

**Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY
Nelson, BC, Canada**

October 23, 2008.

Title: G.E. Free Zones II: Campaign Launch with Percy Schmeiser

**Producer/Host – Jon Steinman
Transcript - Krystel Dieu**

Jon Steinman: And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner – a syndicated weekly one-hour radio show and Podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman.

Back in January of this year, 2008, we launched the first in a series of episodes that began tracking the evolution of a campaign that is working towards creating a region that declares itself free of genetically-engineered plants and trees. The first region in North America to become a GE-Free Zone was Mendocino County California back in 2004 followed shortly by the first region in Canada, Powell River, British Columbia only a few months later. Here in Canada, the Southern Gulf Islands have also declared themselves a GE-Free zone, and since November 2007, a group in the interior of the province has been working towards becoming the *third* such region in the country.

On today's episode we listen in on the official campaign launch, which took place on July 10, 2008 and featured the most vocal and well-known critic of genetically engineered foods, Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser.

Percy was most recently a guest here on Deconstructing Dinner back in March of this year.

As we won't get around to hearing Percy's entire speech on today's episode, this show *will* extend into next week's broadcast when we'll also hear segments from an exclusive interview with Percy and his wife Louise.

(sponsorship announcement)

Today's broadcast couldn't be airing at a more opportune time than right now, as it was on October 20 that the Genetically Engineered-Free Kootenays campaign presented their official resolution for a GE-Free Kootenay region to the City of Nelson and the City of Castlegar.

Over 4,000 municipalities across Europe have declared themselves GE-Free regions, however here in North America, the movement to do the same has been much slower. In addition to the enforceable bylaw in Mendocino County, California and the resolution

passed in Powell River, British Columbia, 83 municipalities in Vermont have also declared themselves GE-Free.

Now the details of how the GE-Free Kootenays campaign has proceeded will become more available to listeners in the coming weeks and months. Because Deconstructing Dinner has covered the topic of genetically modified organisms or genetically engineered foods for quite some time, I've been able to lend my knowledge and experience to the campaign and a good number of the meetings over the past six months have been recorded. The hope is that through the documenting of the GE-Free Kootenays campaign, other regions and municipalities throughout North America can use these recordings as a resource and tool to launch their own GE-Free regions.

On future broadcasts we'll also look to hear from campaigners and politicians from Mendocino County and Powell River to learn how their GE-Free zones are holding up, and we'll listen in on recordings from the October 20th presentations to the cities of Castlegar and Nelson, British Columbia, both of whom are, as this broadcast goes to air, contemplating the passing of a GE-Free resolution.

But before we get to that in the coming weeks, let's track back to July 10, when the GE-Free Kootenays campaign held its official launch. The event was hosted at the Brilliant Cultural Centre in Castlegar and attended by roughly 250 people from throughout the region. Having been involved in the campaign since its inception, I was asked to host the evening and introduce the speakers at the event.

(sound bite)

JS: First, on behalf of GE-Free Kootenays and the Kootenay Food Strategy Society, I'd like to thank everyone for being here this evening, for attending this really, really important event and timely event as well.

Since November 2007, a group of people from throughout the West Kootenay region, from Creston, Rossland, Castlegar, Nelson, Kaslo and many other communities, have been meeting to discuss the creation of a Kootenay region that will be and remain free of genetically engineered crops otherwise known as GE, GMO, genetically modified organism or GM, just genetically modified.

Now currently, most of the Kootenay region is free of such crops and so in many ways this campaign, this GE-Free Kootenays campaign is even more exciting because this is a preventative campaign, it's a proactive one.

Throughout the course of the evening, you will hear from speakers up here on this stage who will be sharing with you what, exactly, genetically modified crops are, what threats and risks such foods pose to our health, our environments, and the rights of farmers and eaters alike. And you will also learn more about the GE-Free Kootenays campaign, how it fits into the larger province-wide initiative, and how each and every one of you can get involved in helping support this region-wide campaign.

Representing the GE-Free Kootenays campaign this evening will be Rossland's Andy Morrell. And he will be speaking to you closer to the end of the evening. And we will of course be welcoming our esteemed and celebrated guest, Percy Schmeiser, who is joined by his wife this evening, visiting from Saskatchewan.

But first, I'd like to introduce the MLA for the Nelson-Creston riding, Corky Evans, who is here this evening to welcome all of you to this important event. Corky was elected in 1991, re-elected in 1996 and once again elected to represent this provincial riding in 2005.

