to pass by-law immediately. So that means that they have then the power to approach any contamination in a legal form. They can take it to the courts, basically; which is a good thing, because this is one way to safeguard biotechnology corporations from them contaminating any properties that are growing non-GMO foods. Everybody will know if they are in any kind of contact with the Powell River Region, that they are a GMO-Free zone.

JS: And that was Jessica Stevenson - a researcher working with Greenpeace in Vancouver, British Columbia. Jessica was among a group that traveled to Nelson from Vancouver to be part of this GE-Free Kootenays meeting, and among the group was Tom Rudge. Tom is a certified organic farmer at Aurora Mountain Farm in Whitehorse, Yukon. He is a director with the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network, a steering committee member with GE Free BC, a founding member of the Fireweed Community Market, a leader of the Whitehorse Slow Food Convivium and is part of the Growers of Organic Food in the Yukon. Now for the past year, Tom has taken a different approach to creating a GE-Free zone, because he has had his sights set on creating a GE-Free Yukon, and his approach is unique because the Yukon doesn't yet have any genetically engineered crops, and is even more unique as instead of requesting that the territorial government legislate a GE-Free zone, he is first working on creating a moratorium - one that would prohibit the introduction of such crops until more research can be done into their opportunities and threats. Tom spoke to the group in Nelson and described the planning that he went through to get to where he is today.

Tom Rudge: So this whole thing that I want to do, it's from the Yukon, it's about the process that I've gone through, and it will be culminating within about two weeks. There's not much science in it, it's just to stir your brain so you can think about it, see what you guys figure out. Just a wee bit of background: the Yukon covers an area of just under 490 000 square kilometres. BC has twice that. The Yukon has a total population of 31 000 people. BC has just under 4.4 million. Just under one quarter of the Yukon's population is First Nation. You talk about the Yukon, you talk about: "Oh my god, now there's a buffer zone." I mean, we are so far removed from everybody. When Tony talks about what capacity there is in the Yukon when you talk GE-Free, I am the capacity. So if I can't do it, and I can't find the people I want to do it, it ain't going to get done. But I'm still optimistic. The Yukon has one hundred and forty eight farms, of which there are two certified organic farms and two transitional to organic farms. My farm is certified organic. Years ago, I was introduced to the idea of being a GE-Free zone by Mr. Beck, Terrence Gerr with the Council of Canadians, and I have to thank them for the

introduction into this. And I also thank another friend who's not here, Catherine Kleinstuber from Powell River, I think many of you know of her.

For several years a few other people and myself worked to figure out a process by which to have the Yukon declared this GE-Free zone. We had strategic sessions, we had meetings, there was an interest but a really visible lack of cohesive direction, and the group didn't move forward, grow or become visible because of this. So there was no goal put in place, no five year "by then we need" whatever, mainly because we didn't know what we wanted. Early this spring I had another viewing of the *Future of Food*, and out of that two individuals, who I did know previously, came forward and said "the time is now, so let's do it." And it was sort of what I needed to move forward with it. Following that first introduction we drew up a petition. And we drew up a petition. And we drew up a petition. We did this several times, and had it wordsmithed by the clerk of the legislature. Little things that need attention on this: if any detail is missed the petition might not even make it to tabling, so the wording has to be clear. Ideas need to be put forth and a question needs to be asked for the petition to make sense. Who can sign the petition also needs to be addressed. In the Yukon we accepted all names, all ages. And it also didn't matter if they were from the Yukon, Canada, North America, or overseas. The one fact was that writing should be legible and no one signs twice. Last thing is that the wording for the petition needs to be atop every sheet of the petition, so no paper with only just names. Quickly, our says: "To the Yukon Legislative Assembly, this petition of the undersigned shows that whereas the Yukon is now one of the only regions in North America that remains uncontaminated by genetically engineered crops,"—there are individual areas that are considered GE-Free, but I was looking at it in a slightly bigger context—"Number two, whereas it is very likely that GE crops, once planted, would cause irreversible harm to our natural ecosystems and sustainable farms. And three, whereas there is currently no legislation preventing the planting of GE crops in the Yukon, therefore the question: We the undersigned ask the Yukon Legislative Assembly to put in place a ten-year moratorium on the planting of any GE seed in the Yukon."

