

Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY
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Local Meat? “Not in My Backyard!”

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Jon Steinman: And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner – a syndicated weekly one hour radio show and Podcast produced in Nelson, British Columbia at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY. I’m Jon Steinman and over the course of the next hour I’ll be taking you through the second installment of the ongoing Livestock Lost series which follows part I that first aired on July 3 of this year.

The series is examining the state of the livestock sector and animal products in North America.

On part I we heard from Toronto author Susan Bourette who spoke with us on the culture of meat eating that is seemingly receiving a resurgence throughout North America. We began to explore the introduction of the new British Columbia provincial meat inspection regulations that came into effect in October 2007 and which have effectively put many small-scale farmers *out* of business and have threatened the future of many more.

Speaking on the topic was Corky Evans - the elected representative for the provincial riding of Nelson-Creston, Jenny Macleod of the District A Farmers Institutes and the late Tony Toth the former Chief Executive Officer of the BC Food Processors Association. It was also during that show that a detailed history of meat recalls over the past 10 years was presented alongside the number of deaths and illnesses resulting from those incidents.

And so today, and as promised, we’ll continue where that last episode left off and begin taking a much more “on-the-ground” look at how one community has begun responding to these regulation changes and to the increasing demand for safer and more responsibly produced local food. As many areas throughout BC scramble to meet the new slaughterhouse regulations, a very important and I would say critical lesson is being learned of what happens when we begin to *really* start to localize food systems. This story is an important lesson for any North American community wishing to begin localizing their sources of meat.

While the reasons for more localized food systems are becoming increasingly accepted by what appears to be a majority of people, the big question now becomes, are people ready, are we ready to begin to see just *how* our food is produced and are we ready to

bear the social and environmental *costs* that may be associated with our current food choices.

As it stands now, the environmental and social impacts of *most* of the foods available to North Americans are inflicted on everywhere *but* the local area in which we live.

And so if the efforts in the West Kootenay region of BC are any indication of whether or not we *are* ready, then the answer is, for *now*, a resounding no.

On today's broadcast we'll meet with Kenyon McGee – a spokesperson for an abattoir Co-operative that has been formed to respond to both recently introduced meat inspection regulations in the province as well as this increasing demand for local meat. (and for those unfamiliar – an abattoir is another name for a slaughterhouse)

We'll also hear segments once again of Corky Evans, we'll hear from Nelson's Abra Brynne who will speak on behalf of her role with the BC Food Processors Association, and we'll hear briefly from Paul Bailey with the British Columbia Ministry of Health.

Now just before we dive into the topic for today I do want to share a few brief announcements.

For any of you who visit our web site at deconstructingdinner.ca, we have just recently updated the main page with a link to an unedited recording of Percy Schmeiser speaking on July 10 in Castlegar B.C. The event was hosted by the Kootenay Food Strategy Society. And you can expect an upcoming show that will continue to *cover* the campaign that Percy was helping launch – the campaign was first introduced here on Deconstructing Dinner back in January when we aired an episode titled GE Free Zones – and that show was the first of many recordings of a group here in the Kootenay region of the province that is working towards creating a region that is free of Genetically-engineered crops (GE).

And I do, want to again encourage you to check out the recording as it is *one* of the most shocking, informative, and passionate talks on food that I've ever heard. And again, that's at deconstructingdinner.ca

Another quick announcement – it was only a couple of hours ago prior to the live airing of this broadcast here in Nelson that the two Deconstructing Dinner cyclists reached their *final* destination of St. John's Newfoundland. The two cyclists began their trip with deconstructing dinner signs affixed to their trikes 2.5 months ago from Victoria B.C. and we've been tracking their journey ever since. We'll hear from them once again on next week's broadcast to learn about their last leg through Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. They've received some amazing media coverage while travelling through the east coast including a ten-minute segment that aired throughout the Maritime provinces on CBC radio. And we'll learn more about that on next week's show.

And one more quick announcement, I'd like to extend a big thanks to all of the volunteers who have been coming forward to help transcribe broadcasts of Deconstructing Dinner. The list of transcripts on the web site is now increasing every couple of weeks thanks to volunteers who have come forward from all over North America to lend a hand in bringing our content to an audience who prefer to *read* our broadcasts than listen to them. The transcripts also assist anyone doing research into the subject matter of this program.

And you can link to those transcripts from the main page of our web site, and that link is on the right hand column of the main page.

Moving on to the topic for today – the title of today's Livestock Lost episode is Local Meat? "Not in My Backyard!."

To avoid having to go through the details once again of the new BC meat inspection regulations – long story short – in 2004 it was announced that *all* meat processed for sale in the province would have to pass through a provincially or federally licensed facility. The problem? There weren't enough facilities in the province to satisfy all regions. So in October 2007 when the regulations came into effect, many regions throughout BC were left without a *legal* facility to process meat. In short – it became *illegal* for farmers to sell meat to anyone even if it was on the front steps of their home. One of the regions left high and dry was the West Kootenay region where Deconstructing Dinner calls home.