Corky has developed a wealth of experience in addressing food and agricultural issues, and has served as the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, and now he serves as the opposition critic for Agriculture and Lands, and Corky has been supportive of this initiative since it was first announced. And so please, give a warm welcome to Corky Evans who is here to welcome all of you.

(applause)

Corky Evans: Thank you Jon and thank you to the committee for making this happen. This is very cool. And Percy, thank you for gracing us with your company. We are honoured to have such a famous person and brave...actually...I should speak to the whole family...famous and brave persons...to join us here today.

I just wanted to introduce the subject of genetically modified organisms by talking about...my favourite farm writer is a guy named Gene Logsdon. He's American, he writes from the American Midwest about farming. And as far as I know, Gene Logsdon doesn't have any...he's not a political writer...I have no idea how he votes or what he thinks about politics, but he refers...you know those big, round 500-pound bales of hay that are showing up now in the modern era? Gene Logsdon refers to those 500-pound bales as fascist bales. And he goes on to say I think they're fascist bales because nobody I know can lift one. None of us can put it in the barn, if it's in the barn we can't get it out of the barn. You can't lift it without a machine, and you can't build the machine, you can't have the machine unless you buy it from the corporation that built it, and you can't fin...none of us have the money...so you can't buy it unless you finance it with the bank corporation that loans you enough money to lift up the bale that we used to be able to do just 'cause we're people.

It reminds me...it's pretty much the same thing Mussolini said when he said you know, we call ourselves fascists, but it's really a misnomer, we really ought to call ourselves corporatists, because that's what we are, and that is how we're organizing our societies so that the corporations will be in marriage with the government. And we will deliver trains that run on time and the good life to the citizenry.

In my opinion, GMO seeds are to gardening and farming and feeding ourselves as the 500-pound bales are to winter feed in Ootischenia or Grand Forks or Winlaw. It is taking

something that we used to understand, and we used to be able to do 'cause our parents did, our grandparents did, and all back through our history did and making it accessible only if we live in consort, in marriage with the corporation who says it's OK. And we pay for it by paying that corporation for the right to feed ourselves.

It isn't just me, you know. And it isn't just you, either. Because I've been hanging around farming issues for a really long time...there are lots of issues that divide us; there's the big farms and the little farms and they argue with each other.

There's the organic and the conventional producers and they argue with each other. There's the ranchers and everybody else, and they argue with each other, but on the subject of GMOs I think we're pretty much all together.

I'll tell you one thing, one time the federal government...I was honoured to be the Minister of Agriculture here for a little while...and the federal government wanted to experiment with genetically modified apples in the Summerland Experiment Station.

And it wasn't food activists who brought the issue to my attention, and it wasn't the Ministry of Agriculture people, and it wasn't the organic people. It was the regular orcharding community of the sort of south-central Okanagan who wanted to stop the movement of genetically modified fruit into their area out of concern that the pollen would mix with their pollen, out of concern that they would lose control of the industry that they had grown up in, out of concern that they would no longer be able to sell honey to people who did not want GMOs in their food supply, and the farmers stopped the federal government. Same thing when the American dairy industry tried to move bovine growth hormone into Canada, it was the dairy community.

So with GMOs, the great news is that we are not in struggle- eaters against producers or big against little. We are in struggle against those few, few, few corporate entities that wish to impose this way of living on our life.

One of the people in sort of public life, you see him on TV, that I respect the most is a guy named John Blatherwick. You'll remember John Blatherwick as one of the citizens in the health community who first brought the issue of AIDS to the attention of the people of British Columbia and who first spoke out on the need for harm reduction in the drug issue. And now John Blatherwick has written to the federal Minister of Health on the subject of genetically modified foods and called for mandatory labeling and he isn't doing it as an individual, he's doing it on behalf of the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority who want GMOs labeled in British Columbia and they are not alone. The British Columbia Provincial Health Officer wants GMOs labeled in the marketplace.

So now we have farmers big and small, eaters and producers, organic and conventional, people in the city interested in health, and we are lined up together. If, I submit, it is not possible to win this fight, then it can only be because Mussolini's winning.

I just want to say what Al Gore is to bringing climate change to popular culture, to getting past that wall of sort of intellectual rejection so that we understand it viscerally, so that everybody is connected with the issue, what Al Gore did for climate change, Percy, I think you have done for the issue of GMOs.