The circulation began. We had envisioned about three thousand signatures on the form, an easy ten percent of the population. Looking back now, hindsight of course, it wasn't at all unreasonable but more advertising would have worked well in our favour. There is no minimum number of names for a petition to be accepted, as long as all the other critical pieces of the petition are in place. We spread the petition around town, to numerous retail outlets and also forwarded it to NGOs and hoped they would also sign up their membership and network of supporters. I think targeting specific retailers willing to support the initiative and advertising it accordingly would have been more successful. During the summer I took the petition to the Fireweed Community Market for fourteen weeks, and had it there for people to sign. This market has approximately thirty-five vendors, six of which are vegetable vendors, the remainder being artisans and crafters. Noticeably, people wouldn't sign or show interest unless someone was there to engage them in conversation and draw them in. So yeah, you have to go to the market, or wherever you are, and you have to be the busker. You have to be the champion for this, and you have to poke people in the chest and say "what do you know about it? Do you

know what you're eating? Do you know what this is about? Have you got a second, can I talk to you about it?"

Along with the petition, the market booth was also selling cups of fair trade organic coffee from a local roaster. It was sold by donation, as well as information for organic growers, information about the market itself. It was an information booth with the petition front and centre. So everything went around, but this was the goal. I would talk about anything there, but they didn't leave until they signed. Throughout the summer the GE-Free petition and campaign was brought forward to as many gatherings as possible.

JS: And you're listening to Tom Rudge speaking of the initial process that he undertook to launch his GE-Free Yukon campaign. As he continued his presentation to the group in Nelson, BC, he stressed the importance of approaching farmers first, and why a moratorium was chosen to pursue instead of an outright ban.

TR: Early on, I presented the idea to the local Agricultural Association, and I used to be on the board for the Yukon Agricultural Association. It was received coolly, with the comment that they wanted more information before deciding to take a position on it. Even then, farmers believed themselves to be the epitome of independent people, and having anyone tell them what they should or should not do will not bode well. And it didn't. Although no one told them what to do, they did feel threatened by the idea of a petition. No follow-up from the Association came about, although they were given access to the most up-to-date information on GM crops. I think it possible the market benefits were explained with an equal emphasis on the possible downfalls, more conventional farmers would listen. The big one is: bottom line, never tell a farmer what they can't do. That's why I brought up at the beginning; there has to be inclusion, they have to be told that there's a benefit to this in marketing, and any other possible benefits. And then you have to leave it up to them and hope that peer pressure from their fellow farmers will eventually pull them in onside. But do not tell them they have to, do not exclude them.

It was following this that the idea came that the petition needs to be consumer-driven, because I wasn't getting the input from these conventional farmers. More work was put into talking to individuals and environmental alternative health groups and other conventional farmers. Some listened. Time is always better spent talking to those who are willing to listen. The Organic Growers group signed on quickly and became an excellent advocate. The Yukon Territorial Agricultural Department, a branch of Energy, Mines and Resources, was informed of the idea of the petition early on. And it was that initial conversation that led to the wording of the petition itself. The Ag Branch openly said: "Ain't gonna happen. We're not going to support an outright ban on the crops because they're legal in Canada." So at that immediate moment, the next best thing I came up with was a ten-year moratorium on the planting of seeds, until there had been studies to show either the benefits or the negative aspects for the Yukon. The Ag Department Chair said nothing negative to this idea, so that was what was put forward.

There are two streams of thought when it comes to dealing with the GE crops. One is to ban the growing of them for social, environmental and economic reasons. The other is

scientific, and it's a tough one because once the GE crops are in the area, it's viewed that Pandora's Box has been opened and cannot be closed. The choice here is to stop further contamination of the areas and watch closely for long-term issues and possibly find a way to record any environmental casualties or health issues. From the standpoint of a campaign a moratorium might be good enough, but from the purist's point of view the ban is the ultimate goal. In the Yukon there are no GE crops currently being grown, so a moratorium working into an eventual ban will work. Since this time, the Ag Department have intimated that it will still be impossible to deal with. Talking in person to Ag Department officials—and this was behind closed doors, and quietly with these guys when I just happened to run into them—I soon realized it's not the fact it's illegal or impossible, it's just they don't know how they would regulate or enforce this petition if it became a reality. So this was never a case of previous policy denying this possibility, it's a case of people not wanting to do their job as the consumer and public want. And they are also absolutely petrified of being sued by multinationals. So it's not illegal. I mean, PEI already said you could do it. It's a matter of these guys are just scared to. And I told the one guy that I know very well, you just have to grow up and get some backbone and get at it.