But the West Kootenay is not the only region dealing with what essentially amounts to a government-imposed ban on local food, the region of Powell River is too dealing with the same issue. Powell River is located up the coast of the province well north of Vancouver – and with no direct road access – it's essentially an island.

In February 2008 I travelled to the community of Saanich on Vancouver Island to attend a conference where the meat inspection regulations were being discussed. Speaking on the first evening of the conference were bureaucrats from the provincial Ministry of Health and many in the audience were farmers from across the province. Needless to say, the energy was tense and the exchanges heated.

One of the farmers in the audience was from Powell River – a community that has become well-known for launching a community-wide 50-mile diet challenge that signed up hundreds of residents. Here's a clip of that farmer addressing Paul Bailey – a Program Policy Consultant with the Ministry of Health.

Farmer: The 50-mile challenge was really embraced by the people in our town. And people have just wanted more product, and now I can only say, "Well my meat's illegal," and short of having public events where we eat illegal meat, I don't know what we're going to do. Our capacity's too small. None of the solutions that might have worked in other areas will work for us. So there we are. Our meat's underground and that's not a safe place for meat to be. What are we going to do? We've got more demand and what do you say to someone? "Borrow some money from the bank to put in some things for your chickens and stuff because it's a great market to get into." No one will touch it. There's

no future. What do we do now? That's where this whole thing has left us. And maybe you went to Ontario and read a great report. I'm going to actually read that and it might make sense for a landlocked province, but for us, and lots of people who are sitting on islands, and Powell is effectively an island. So there we are, we're sitting there producing illegal stuff, we're twisting in the wind as farmers and there's no relief. We can't increase capacity which might make it economical because it's an illegal act. Do you have any answers for me that I can take back to the meat producers of Powell.

Paul Bailey: My comment would be is that there are challenges, there are challenges across the province. And different areas of the province are at different stages in making the transition. The BC Food Processors Association is involved in coming up with creative solutions for different areas. Mobile processing is one that is being looked at and is in development. And it is part of the challenge to come up with communities coming together and looking at options. The Slocan is facing some significant challenges as well. But it is in facing those challenges that creative solutions are coming forward. Some have come forward and are in place in some areas of the province, others are in development and the different areas face different types of challenges.

JS: Also sitting in the audience was Abra Brynne who we'll hear from later on the show representing the BC Food Processors Association. Abra was hired part time to work *with* regions wishing to transition into these new regulations. Also in the audience was elected representative for the Nelson-Creston riding of the Province Corky Evans who we heard from on the first episode of this Livestock Lost series. Corky has been involved with the abattoir cooperative in the West Kootenay region ever since it was first conceived and he too spoke up at the February conference in Saanich.

Corky Evans: We have learned with abortion, which is not a subject that we like to talk about, that when we made it illegal, it didn't stop. It went underground and became dangerous. It's the same with drugs. It's against the law, but it didn't go away. It's happening where I live and it's breaking up communities and it's happening underground and it's dangerous. In the last few weeks we were trying to make a co-op, and we're still trying. I'm not stopping and I so much appreciate the help. But we contacted a hundred farmers or little growers, people like these people, and said will you join. And they said, we've got to go underground. If we put our name on your piece of paper, they know who we are. From a health point of view, I'm asking you, will you report to your minister that I'm telling you that it's not going away and it's not going legal. It will go underground and then we will have no way to trace it. We need an exemption for a long enough period of time until Abra and Kathleen can get a certified plant in the neighborhood. That will be a wonderful thing. But until that happens, we're taking a healthy product and sending it underground and the threat is not to agriculture because we're going to make money underground, it's to health. Tell your minister that at least one person thinks it's having the opposite impact on public health than was intended by the law.

JS: And that was Corky Evans speaking at the Certified Organic Associations of BC conference in February 2008 in Saanich, BC. We'll hear from Corky again on today's show.

Now in the case with the West Kootenay region that Corky represents, there have been a number of responses *to* the new meat inspection regulations. The first as Corky has described are farmers choosing to go underground whereby eaters can still purchase meat products from them. Now some of these farmers are *not* interested in the construction of a licensed slaughterhouse and are satisfied with continuing to process their animals as has been done for a long time. There is on the other hand one problem with this desire (regulations or not) and that will be addressed on next week's show.

There are *other* farmers who *do* support the abattoir and the new markets that will be opened up such as those with restaurants, butchers and grocery stores. And there are many eaters in the region who are exploring the idea of cow-sharing – that is taking ownership of an animal and paying a farmer to raise it for them. It would appear that this would effectively bypass the regulations because no sale of meat would ever take place. Again, that's another topic for another show.

But let's get into the details of this one response – the abattoir co-operative that was formed in the Slocan Valley of the region. The valley is a very rural area of the province without any major urban centres and is at its closest point - about a 25-minute drive from the cities of Nelson or Castlegar. It's that valley that has the highest concentration of farmers raising livestock and so it was there that seemed like the most ideal place for a regional slaughterhouse. This would have limited transportation costs and the environmental impacts of that, and the shorter distance would have lessened the stress on the animals.