(applause)

I got to sit in a really, really pretty office with a huge desk, a bunch of people outside managing paper and four hundred people in the ministry supposedly keeping me on top of it. And if it hadn't have been for you, an entire government would not understand what GMOs were about. And I think that goes for the country. Thanks a lot.

(applause)

JS: And this is Deconstructing Dinner. Again, that was Corky Evans, Member of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia who represents the riding of Nelson-Creston.

Now also invited to welcome Percy Schmeiser was the recently re-elected Member of Parliament for the region, Alex Atamanenko. Alex was unable to attend as he was in Ottawa at the time, but he did send a letter that he requested be read to the audience.

(sound bite)

(letter read by Jon Steinman): Dear friends, let me begin by saying how much I regret being unable to be here today to participate in the launch of the GE-Free Kootenays campaign. On behalf of the constituents of B.C.'s Southern Interior, I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to all of the movers and shakers who have worked to hard to bring this movement about.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Percy Schmeiser to the Kootenays and thank him for being here to kick things off. I have a profound admiration for both he and his wife Louise who sacrificed all for the greater good in their stand against the multinational giant Monsanto. In light of the technology being employed to control the genetic future of our food and our forests, it is imperative that we all have a great understanding of the nature and character of companies who are driving this industry.

With Monsanto leading the pack, there is much to be concerned about. One of the biggest problems we have in Canada and the U.S. is that for over twenty years, the Canadian and U.S. governments have played both the role of promoter and the regulator for the biotech industry. As long as this conflict of interest exists, it will be very difficult to enact legislation that truly prioritizes and protects the public interest.

For example, it was entirely predictable that the Liberals and Conservatives would join forces in the last session to defeat the Bloc Québécois Bill C-517 to require that genetically modified food be labeled. Also in this session, these same parties combined to defeat all of the amendments on genetic engineering put forward by the NDP colleagues

on the government's biofuel legislation, Bill c-39. Our amendments to prohibit the use of genetically modified trees and other GM crops to produce the feedstock for biofuel production were not only rejected but were often ridiculed by leading members of the government and the Official Opposition.

In listening to some of the comments made during these recent debates, I realized that many MPs were simply misinformed about the technology itself. For instance, one Liberal member stated that he'd been eating seedless grapes for years, and wondered what all the gloom and doom was about when it came to GM food. When it was pointed out to him that seedless grapes are not genetically modified, he had great difficulty accepting that this could be true. Clearly, I have more work to do on Parliament Hill to bring these misguided MP's up to speed.

In closing, I would like to assure everyone here today that I will continue to do everything in my power to ensure that social justice prevails when it comes to the biotechnology industry. If you have not already done so, I would like to urge you to write the Prime Minister in support of my private members' bills, Bill c-448 to ban terminator seeds in Canada, and Bill c-458 to require mandatory labeling of genetically modified food, and information on how to take action is available on my website.

Many thanks for allowing me this opportunity to say a few words on this exciting and important occasion. My door is always open and I trust that you will contact me if there is anything at all I can do for this great cause.

(applause)

JS: Again, that was a letter from Member of Parliament Alex Atamanenko, read to the audience at the July 10 launch of the GE-Free or genetically-engineered Kootenays campaign.

Moving on to the featured speaker of the evening, Percy Schmeiser, we'll spend the rest of today's broadcast listening to his talk. I will note that these recordings will extend into next week's show when we'll also hear from GE-Free Kootenays spokesperson Andy Morel who followed Percy after he spoke, and we'll also hear recordings from an exclusive interview with Percy and his wife Louise.

JS: It's now estimated that eight percent of all foods on grocery store shelves contain ingredients that have been genetically engineered – GE ingredients. And so, in other words, many of you here today are likely consuming and supporting such foods without realizing it.

So what is a genetically engineered ingredient? Well, proponents of such foods would tell you that humans have been genetically engineering foods for thousands of years. However, such comments are completely misleading, because as they clearly know and as probably most of you in this room know, those concerned with genetically engineered foods are concerned with the transgenic manipulation of life forms. And transgenic

engineering refers to transferring DNA or the genes from one species or kingdom into the species or kingdom of another species or kingdom.

So, in other words, this is a process that could never take place naturally, and could only take place in a scientific lab. And why is this being done? Well, we need only look at how the currently commercialized GE crops have been manipulated to find out why.

And almost all of them have been engineered to be resistant to a proprietary herbicide. And so, in other words, crops are being engineered so that when the seeds are purchased, the company selling the seeds can also sell to the farmer a herbicide to go along with it.