JS: While Tom Rudge stresses the importance of approaching farmers, he emphasizes that First Nations also be brought into the dialogue up front. In this next clip we also hear Tom speak of his efforts to involve the Chamber of Commerce, as a GE-Free zone can indeed, carry with it an economic benefit, as it sends a positive global message to those who oppose genetically engineered foods.

TR: Next I have to do a joint presentation to the Council of Yukon First Nations about this petition, and to the possible impacts. Having witnessed a recent court case in the Yukon regarding land issues between the First Nations and the government, I sort of realized too late that First Nations need to be brought in at the very beginning of the process. A champion among the First Nations people should be found to help provide the correct protocol for talks with these people, and also to facilitate further talks to ensure transparent consultation is provided on equal terms with any other group or level of government. The Chamber of Commerce, I am fortunate that I have two people that are within the Chamber that believe in this and they are going to talk to them, and they are going to be positive about highlighting progressive ideas about how this could highlight the Yukon as being a GE-Free area. The one thing they were told not to talk about was large corporations. You do not talk about large corporations and advancement and technology with the Chamber of Commerce.

JS: And this is *Deconstructing Dinner*. We've been listening in on recordings compiled in November 2007 at the first GE-Free Kootenays meeting in Nelson BC. Now this meeting took place two weeks before the GE-Free Yukon petitions were to officially be presented in the Yukon legislature, and later on the broadcast we'll listen in on my recent phone conversation with Tom Rudge to find out how that process was received and what next steps are now being taken there.

But in first wrapping up Tom's presentation in Nelson, he cautions others to be wary of government interest to present what he calls, middle-of-the-road information. And he uses one example of an event hosted by the Agriculture Branch of the Yukon government, during which two province of Alberta scientists were invited to share their thoughts on GE crops.

TR: A month ago the Ag branch went through their five-year Strategic Development Plan, and when it came to the Roundtable Planning Session with industry I made sure the table was stacked in favor of sustainable farmers with local ideas and strong support for a market: as in a local market and also a physical market. The result of this was that in the final draft of the Ag Development Plan presented last week, organic was on the list of priorities, and so were local market initiatives; and the issue of GE crops within the Yukon is now a priority. This development plan forms the framework for the Ag Branch's next five years of work, and also for the government to look at and support.

At the fall Ag conference and banquet put on by the Ag Branch, the afternoon session was set aside for discussion on the pros and cons of GE crops. And I was led to believe there would be people from both sides talking, and I would also join them in the panel discussion. And I honestly have to say be very wary of this, because what I ended up with were two provincial scientists from Alberta talking very middle-of-the-road with most emphasis being on weed suppression and examples of successes in that regard. There was zero discussion on environmental effects, long-term health studies, possible social issues, that have affected southern countries. All the issues stemmed from what research they had done; ergo I had nothing to argue against. I didn't have their papers; they wrote them, they know what they talked about, and that's what they referred to. By the end, though, the crowd listening to the speakers had seen through what was happening, and ended up being even more on the side of no GMOs, simply because the scientists failed to support any view outside of their own. They didn't sort of look at the audience and say "Yeah, I feel for what you're going through," not once. If I were to engage the public again it would be on my own terms, with independent industry talking about GMOs. Let the people decide, but give them all the information and not just what a government employee will say to protect their own job. I cannot blame the scientists nor the Ag Branch, they have a mandate to tell the middle of the road, and not to scare people. To tell the rest, that's my job.