In the fall of 2007 the co-operative began promoting itself throughout the region and urged people to join and help support its interest to construct a slaughterhouse in the Slocan Valley.

And here is where this story begins to get so interesting – so interesting (I'll add) that it will extend into next week's episode as well.

Because long story short, the efforts to build the abattoir in the valley were shot down for a number of reasons, one of which was opposition from people *living* in the valley. And the opposition was not just coming from vegetarians who may not support the killing of animals but from meat eaters as well.

And it's this that begins to raise the most interesting questions because there *are* residents of the valley who are *content* to receive their meat from factory farms operating in places like Alberta or the United States or more simply – from places that have devastating environmental and social impacts... versus, being able to know first hand *who* was raising the animals, *how* they were treated, and being able to *manage* the environmental impacts. If indeed there is an abattoir right in one's own neighbourhood or community, there would be conscientious efforts to be *sure* that our water is protected that our air is protected, that our soils are protected and that the animals are treated as humanely as

possible (something that slaughterhouses in locations well away from people have clearly been able to get away with).

It's an opportunity to begin to take responsibility *for* our food choices instead of committing those impacts to the exploited migrant labourers working in massive slaughterhouses or to the groundwater pollution surrounding such facilities or to the illnesses caused by fattening up cattle on grain or to the costs of shipping meat long distances whether they be off the backs of military invasions for oil or the human rights violations by oil companies in places like Nigeria or Columbia. It's an opportunity to take responsibility for our choices.... period. But here is perhaps one of the most blatant examples of people deciding to *not* want to see how their food is produced or to take the responsibility for how it's produced.

But when really taking a look at this, even the many vegetarians who also opposed the facility are not exempt from these responsibilities just because they don't eat meat. There are very few 100% self-sufficient eaters anywhere and their food is too, travelling long distances and causing the very same impacts that long-distance transport of rice or soy products or nutraceuticals in those little plastic containers are causing as well.

And it's this that irks Kenyon McGee – a spokesperson for the abattoir co-operative that has already found a proposed alternate location after being booted out of the Slocan Valley. But let's track back to when this all began because as communities across North America begin to *also* try and re-localize food systems, the process that unfolded here in the West Kootenay region of BC – can act as a great lesson for *other* communities looking to launch similar projects.

Kenyon McGee is a lawyer based in the community of Winlaw and he spoke to me over the phone

Kenyon McGee: I've been a bit of a farmer all my life, but when I originally moved to the Slocan Valley my family and I did raise meat animals and we did our own butchering. And it was an interesting experience and valuable. But it was unsatisfactory because we did not have the equipment or really the detailed knowledge to do a real good job at it. So at a certain point, I think it was about fifteen years ago, I switched my attention to non-meat producing animals like canaries and horses, and looked to my neighbors, who were either raising chickens, turkeys, pigs, sheep, or cattle and obtained meat from them. And that's why I guess you could describe my interest as kind of passionate because I was so darn happy to be getting something that was raised right here and not a product from an industrial agricultural industry from the ground up which I just instinctively feel is not safe, healthy, or good for the animal at all.

JS: Kenyon became involved in the abattoir project after being approached by MLA Corky Evans who is also a resident of Winlaw and they immediately began working with the Village of Slocan which was excited at the prospect of a new industry which could create more jobs in light of a dismal forestry industry which the community has most recently been reliant upon.

KM: Last August, Corky called me and he told me that there was an abattoir group that was going to meet at his house and what they needed me for was to set up a business structure for an abattoir that was a slam-dunk. They had the people, they had the expertise, they had the money (seed money anyway), and they had the land up in Slocan. And the village of Slocan had applied for a grant to get the business into the village and the village also had a couple of acres just outside the village just on the border. And they were going to sell that to the cooperative or the corporation, whatever we set up, to gain shares and have someplace to put a workforce of about fifteen village people into operations.

JS: Later on today's broadcast I'll be reading through some of the letters to the editor about the abattoir project that have been flooding regional papers since the spring of this year. And one of the newspapers in the Slocan Valley that printed many of these letters of opposition was The Valley Voice based in New Denver.

Some of the comments appearing in the newspaper as the project was being proposed began to spread fears about the project that were – quite simply a little off the wall. In one instance a submission was printed that directed those concerned with the abattoir to watch the Internet-accessible film known as Earthlings. The film is one of the most graphic exposes of the treatment of animals around the world, and in the section on farm animals the images are all filmed on massive factory farms and industrial slaughterhouses. It was comments like these that began to create very emotional responses to the project and I asked Kenyon what exactly the proposed abattoir would instead look like.