And so this is all about control, it's all about engineering life forms so that corporations can patent and take ownership of these life forms of our food. Now needless to say, there is absolutely no possible way that we can be assured that such foods will not have negative impacts on our health in the future if they haven't already done so already, since these foods were first introduced into the food supply in the mid-nineties.

There are also no ongoing human safety studies being conducted anywhere in the world. And so, in other words, it could be said that most Canadians are now part of the largest human feeding experiment ever conducted.

But this isn't just about health, this issue of genetic engineering. Concerns surrounding GE foods extend to the environment, such as biodiversity, impacts on wild plants, wildlife, insects, and microorganisms. It extends to the rights of farmers, to save seeds, and to the sovereignty of people around the world to choose what foods are available to them. Currently, the most widely engineered crops for food are corn, soy and canola; the ingredients that make their way into almost all processed foods and most of the feed consumed by the grain-fed animals producing our eggs, our dairy and our meat.

Other varieties of staples such as rice and potatoes have also been engineered but are not yet widely commercialized. But as we gather here today, almost every food that we consume is in the process of being engineered and/or waiting approval. Even animals and fish are now being engineered, salmon being one of them.

But the focus for this evening is on the rights of farmers. The rights of communities and regions to decide for ourselves what foods are being grown in our communities. And while many would believe that we can still choose whether or not to grow genetically engineered crops, our featured guest for the evening, Percy Schmeiser, will share with you that this is far from being the case.

Percy Schmeiser was a member of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly from 1967-1971 for the Liberal Party of Saskatchewan. Percy was also mayor of his hometown of Bruno from 1963-1982. He has most recently served as town councillor between 2003-2006. Since 1998 Percy and his wife Louise have been engaged in a number of long and drawn-out battles with American-based Monsanto, the largest developer of genetically

engineered seeds in the world, whose Canadian operations are based in Winnipeg. The company controls a significant percentage of all of the food grown throughout the globe.

And it's important to stress, as I'm sure Percy will too, that the Schmeisers are not an isolated case of farmers being placed under the heavy-handed pressure of large agribusiness. Many farmers face this kind of intimidation every day across the country and around the world. And the only difference with the Schmeisers, versus others, is that the Schmeisers chose to not buy into or submit to this pressure.

And as a result of this defiance, Percy was involved in a six-year battle with the company which ended in a Supreme Court decision in 2004, a decision that resonated around the world. And since then, Percy has been touring throughout dozens of countries sharing his story with other farmers, politicians and communities, and warning them of the direction in which our food system is heading.

In December 2007, the Schmeisers were awarded the Right Livelihood Award, also known as the Alternative Nobel, and in March of this year, 2008, the Schmeisers were victorious in small claims case that saw Monsanto pay them a precedent-setting \$660.

(applause)

Now, before I do invite Percy up onto the stage, I would like to request that everyone here in the audience this evening...while Percy speaks, I think it's important to recognize that what has happened to farmers like him could very likely happen in the not-so-distant future to farmers and crops here in this region.

And so it's a tremendous honour to ask all of you to join me in giving a warm welcome to perhaps the most celebrated farmer in the world, Bruno, Saskatchewan's Percy Schmeiser.

(applause)

Thank you very much Mister Chairman for the very kind words. It's really an honour for my wife and me to be here with you this evening and back in B.C. I've spent the last four or five days on Vancouver Island and also in Vancouver. But before I start, also I could never have stood up to Monsanto and what we went through if I would not have had the support of my family and especially my wife. And I would like to introduce her and ask her to stand up.

(applause)

I would also like to thank all of the people involved from the various committees and organizations that have brought my wife and myself back here to B.C. And I also would like to extend warm welcomes by the Province of Saskatchewan to the people here in B.C. also. Thank you.

So as was mentioned, there are so many issues with the introduction of GE – as I like to refer to them as GMOs – genetic modified organisms. There's the health issue, the environmental issue, the human rights issue, and I hope this evening that I can touch on many of those to really bring you up to date on what has happened with the introduction of GMOs in 1996.

As was mentioned, I was the mayor of my community, I was an MLA...but I would like to say, as my role as an MLA, I was in the agricultural area, and I always thought that I worked for rules, laws, regulations that would always benefit farmers both on the provincial and then representing my province on the federal level in agriculture.

One of the other things was that my wife and I were known on the Prairies, we come from a small town east of Saskatoon in the heart of the grain-growing area. And we were known there as seed developers and seed savers, which means that we were saving our seed for – like many farmers do – hundreds of thousands of farmers do all over the world from year to year.