With only two weeks left until the petition goes to the Legislature, the last person I needed to put in place was a Member of the Legislature to table the petition. I could not ask a Minister to do this because of protocol; they can't present petitions. I also went with the ruling party, the Yukon Party, because regardless of their leanings the petition has to be perceived as non-partisan. If the party in power won't table the petition then the game is wide open, and it will become a partisan issue. Letters of support: they are great, but they do not form any part of the petition, so they will be set aside from the actual petition and that is what becomes the legal document. Last thing is after the petition is tabled, in the Yukon there are eight working days from that moment for them to decide whether to move forward with the petition or to set it aside, meaning it's dropped. This is when the phone calls and emails need to be sent to members of all parties to support this initiative.

I've also talked with my Member, and said that under—this was one of these backroom things, and I just poked him in the chest and I said—under no terms will I be satisfied if this is dropped. There's just no chance in hell I'll settle for that. I said if there are issues let's communicate and iron out the issues, because this is a priority of the Agriculture Branch, 1500 signatories to the petition, and First Nations. And I just said I will make it a personal point that you never, ever get elected again if you just drop this thing. I will be in your face at every meeting.

From my point of view, to try this I strongly believe you need a champion, or several, who are willing to learn about GMOs, about GE crops. There needs to be a focal point for people to go to. That has to be there.

The GE-Free Song

Phil Vernon (singing): Well it started in Ukiah

Just a little northern California town

Just a few determined people

And you know they brought the whole county 'round

Going door to door with their petition

Holding meetings and talking on the phone

That's how the County of Mendocino

Became the USA's first GE-free zone! ...and now they're

Chorus:

GE-free - safe food and strong community

GE-free - that's the way... that's the way it should be!

Now those farmers 'way Down Under

From what I hear, they're clear on what to do

They know they'd lose international markets

If genetic seed technology goes through

Put to the test in West Australia

The biggest farm state in that southern land

They got their government to pass a law

And now commercial GE crops have been banned

... and now they're

Chorus

Peasant farmers in Venezuela

Fight the pressure from Monsanto

This is our land - they tell their Presidente

Now Monsanto's plan is terminado

From Powell River out to Brooklin, Maine

We're gonna be GE-free from coast to coast!

From the farm field to the kitchen table

Let's work together to protect what matters most (that's good food)

All the power behind technology
Cannot surpass what our grassroots can do!
And when we say "No!" to GMOs
Then our vision for the future's that much
closer to coming true! ...and we'll be

Chorus

...that's the way, Mendecino...
that's the way, West Australia...
that's the way, Venezuela...
that's the way, Powell River... that's the way it should be!

JS: And this is *Deconstructing Dinner* - a syndicated weekly one-hour radio program and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman.

And that was a tune by Phil Vernon - a well-known musician based on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, who is often featured here on *Deconstructing Dinner*. That was his tune Ge-Free, created in 2005. And more information on Phil and his GE-Free CD will be posted on the *Deconstructing Dinner* web site at cjly.net/deconstructingdinner.

A quick reminder that today's broadcast will be archived on our web site along with the previous two broadcasts titled the "Colonization of the Canadian Farmer", both of which have led into this one today. On today's broadcast we explore in depth the process that communities and regions can take to create zones that are free of genetically engineered crops (GE-Free zones). As was learnt on last week's broadcast, efforts to challenge the presence of genetically engineered foods in Ottawa, is being met with little interest on the part of most Members of Parliament. It was this that stressed the importance of alternatives for communities to take who wish to keep their regions free of such patented and controversial technologies, and instead ensure seeds remain in local hands with local farmers. And so today's broadcast titled "GE Free Zones - A Community Response to Genetically-Engineered Food", we've been learning of the initial stage of one area right here in the West Kootenay region of BC, where twenty-three local residents and politicians gathered together to strategize around launching a GE-Free Kootenays campaign. Just before Phil Vernon's tune, we were listening to Tom Rudge - the mastermind behind the GE-Free Yukon campaign that has been ongoing now for over 2 years. Now we will hear more from Tom Rudge later on the broadcast, as I caught up with him over the phone just recently to learn more about what's been happening with his efforts there since the November GE-Free Kootenays meeting in Nelson. But first we'll listen in on a session of the Nelson meeting that was facilitated by the Deputy Leader of the Green Party of British Columbia - and that is Kelowna's Angela Reid. During the second half of the full-day meeting, Angela facilitated a brainstorming session whereby the group was asked to split up into smaller groups. Now we'll listen in on some of the outcomes of these smaller group sessions, and in doing so provide suggestions on how other communities can facilitate similar meetings. And here's Angela Reid outlining the first part of the brainstorming session.