KM: Actually, we're very lucky because Bob Inwood has just completed the initial drawing of this little abattoir. For one thing is the scale, this is a very tiny little building. It's only about thirty or forty feet long and it's probably about as wide. It's designed to handle a small number of animals and I don't have the figure on the tip of my tongue, but I can say that one thing I have remembered is that if we had a very very busy and big day and it was the peak of our efficiency, maybe we would be able to process ten cattle. And for smaller animals of course the numbers go up. But the whole facility itself is quite tiny and there is no (and this is a crucial thing) feedlot associated with it. So no animals come there to be fattened up if that makes any sense. They come after the farmer has finished raising them, and they come there in the morning and they are processed during that day. What we designed was a facility where the most humane methods of ending the life of these wonderful animals that are providing us with something to eat were employed. And our people are all either farmers, and out in the Slocan Valley I really haven't witnessed much animal cruelty by the farmers if any. Or they were like-minded individuals. And of course, in our hiring practices, if somebody wants to come in and try to apply for a job that in some way has a cruel streak in them, they're not going to work there. So the respect for these long-suffering food sources was high on everyone's agenda. And it was not going to be operated in any other way.

JS: At the same time that opposition was pouring in regarding animal welfare concerns, environmental concerns, and fears of smell and air pollution, another fork was stuck in the road which was yet *another* federally-imposed regulation change and this was *again* in response to concerns over Mad Cow Disease – a disease that is restricted to animals who consume other dead cattle through their feed (the standard approach for raising animals on an industrial scale). And it's important to point out that the farmers in the Slocan Valley are in all *known* cases raising their animals on pasture and perhaps a little grain throughout the winter – no cannibalism as is the practice for most North American beef production.

KM: I don't mean to be critical of our provincial government, but it's a catch up game from their perspective and what we didn't know is that while we were making our business plan which included two things which we felt were very very crucial, the first was a specified risk materials incinerator, and the second was a composting facility for all the non-specified risk materials. Now specified risk materials for cows or cattle is the brain case, the spinal cord, and I think one small part of the intestine. So it's a small amount of stuff. But the problem that even the big outfits in BC are running into today is what can be done with this. And instead of the usual model which is to truck it away to Alberta and have it buried in concrete over there someplace, which we felt would be bad in two ways. First of all, it's not really a long-term solution, and second of all, it puts us right back in the thrall (if I can put it that way) of big business in the trucking industry. We didn't want that. So we wanted to deal with everything right on site. And the composting is a big part of our business plan, because the compost that will be produced from a combination of everything from chicken feathers, which I've learned make very important compost, to wood chips, will produce an excellent gardening mulch and fertilizer we'll be able to sell for a lot of money. So that was our business model. So this takes us back to why I say that the government is playing catch-up. It wasn't until December of last year that the rules came out about this. And the rule on the incinerator is that an incinerator like that couldn't be 500 meters from a home or 1000 meters from a business. So we made the decision that we couldn't justify having anything that was at all risky close to a house but far from a junkyard or any other business so we went to 1000 meters. Now that takes out many, many, many, in fact most of the accessible land in the Kootenays. And that's a settlement pattern issue. And if you know the Kootenays, you know that we're all down in the valley bottom and we're pretty well packed in here when you think about a kilometer. That shot us right out of Slocan although we were shot out of Slocan before that even came out.

JS: And this is Deconstructing Dinner.

One of the provincial bodies who has been commissioned to help regions transition into the new regulations and construct local slaughterhouses is the BC Food Processors Association. Hired to work with groups in the interior of the Province was Nelson's Abra Brynne – a familiar guest here on the show.

In April of this year Abra spoke at a press conference hosted by the organizers of the Future of Food in the Kootenays conference in Nelson. We featured a number of broadcasts of that conference here on the show since it was held in November of 2007.

Abra was invited to update the media on the abattoir project and she uses the word nimbyism in this next clip (which is referring to “not in my backyard”)