But as a seed developer and seed saver, we all were involved with developing new varieties of canola for our region on the Prairies, and we had done that for over 50 years, so we were known also, besides mayor and MLA, as a seed developer in canola, my wife and I, and my wife primarily did a lot of work in canola research, developing new varieties suitable for climatic and soil conditions but especially and various disease control.

What happened to us? Nineteen ninety-six, Monsanto introduced four crops – GMO crops – into North America, and they were corn, soybeans, cotton and canola. And by us, canola was the one that was more...that we were more affected by than any other crop at that time. So those were the four crops – 1996. Nineteen ninety-eight, and I'll just go briefly what happened to us with the courts that we went through or the lawsuits that we went through. Monsanto laid what they called a patent infringement lawsuit where they said we were growing Monsanto's GMO canola without a licence from them. You can imagine the surprise that was to us, because we had never bought Monsanto's seed, we didn't even know anybody at that time from Monsanto. And we said to Monsanto do you have any of your GMO canola in our canola that we worked so hard for to develop new varieties, you should be guilty, and there's a liability issue, and you should pay for any damages you may have caused to us.

So a patent infringement lawsuit where they charged us, as I said, for growing their GMO canola without a licence from them. Now patent laws in Canada come under federal jurisdiction, as in many other countries of the world. So we didn't have a choice of where the case would be heard; Federal Court of Canada with one judge. And how often we wished that we could have had a court with a judge and jury and people on...farmers on that jury that knew and understood farming. But that was not to be. One judge, Federal Court of Canada. Now it took two years of pre-trial before it went to the main trial. And Monsanto agreed and admitted that they had absolutely no evidence we had used their seed, but they said because our seed was contaminated, our canola seed was

contaminated by their GMOs that we were using their seed and they were in the ownership through patent law of our canola seed.

So that was what they had claimed in the pre-trial. Now what the judge ruled after three weeks of trial is what made the case become internationally known around the world almost immediately, how his farmer could lose his rights to his seeds and plants, an organic farmer, conventional farmer like myself, overnight if you are contaminated.

And I'll just mention some of the items that he had mentioned. Number one, the first one he said, it does not matter how a farmer, a gardener, or anyone is contaminated with Monsanto's GMOs. And he went on to specify how this could happen; cross-pollination, with pollen flown in the wind by birds, by bees and so on, or direct seed movement, by seeds blown in the wind, transportation by farmers, processing and so on. And he said if that happens to a farmer, you no longer own your seeds or plants, through patent law they become the ownership of Monsanto.

So you can imagine how we felt. He also ruled that we were not allowed to use our seeds or plants again, all our seeds, all our research and development now was the ownership of Monsanto through patent law.

So fifty years of research and development, all of what we had developed, went to Monsanto. Another disheartening thing he said it does not matter the level of contamination, if it's one percent to two percent or five percent, if you're contaminated, even by these low amounts, you no longer own your seeds, your plants, again they become the ownership of Monsanto. Level of contamination does not matter.

And what really hurt us in 1998, we had 1030 acres planted to canola, and so ruled that all of our profit, and as I said all of our seeds and plants from that 1998 crop goes to Monsanto.

So you can imagine how we felt. First of all losing all the profit from that crop, and secondly losing the research and development. We had a next avenue, what we used was in the Federal Court of Appeal. Now we have three judges. But basically they upheld the trial judge's decision, so now we were into about four years of legal battle, or five, spent about \$300,000 and it was pretty bleak when we lost twice in the Federal Court of Canada.

And we had one avenue left, and that was the Supreme Court. And the lawyer advised us it was very unlikely that the Supreme Court would hear our case after the two courts before had ruled against us. But it was really a great...we were really happy when the Supreme Court ruled in our favour that they would hear the case.

Now at the Supreme Court, we could bring in other items besides patent infringement. And I think tonight I'll just list you some of the other items that we were able to bring in to the Supreme Court of Canada, which I think are very important.

And I'll just mention some of them. First of all, can farmers' right to grow conventional, organic crops be protected? Another one: can farmers keep the ancient right to save their own seed and develop their own seed if they so desire? And then there were other ones, but I think the most important one by that time to my wife and myself was who owns life? Has any corporation, any individual, through patent law, to put a patent on life, to control life?