Angela Reid: We'll break into three groups of about seven people each, and what we're going to do is first of all come up with a list of potential allies who might be good allies in creating GE-Free or non-GMO zones in the Kootenay region. We'll take five minutes, just quickly brainstorming a list of allies. Then what we'll do is if each person in the group make a list if you can, think of five to ten strategies or ideas that will help lead towards creating GE-Free zones in the Kootenays. Then we'll move back into the group and I'll give another instruction, I don't want to go over it too much; but essentially what we're going to come up with: we're then going to cluster them as a group, organize them, come up with some blockages. And then we'll list the potential blocks to GE-Free campaigns, and then the next step will be how do we get around those blocks, what are the actions and strategies for getting around those blocks? And the hopeful outcome of this will be a list of specific action items or strategies or campaign ideas that the steering committee can then take and use as we develop a campaign, hopefully identify a lead person in the Kootenay region who can take on the campaign and give them this, probably, eight page document which we can then circulate to this group as well, all of the ideas that have come out of these groups.

JS: After the smaller groups had completed the brainstorming of strategies, the larger group reconvened and these ideas were amalgamated onto the wall in order to develop common themes.

AR: But for now we're just going to get them up on the wall, and kind of get an idea of what's up there. Champions for steering committee; education and awareness for government; education and awareness for farmers, and Scott, two ideas from your group. Clear definition of a GE-Free zone. and identify local champions. So we've got two identical ideas there, which is great. Usually the common themes will start emerging. Alternative crops--so is that educating farmers about alternative crops to GE? Educational strategies, schools and (indistinct voices in background) film. Promote non-GMO animal feed, so that would be for farmers. A survey?

Unidentified male: Public survey, yeah.

AR: "Coalition of the willing", support organic farming.

The next thing we're going to is go back into your groups, five minutes to brainstorm people who might block some of this stuff happening, and some of the ideas around creating GE-Free zones, who might block these. And then we'll take five minutes and do individual brainstorming around what some of the obstacles will be.

JS: And here's Angela Reid compiling the list of blockages and obstacles that a GE-Free campaign may run up against.

AR: Chamber of Commerce, WTO, NAFTA. I'm going to start clustering these, too, because there are some natural clusters that I think are going to form here, some of the larger organizations or things that could be used against us. Transport companies, feed

and farm supply stores, losing focus with too broad a spectrum. So that might be an obstacle towards trying to do this. Bureaucrats advising that risks are greater than benefits. So is that risks of creating a GE-Free zone is greater than the benefit of creating a GE-Free zone? CFIA and Ministry of Health. A move to biofuels. They might come out and say "well, we're never going to be able to grow enough biofuel feed if we don't create higher yields" or something like that, that would be their argument. (indistinct voices in background) That is what they're saying right now. I'm going to put that under the large corporate interests; I mean, these are corporately-governed bodies, typically. You could even say our Ministry of Health is. But these are more specific entities, corporate bodies. Uninformed public, being caught or called out on misinformation—if we're not really sure that we're clear with our facts and our message.

Unidentified male: Human element, back with the apathy and the—

AR: City council and administrations, inflammatory extreme paranoid statements by allies. (laughter. Inaudible background comments) Fear of lawsuits. Farmers fearing losing independence regulation. So, farmers that are feeling like they're somehow--

Unidentified male: This is another regulation

AR: This is another regulation, now we can't do this. We're already being squeezed so hard.

Unidentified male: That's got to be its own category; this is who we're talking about—

AR: Yeah, I think that's true, like that's specifically to deal with the farmers who are going to be affected. Economic transition, GMO to non-GMO. Are we talking at the local level, or farmers? Okay. Scientific bafflegab. ***** [42:12] as corporately-funded science. Lack of peer-reviewed scientific study. Ag Department, provincial.

JS: Following this session of the meeting, all of this information gathered helped the group end with a discussion on what roles any coordinator of such a campaign would need to take on. And a full list of all of these ideas compiled at the November meeting will be linked to from the *Deconstructing Dinner* web site at cjly.net/deconstructingdinner, and will be posted under the January 17th 2008 broadcast.