Abra Brynne: So one of the paid contracts I've had related to food and agriculture for almost two years now has been to work with any abattoir proponents across the southern part of BC. And some who aren't familiar with the concept of abattoirs, it's a slaughterhouse. It sounds prettier in French though. The meat inspection regulation as most people know has been a real challenge for localized food systems to adapt to. There were only a few inspected areas in the province previous to 2004. So it's been a challenge to meet those requirements, but what has happened since the introduction of the inspection regulation is that all of the other government agencies have realized that there are pieces of this that they too need to address. So part of the challenge in getting a local abattoir is meeting all the other requirements be they zoning or environmental or agricultural land being preserved etc, etc. One of the biggest issues and the hugest barrier to established abattoirs and to fledgling abattoirs is the management of waste. And if you include beef in the scenario, as probably most of you know, there's the issue of Mad Cow disease. And they have identified prions as being the likely carrier of Mad Cow disease and so there are parts of the animal's body that must be segregated and disposed of in only approved manners. Across the province, there's a lack of public and political will to address this critical waste issue. And it has been a huge barrier, huge enormous barrier. Nimbyism is alive and well when you talk about waste products from an abattoir. although everyone still likes to throw their steak on a grill, for the most part, though there's lots of tofu eaters here in the Kootenays. So the reason I'm framing this that way is because I need you all to know that the political support for managing the waste byproducts of slaughtering animals if we want to eat meat is a critical piece that needs the public support. There is an abattoir in Preston that is moving forward and will probably be in operation in June and it needs the support of the regional district to have a waste solution. The Slocan Valley abattoir has been planned, actually to fully address and accommodate all of the waste byproducts. And in fact many people don't regard them, especially not at the farming level, as waste but as offal and as a nutrient possibility. So the ideal scenario for a lot of the byproducts of slaughtering animals that are not edible for humans is to compost it. And then you've got really valuable nutrients that can return to the soil. Animals are a very very important part of soil nutrient management, particularly in an area like ours, with peak oil getting synthetic fertilizer is going to be that much more difficult. So being able to use both animal manure as well as the byproduct of the slaughtering of them is a very important part of our food cycle. So the Slocan Valley abattoir plans on composting all the non-specified risk material, offal so that it can be sold as compost as soil nutrients to anyone who wishes for it, and then will be establishing an incinerator to deal with the specified risk material as per the requirements of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. We are seeking a home for this plant because the original partner for the abattoir backed out partway through the project and all of a sudden our land base was gone. So it's been a bit of a challenge to come up

with a new site without additional money, but we've got the support of the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands and so we've been speaking with the Crown lands for quite some time. My role with this organization is to help them with any kind of regulatory requirements including helping them deal with the Crown lands and the process that needs to be undertaken in order to acquire the land. So we're looking at a site in the area that would still make it fairly easily accessible to most of the livestock operators in the area and will also allow us to have legally accessible meat at the retail, the restaurant level, you can purchase it for your home. It's a very exciting possibility. It's also one of the few abattoirs in the province that will be doing every species, so chickens, turkeys, beef, bison, sheep, lamb, I don't think they'll do ostrich though. But it's quite exciting because protein is a really really critical part of our diet and if we do get somewhat isolated here around our dietary needs protein is a biggie.

JS: And that was Abra Brynne of the BC Food Processors Association. Abra was recorded addressing a press conference in April 2008.

This is 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.

You're currently tuned in to the second part of our ongoing series here on the show titled Livestock Lost – with this part two exploring the challenges that a unique project in the West Kootenay region of British Columbia has been facing.

The project is a small-scale slaughterhouse otherwise known as an abattoir and you can catch part I of the series by visiting our web site at deconstructingdinner.ca

On next week's part *three*, we'll explore in more depth yet another of the main concerns raised throughout the Slocan Valley proposals. Marilyn Burgoon will lend her voice to the show. Marilyn is also a resident of Winlaw and was *opposed* to the project existing *anywhere* in the valley. Marilyn is with the Slocan Valley Watershed Alliance and she'll be sharing their concerns. We'll also be hearing from Bruce Davidson – the chair of Concerned Walkerton Citizens – a group that was formed following the devastating aftermath of the drinking water contamination that unfolded in Walkerton Ontario in May of 2000. Seven people lost their lives and thousands more fell ill.

The issue in Walkerton was E. coli contamination which originated on a cattle farm. Some of the opposition to the small-scale abattoir in the Slocan Valley have used the Walkerton tragedy as a tool to caution residents over the risks of a small-scale abattoir. There's just one problem – the Walkerton tragedy was *not* caused by the presence of an abattoir and so we'll explore more as to whether or not Walkerton *can be* associated with the risks of a small-scale slaughterhouse serving small-scale farmers who are predominantly raising animals on grass and not grain.

When the village of Slocan proposal was shot down, the next possible site moved a little south in the valley to the community of Lemon Creek. That proposal was met with

similar opposition and then a number of other uncontrollable factors contributed to that site not working out either.

This brings us once again to Corky Evans – the elected representative for the provincial riding of Nelson-Creston. Corky was working very closely with the group and in March of 2008 spoke to a room filled with mostly farmers at an event he hosted in Nelson. It was there that Corky shared some of the mistakes that were made in proposing the facility in the Slocan Valley.

CE: We, and I take responsibility for this because I certainly have the most experience in public affairs, *I* made the mistake of assuming that people would want an abattoir. And so twice I said to folks, oh here's a place where there's Crown land where we could go. And in truth I was wrong about that and I should have advised the abattoir committee, we have to tell a story about how benign and lovely this is before we say we're coming to your community. Otherwise they watch that terrible TV show in San Diego where they're killing cows with forklifts and they think that's what's happening in their neighborhood. So I have made the public relations mistake of alienating people and we've been rejected twice in various places that we've intended to go. The co-op members have not given up, although one did say, third strike you're out. So we ought not to screw up again. They're going to make a drawing, maybe even a Bob Inwood drawing and a model and show people how groovy and little and benign this is before they come up with another piece of property. Now I want to make a plea. It's very expensive to join the co-op, it costs 500 bucks. We phoned a hundred people who raise animals and they refuse to join, not because they didn't have 500 bucks, not because this isn't going to cost them their income forever, but because they didn't want to piss off their neighbors or get their name on a list. And I would argue, if we don't want trouble enough to participate, we don't deserve the plant. The Crown is not coming here to build us an abattoir. It will happen or not essentially if this group of people in this room and their friends want it. I want to finish by thanking you so much for coming here. There are people who think food is not a political issue and that you can't fill a hall. And that you care just makes me happy and I want to remind you of the importance of meeting the person behind you that you haven't met or signing your name or something. You've got to leave here with some more alliances or we can't win and I can't do it.

JS: Corky Evans speaking in March 2008 in Nelson, BC.

Now Corky raised a topic that we'll get to on next week's part III of this series and that is with respect to support – while there is plenty of opposition to the project, there has *not* been adequate support – such as from eaters and businesses in the community stepping forward and saying “yes” we want local meat.

Following their failed efforts in the Slocan Valley, the group sought yet another site which had to still be easily accessible to farmers from the valley. Here again Kenyon McGee.

KM: We really racked our brains and we got excellent help from the planning staff at the regional district. And so with a combination of local knowledge and brain racking, we tried to come up with some place that was accessible because in the winter, you've got to get there, and had three-phase power, and that's a little tricky once you get out of the valley bottoms. And it's very expensive. I think it's many many thousands of dollars per pole. And water, you have to have a good source of clean water, and yet still be a kilometer away from everything. And we wrestled with all kinds of sites. And our sites ranged all the way from the top of the Bombi summit, which I thought was a decent site as far as no opposition to the site. Although I'm sure somebody would have come up with something. But finally we came up with this site that's located by the Ootischenia dump and it seemed, at the time, very good because the land is zoned industrial and if you think about it, there's an airport, and the Brandt tractor and portable house sales, West Arm Trucking, the sanitary landfill itself, and there's also a human sewage treatment pond. And there was plenty of room for that and it's a very easy site to get to and it's flat land, but it's in a bit of a dip. And one of the first worries that came up was the new subdivisions that were going up across the Columbia in Castlegar, and that's the old-age home up at the top, and then a new subdivision down below the highway, towards the trail would see it. And once we visited the site, we realized that they couldn't see it because there is a cliff on our side of the river and then it's down below that cliff. So the only way you could see the darn thing would be if you were flying into the Castlegar airport. Otherwise you would not see it from any place. As far as smell and noise, there's not any noise associated with it for over a hundred feet and there's no smell problem even from the compost which is designed *not* to smell because when we were on the site, we were overwhelmed by the smell of the dump in combination with the human sewage treatment pond. It stunk. So we knew that our smell was not going to create any additional problems for anybody. We thought it was perfect.

JS: Upon learning of the proposed location for the abattoir, it did dawn on me how symbolic the location is of what our culture has done to food. That here we have a building that should, in many ways, be regarded as a temple – a place where an animal's life will be taken so that people can be fed. Instead, because of opposition from people within other communities, this project has received such widespread opposition, that it's been pushed towards being placed in the proximity of sites where not only does garbage end up in a landfill, but where human waste is collected as well. Now juxtapose this with Toronto Abattoirs Ltd. one of the last remaining slaughterhouses that exist in the middle of a city – Toronto – and it's right downtown. And the downtown Toronto slaughterhouse is not even that small – in fact it employs 600 people. It has on the other hand begun to receive increased opposition only in recent months as the area of the city becomes a hotbed now for new condo development.

But coming back to the proposed site in the Ootischenia area of Castlegar, it too, has received opposition and this time from the Doukhobor population of the area. For listeners unfamiliar with the Doukhobor people – they are a Christian group of Russian origin who settled in the Kootenay region in the early part of the 20th century. The Doukhobors are very rooted in an agrarian lifestyle, however, they are traditionally, vegetarian.

And here again is Kenyon McGee.

KM: Somehow the news leaked out that we were looking at this place and we were trying to keep it quiet, which I don't think was a mistake. But in any event, what we thought is, we knew there was a little bit of opposition. We thought, okay let's have a site visit out there and people could come out and catch a whiff of what they've already got going and see that we are going to be completely benign. And that was nixed. No one would go to that. At the same time, anonymously I was mailed an 800 (and I'll tell you I have not counted) signature petition. Now the petition just says we're opposed to the slaughterhouse in Ootischenia. It doesn't say why or what's going on or anything. And sadly, I personally quit reading the paper because it just made me too sad, really to read the sort of crazy (I hate to say it that way) letters claiming all these things and they didn't have anything to do with us. So I don't know what's the opposition. But I did do this. I looked through the petition and identified a couple of older people who I knew and I called them and I asked them, "What is wrong?" And the best answer that I got was that way back when, Peter the lordly Verigin purchased the Ootischenia lands for the Doukhobors to come out from Saskatchewan and try again out in Castlegar, and that it would be in some way insulting to do this on those lands, even though the lands aren't owned by the Doukhobors anymore, and they've been occupied by the things I've told you about already. So whether that plays in to the people who are not Doukhobors who are opposed or what their opposition is, I just don't know. But again, I think the bigger problem is not that there's opposition because reasonable concern for the location and how it's going to operate and everything else is fine. And we're ready for that and we can work on that and incorporate new ideas and take concerns into account, modify plans. But simple Not In My Backyard please find another place, for no real reason is difficult to deal with. So we don't know yet. And we haven't given up which will probably mean eggs on my window, on the Ootischenia site yet.