Now we can come back to Whitehorse Yukon's Tom Rudge whom we heard from just earlier. Since he attended the Nelson meeting in November, the GE-Free Yukon petition was presented in the Yukon legislature and so I caught up with him over the phone to learn more about what happened when the petition of 1500 signatures calling for a moratorium on the introduction of GE-Crops was submitted. And he refers to the response from Archie Lang - the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources.

soundbite

JS: Now we can come back to Whitehorse, Yukon's Tom Rudge, who we heard from just earlier. Since he attended the Nelson meeting in November, the GE-Free Yukon petition was presented in the Yukon legislature and so I caught up with him over the phone to learn more about what happened when the petition of 1500 signatures calling for a moratorium on the introduction of GE crops was submitted. And he refers to the response from Archie Lang - the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources.

TR: We did submit the petition. It was not a big deal; I think we had just over 1500 signatures on it. It was taken, and the government did have eight sitting days in which to respond. We were in the legislature the day they did respond, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources Archie Lang responded, and I would say it's kind of a perfunctory "thank you very much for your petition, thanks to all the people that signed it, we look forward to looking into the issue," sort of a "thank you very much". So needless to say, we were sort of disappointed in the fact that they relied on outside facts and figures, and they didn't really pay attention, I don't believe, to how important this is and how many people were really signed up and concerned about this issue.

JS: The presenting of the petition also gave the opportunity for other political parties represented in the legislature to comment, and Tom outlines these responses and the position of the Agriculture Department itself.

TR: The other thing that happened during that period as well; Todd Hardy, the leader of the third opposition, the NDP here in the Yukon, he tabled a motion supporting the petition and asking for a moratorium. But unfortunately that was at the end of the sitting, so it won't be carried on. But it did plainly state the NDP's position, that they would like to be able to move on this and if they ever had a chance they would. So it was a nice way of supporting the issue. The Liberals, they didn't come out one way or the other on anything, although they sort of nodded and looked positive. They really didn't say anything in regard to it.

Subsequent to the petition and Archie's response, we've had a couple of articles in the newspaper and a radio interview. The GE-Free Yukon committee sent several letters or emails in response to the petition, to Minister Archie Lang and also to the Agriculture Department Director Tony Hill. Archie Lang has written back, but it's more or less reiterating what he already responded to in the legislature. Tony Hill has responded, saying "Yes, let's have a meeting and let's talk about this." He is interested in looking into a consumer or an industry-driven solution to this. Basically the government seems to be refusing, at any length, to create any sort of legislation; they really don't like doing that. So it really sounds like they would like the industry to come up with a solution, saying "Why don't you guys just not grow the stuff?" And to me and to our group, that's sort of a "pass the buck, we don't want to deal with it," but it's also stating that they don't want to face off against any of the big guys. They really don't want to have anything to do with the big companies on this; they would like the people to just choose amongst themselves not to do this. But I think we're going to move farther with it, we're going to push a little bit harder yet. There was a one page commentary that was put in the Yukon News, which is online, and it responded to Archie's reply to the petition; and the article essentially

refutes everything that Archie said in his response, so the people of the Yukon and of Whitehorse are well aware of the issue. The Agriculture Department, as I've said, they're looking forward to this meeting and talking about it, trying to figure out a solution. So that's a good thing, I think, and the more we can talk about it the bigger the awareness becomes. And that was always the bottom line, that the people of the Yukon become aware of these issues.

JS: Now while the responses were enough to ensure more dialogue on the issue would continue, there was one fork stuck into the process by the Yukon Agricultural Association - a group made up of members of the agricultural community. Some members of the Association are organic farmers, and as we learned from previous broadcasts, the ability to grow certified organic crops is threatened by the presence of those that have been genetically engineered.