JS: Now I have here a collection of letters written to area papers – most of them based in Castlegar – and it was ironic that on the right hand column of the web site for the Castlegar News where I was collecting some of these letters was an advertisement for M&M meats – one of the most recognized names of frozen industrial meat products in the country. A link to these letters will be made available on the Deconstructing Dinner web site at deconstructingdinner.ca

But here's the first one I came across written by Verna Chersinoff on May 28. This appeared in the Castlegar News and the Kootenay Western Star.

"What it will bring to Castlegar and surrounding areas is employment to perhaps 15 people, but it will also produce a horrible slaughterhouse smell within a five km radius. It will impact negatively on tourism in the surrounding area — e.g. Doukhobor Discovery Centre, Castlegar Golf Course and many other tourist attractions. It will impact negatively on the surrounding residential areas; like beautiful homes, Twin River Estates, Emerald Green and Grandview Heights and more; property values will go down." That's the end of the letter there.

Now putting aside the environmental impact of tourism, golf courses, and housing developments, here's another section of a letter from Alan Sheppard. This appeared in the Castlegar News on July 1st. And this one paints a completely different picture of the area than that painted by the last letter. The letter instead lists off all the horrible things already in the area and suggests an abattoir will only make it even worse. It reads this...

"For example, two highways, two gravel pits, a tarmac plant, weight scale, a truck garage and warehouse, a rock quarry, a regional dump, two hydro transmission lines, two electrical switchyards, and a regional airport all detract from this residential area."

And then again here's another letter – but similar to the first it paints a pretty rosy picture of the area. It's titled "Don't Disturb the Peace With an Abattoir" and was written by Katherine Kalmakoff on June 17 and appeared in the Castlegar News.

It reads... "When my grandparents arrived in BC 100 years ago, they saw this beautiful plateau with dense forest and two rivers meeting nearby. This area gave them a sense of peace and consolation. They called it Ootischenia. They were able to foresee what could be done with this land."

And again, according to Alan Sheppard's letter, the land has since become the home to a tarmac plant, truck garage, rock quarry, regional dump, hydro transmission lines, two highways, electric switchyards and a regional airport.

Here's another letter titled "Many Cons for Proposed Abattoir". This one was authored by Bill Stoochnoff and also appeared in the June 17th issue of the Castlegar News.

It reads... "The talk of reduced transportation costs is a farce, I know of no large ranches anywhere in the Kootenay who raise beef or swine."

And then the letter continues.

"In order to have such a supply at hand, the abattoir, as a rule must have holding pens, corrals, barns, feed lots,"

Again, here is a rather perplexing letter whereby the author doesn't even realize that animals are being raised in the area and has concluded that a feedlot will be attached to the facility when in fact it won't be.

These unfounded concerns will extend into next week's broadcast and we'll be expanding on what clearly is somewhat of a syndrome of condemning instead of questioning.

And while it's always more prevalent to hear messages from people who are against something than from those who are *for* something, there was, on July 8th, a letter in the Castlegar News that was titled Rally to Support Abattoir. It was written by Elsa Wyllie and it read this, "'U.S. food supply vulnerable to attack.' 'World facing global food crisis.' 'Forget oil, the new global crisis is food.' These are the headlines that have

recently taken precedence in the media. And though we have a tendency to believe that we in the Kootenays are immune to these world headlines, let me assure you, we are not. There has been much controversy and much anger over the proposed abattoir in Ootischenia, but little proactive discussion about what this issue is really about. Forget the rhetoric; we in the Kootenays have the luxury of being in a so-far relatively stable environment, where scarcity is not a part of our daily lives and where access to food is rarely considered. That is because until now, there has been little need for said consideration. We have both the opportunity and the responsibility to continue to secure our regional food supply, where we can secure access to fresh, safe meat from local businesses. This is a luxury very few regions in the world share, and instead of celebrating it, we are becoming divisive and cavalier about what it could mean to not have this access in the future. The critics contend the abattoir is going to turn into a massive corporate entity. In fact, this establishment is to be run as a co-operative entity, limited by the people who are physically present to process the meat at this establishment. Critics are talking about carcasses strewn about. This is illegal. The issue of the abattoir is only one because of new government legislation that created strict guidelines to the disposal of animal waste. Critics contend that the operators of the abattoir will run rampant over local concerns. Rather, the livestock will be local and will be sold locally and the business will therefore be dependent upon local producers and consumers and their interests. The bottom line is that without the incinerator and the composting that is part of the business proposal, local butchers will not be able to afford to operate because of rising oil prices and problems in the United States with crop flooding, food prices, and, particularly, rising meat costs. The abattoir project is nowhere close to being launched, but instead of thinking of ways to block it, let's think of ways to support it that most people would find suitable. Let's closely examine the plans before making assumptions and focusing on the potential drawbacks to the project. This is what we should be focusing our petitions on, rallying together as a community to find a community solution. To not take this opportunity is not only foolish, but consequences may well be swift and wildly disproportionate." Again, that letter appeared on July 8 in the Castlegar News.