TR: We have an Agricultural Association, sort of an industry group, up here in the Yukon. The Board of Directors took it upon themselves to write a letter to the Minister stating that they do not support the petition. A lot of people were quite amazed at this, and I quote from their email, it says: "In fact, to the best of our knowledge to date, GE seeds have not shown any deleterious effects on the environment nor food quality. Meanwhile, they have resulted in increased production and extension of the geographic range in which certain crops can grow." So I did email them back and said "if you can possibly give me one source on any of this, I'd believe you." And we had quite an email campaign going back and forth, and not once could they come up with any source for any of this. And as far as deleterious effects to environment, food quality or health, there's never been any long-term testing done. Probably the most serious issue that came up was the fact that most of the organic growers, besides being members of their own chapter of Organic Growing, are also members of the Yukon Agricultural Association. Now what happened was the Board of Directors took this and said "no, we don't support the petition." And in doing so, it really appears they've said "we won't support organic agriculture" by saying that. Where it's at right now is the Yukon Agriculture Association, we've asked them to have another look at this and see if that's actually what you meant or what you're willing to do, or if you would like to sit down and talk more with the organic sector. But it really sounds like they've just decided over a weekend of emails and phone calls that this was going to be their stand, and we'll see what goes on from there. But that is a huge thing that happened up here, was that the Agriculture Association did not want to support the moratorium on the seeds.

JS: And this is *Deconstructing Dinner* where we've been listening to Tom Rudge - an organic farmer in the Yukon who has spearheaded the GE-Free Yukon campaign, one calling for a moratorium on the introduction of genetically engineered crops into the territory.

Now there is an interesting inner conflict among agricultural groups like the one just referred to and government itself when it comes to the issue of GE crops. We currently live in a time where there is rapidly rising interest in the health, environmental and economic benefits of organic food, and with it has come the creation of policies and

wording within governments that encourage the growth of the organic sector. As mentioned on our January 3 broadcast, the organic sector is threatened by genetically engineered crops as cross-contamination can lead to an entire organic harvest losing its ability to be certified as organic, and so it appears that any support of GE crops is contradictory to this rising support for organic agriculture, and hence the conflict.

Now this can become an important tool to stress when working with any level of government on the banning of GE crops. Because while science will always butt heads over health concerns, the cross-contamination argument involves little debate, it's a simple eventuality that was stressed by farmers Marc Loiselle and Arnold Taylor on our recent January 3 broadcast.

soundbite

JS: Now while the Yukon is one of the most far removed places in the world, they have nevertheless been receiving international attention for their GE-Free efforts. And around the time the petition was presented in the Yukon legislature, a wave of letters of support rushed in, and Tom Rudge explains.

TR: Well one of them was an excellent one; it came from Dag Falck from Nature's Path, and they are North America's largest organic cereal producer. And Dag sent a wonderful letter to the government and also to the Agriculture Branch, just outlining how large this industry is--this organic industry, and theirs specifically--and offered to help in any way that the government could see fit if they needed it, just to let him know because he's in favor of this petition.

Another one was, a lot of people know about the independent research group in the United Kingdom, the Institute for Science in Society. Dr. Mae-Wan Ho from the UK is a geneticist, and she's been working for a lot of years, she has quite an incredible resume behind her, and she wrote a personal letter to the government, just outlining her thoughts, and also attached another scientific document that rounds up a lot of issues on more of a scientific level.

The whole deal behind this whole petition was the fact that earlier on I did go to the government, the actual party in power, and I asked about these issues and how I should go about looking for change. And it was suggested that "You know, Tom, if you're going to do stuff like this what you really need is support of the people, because nothing hurts harder than a vote. Get a petition, maybe, that works really well. Get the science behind the stuff and get some of the big players on this, and get them together and let's see what we can do." Well that was two and a half years ago that I talked to them, this has all been followed up now. So I've mentioned it to Minister Lang that, yes, we did follow all your suggestions about this. We had some really great support from people across Canada. And as I say, Dag Falck was tremendous in his letter of support, and Dr. Mae-Wan Ho is great because she's emailed back several times asking how it's going. People are interested, and the reason I did ask for emails from outside of the Yukon as well as inside was the fact that the Yukon has to realize that we're not in a bubble here. We are part of

the world system; we do represent something here to the rest of the world. People come here for a reason. I just wanted to make sure that everyone realized we're not alone here, there's a lot of impact that this will carry; it's national, it's international, and it's a big deal.

JS: During my conversation with Tom I was curious to learn of other efforts perhaps here in Canada that have attempted similar campaigns to launch GE-Free Zones, and he spoke to me about Prince Edward Island where such a campaign was launched but failed. And it was an important example as it stresses the threats such campaigns can be up against - which in this case, were multinational corporations and governments who choose not to respond to public opinion.

TR: When PEI did their campaign to try and keep genetically modified stuff off the island, it was at the very end of that whole process of public hearings that both the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and also Monsanto showed up and had discussions behind closed doors. It was within a very short period of time after that, that the government came out and said "no, we can't support a ban or anything on this, because there's not enough science behind any health issues. So we can't say it's bad for people, so we cannot ban it."

JS: It was highlighted on last week's broadcast how farmers are of course the most important group to be involved in the creation of a GE-Free zone, and perhaps of greatest importance is the ability to present farmers with alternatives. Now this is exactly what's happening here in the Nelson area where local residents are banding together to encourage farmers in the Creston Valley to grow non-genetically engineered and naturally grown grains, and at the same time secure a market for them using a model similar to that of Community Supported Agriculture where the farmers receive the money up front. And you can stay tuned for a broadcast on that exciting project in the next few weeks. But here's Tom Rudge stressing the importance of creating these alternative markets for farmers when attempting to create GE-Free zones.

TR: So to talk to the farmers, if they need to be a part of the community, the community needs to go to them and say "Listen, this is what we're looking for." It has to be a supportive move towards something else. To just go and rant at them, saying "what you're doing is bad" doesn't work. Because all they're doing is growing something to feed their family—I mean, not directly, but by selling it to whoever, that's how they're making their money.

If it could be instilled to these people that the community doesn't support it, they support the farmer but not what he's growing. So if they can offer alternatives to what he's doing, and offer alternative markets, because that's probably the largest issue is that for whatever they were previously growing there isn't any market, so they were sold on this new technology. So you almost have to go back and try and sell them back again, to keep them in. They're only human; I mean it's pretty evident to me, anybody that's growing this stuff really hasn't seen all the paperwork, and all the issues from around the world and how this affects everyone. I mean, around the world it is just frowned upon. And yet in North America, we don't see that.

JS: And in closing out today's broadcast, here again is Tom Rudge.

TR: As far as I'm concerned, John, on your show I'd declare the whole Yukon a GE-Free zone because we don't have any here right now. With the petition asking for a moratorium, people are looking sideways at everybody else saying "Are you going to grow it? Are you going to grow it?" Nobody's willing to do it. So with a tremendous amount of peer pressure, a lot of people just might not do it. So if that happens, that's great. But I'd still like legislation in place; it would still be great saying "no, we don't want this stuff up here." But as it is, yeah, the Yukon is a GE-Free zone.

JS: And that was Tom Rudge - an organic farmer in Whitehorse, Yukon and the driving force behind the GE-Free Yukon campaign. Those last clips were recorded during a recent phone conversation. And you can stay updated to what's happening way up there in the Yukon by visiting their web site at gefree.yukonfood.com and more information will be posted on the *Deconstructing Dinner* web site at cjly.net/deconstructingdinner.

And in closing out today's broadcast, I'll quickly mention that along with our recent partnership with The Tyee, is the ability to comment on our weekly broadcasts and engage in dialogue with other listeners. And you can link to this feature on the Tyee by visiting the specific broadcast pages on the *Deconstructing Dinner* web site. This broadcast is archived under January 17.

And I'll also leave you with one more clip from the November GE Free Kootenays meeting that took place in Nelson. And this one is of Nelson City Councillor Gord McAdams, who advises on the importance of educating local politicians on the basics of genetically engineered foods, and he uses the example of the recent push here in Nelson to ban the cosmetic use of chemical pesticides.

Gord McAdams: When we did pesticides in Nelson, what made it work for me was I had some champions like you out in the community, and they gave me good examples of other places that did it. So it took away that threat of what's going to happen to all the shops in town that sell these pesticide products? How am I going to deal with them? And they walked me through what other communities did. Frankly, it gave me, and politicians love this, an opportunity to look good. So I could solve the other side, and move, and segment the side I wanted to segment. Really what you—and you got it—is that you make it easy for them to look good, and that's what you did. And so (indistinct voices in background) other examples of other communities really, really helps; because then I'm not cutting new ground all by myself.

Ending theme

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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