Abattoir spokesperson Kenyon McGee shares such concerns as he has now had firsthand experience of what rising costs will mean to the abattoir construction itself.

KM: And this is the reason why we need this darn abattoir. Because it's part of the thing, what is finally reoccurring probably for the first time in many people's lives is inflation. And inflation has been under control for about 38 or maybe 35 or 30 years, let's put it that way. And although prices have gone up for everything, we know that, inflation rates have been low. Now they're not. And so whereas ten or fifteen years ago you couldn't get rid of a piece of steel, you couldn't give it away, now steel, maybe because of China or the other developing world, is very expensive. And every other bit of stuff that we need to build this, has likewise increased in cost. So where we originally felt that we could build a beautiful little tiny abattoir that could function and make a profit for our members and serve the local community for about a million and a half, and we may have been a little under on that. The current estimate now is about 2.2 million.

JS: And that was Kenyon McGee – a spokesperson for the small-scale abattoir being proposed in the Ootischenia area of Castlegar British Columbia. Kenyon spoke to me over the phone from Winlaw. We'll be hearing from Kenyon yet again on next week's part III of this Livestock Lost series here on Deconstructing Dinner. We'll also be joined by Marilyn Burgoon of the Slocan Valley Watershed Alliance and Bruce Davidson of the group Concerned Walkerton Citizens. The episode will continue to examine the opposition to the abattoir when it was proposed in the Slocan Valley and narrow in on the concerns over water contamination that in part forced the abattoir co-operative to seek an alternate location outside of the valley. As mentioned earlier, the focus on this particular project is receiving such a concentrated attention because it represents somewhat of a first since the recognition of encouraging more localized food systems became so widespread. It's a perfect example of what communities throughout North America may likely encounter when they begin to try and develop more responsible sources of food – in this case, meat.

And so in the meantime, as this project in the West Kootenay region of British Columbia continues its struggle to receive sufficient public support, and as the provincial government continues its ban on any commercial sale of meat that does not pass through a provincially or federally licensed facility, the meat eaters in the Kootenay region along with other regions in the province have a number of options. Go vegetarian, purchase underground meat from criminal farmers, or support the food system that continues to result in news segments that sound like this...

News Soundbites:

Three Marquette students are recovering from E. coli infections. Health investigators say all of them ate tainted beef patties recently recalled. The students ate the patties at a campus-sponsored event.

They did and the event was right here on this soccer field. A spokeswoman for Marquette says the burgers were served before the recall was announced. Health officials say people generally get sick from E. coli about two to eight days after being exposed to the bacteria.

Marquette junior Chad Moran says his roommates bought some of the frozen hamburgers from Sam's Club that ended up being recalled for E. coli contamination. Chad's roommate grilled them a week ago.

"Felt a little sick, it didn't taste too good. It was a kind of an upset stomach."

Here is what a package of the recalled burgers looks like. They are American Chef's Angus beef patties made at the Con Agra plant in Butler, Wisconsin. The Milwaukee health department is investigating those patties being served prior to the recall at an official Marquette University event on September 21st. The burgers were served to student fans before a women's soccer game.

“There were 120 burgers that were purchased and consumed (served) and later three people were ill.”

One of the students ended up in the hospital with E. coli poisoning.

“One of the key messages, if you went to the soccer game, had a burger, and then got sick, come forward mainly so that the health department can get some information from you. . . “

A Minnesota meat packer is recalling 188,000 lbs of E. coli tainted ground beef. The meat was produced at the Rochester meat company on October 30th and November 6th. The company shipped the beef to distributors and food service institutions. However the beef was not sold by retailers. The U.S. Agriculture Department says six illnesses have been linked to the beef, five in Wisconsin and one in California. The strain of E. coli is potentially deadly and can cause bloody diarrhea and dehydration. Officials say the very young, senior citizens, and those with weakened immune systems are most at risk.

People infected with E. coli 0157H7 can experience severe stomach cramps, vomiting, mild fever, and bloody diarrhea. Symptoms usually appear from two to ten days after consuming contaminated food. While most people recover within seven to ten days, some may suffer serious kidney problems and may even die.

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.

This radio program is provided free of charge to campus/community radio stations across the country, and relies on the financial support from you the listener.

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