And we said no one should have the right to own life, and to us, life was sacred. So those were some of the issues submitted to the Supreme Court. But I should also mention, Monsanto had laid two other lawsuits against us in those seven years. And another lawsuit they laid against us was for a million dollars, and that was for...they said up to that time...what their legal bill had cost them. And they said another thing, because we were stubborn, because we were arrogant, and didn't do what Monsanto wanted, they wanted another million dollars besides the other lawsuit. So we also had to fight them on that.

JS: And 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 listening to the second episode in a series of broadcasts that have been tracking the evolution of the Genetically-Engineered or GE-Free Kootenays campaign. The campaign was launched on July 10 with Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser who we've just been listening to, and since then, campaign organizers have presented a resolution to two municipalities in the region, and we'll learn more about that process on upcoming episodes of this series.

And if you miss any of today's broadcast or would like to link to previous broadcasts within this series, you can do so by visiting our web site at deconstructingdinner.ca

PS: So the Supreme Court ruled this: first of all, they said, on the issue of the patent infringement case, they said we did not have to pay Monsanto, not a single dollar, which was a tremendous victory because we would not be here today if we would have had to pay them one or two million dollars.

And then they also...they had said because we had not benefit from the contamination...as I said, we didn't have to pay them anything. But what was not fair, the Supreme Court ruled that we had to pay, my wife and I had to pay, our legal costs for all of the courts for seven years of legal battle. Monsanto pays their legal costs.

Our legal cost up to that time was around over \$400,000. Monsanto's legal bill was over \$2 million. And you may ask why is ours \$400,000, Monsanto's is \$2 million? Well, at one point in time, they had nineteen lawyers in court, I had one lawyer. Talk about intimidation.

So that was not fair, because here, Monsanto admitted, it was a test case for them, this patent infringement case, to see how far they could exercise patent law and control over farmers' rights. And as I said, through patent law. And it was a test case for them.

So it was a lot easier for them to pay \$2 million as a test case than a farmer to stand up for his rights and spend \$400,000. And to us, as I said, it was not fair. Now on the issue of who owns life, this is what the ruling is, and still is today, or was and is today yet. Monsanto's patent on a gene is valid. And wherever that gene arrives in any higher life form, they own and control that higher life form.

And that's now vast implications. Because when I referred to a higher life form, I mean basically anything that comes from a seed. So where does it really stop now? Now we've got more problems that we have answers for in Canada, because if you have a patent on a gene, and you control that life form, seed or plant, what about a bird, bee, animal and even a human being?

So those are the things that the Supreme Court said has to go back to the Parliament of Canada to bring in new laws and new regulations for who owns life. And also rights of farmers given back that they obviously can use their own seeds and plants.

So those are some of the issues also before the Parliament of Canada. Now, I think Monsanto thought they had a great victory when the Supreme Court ruled they owned and controlled that higher life form. But now that has come home to haunt not only Monsanto but the other corporations that have patents on genes, because the legal community in Canada now say that if you own and control a higher life form and you put a higher life form in the environment where you know...we know you cannot control it, then you should be liable for the damages...there's a liability issue...you should be liable for the damages that you've caused with the introduction of GMOs or any higher life form into the environment.

So my wife and I watched very closely our fields since that court judgment came down, the Supreme Court judgment, and in 2005 we noticed again there were some canola plants growing in our field where canola had not been seeded at least for ten years.

So we did some initial testing, and the initial testing showed us that the plants in our field, the canola plants, all indications showed they were Monsanto's Round-Up Ready canola plants in our field. So we notified Monsanto and indeed, Monsanto came out and took samples of the plants throughout the field – it was a 50-acre piece that we had grown no crop on for a year to make it ready for mustard research.

And so two days later they notified us and said yes, indeed, after their testing, it showed that it was their...Monsanto's Round-Up Ready canola plants again on our field. And they asked us what we wanted done with those plants. And we said we want those plants off our field, it's a contamination. And we said to them we want all the plants on that 50-acre field pulled out by hand. And they agreed to do this. And two days later we get...if I ever saw my wife excited or upset, it was two days later, there was a fax from Monsanto

and said we will not remove the plants unless you sign a release form. And in that release form it said this: number one, my wife, myself or any member of family could never, ever take Monsanto to court again for the rest of our lives no matter how much they contaminated us on that field in the future.

But what was really aggravating was when it also said there was a gag order. We have to give up our freedom of speech; we could not tell the press or our neighbor what the terms of settlement were. So we said to Monsanto, and it didn't take us very long to tell them that...

(laughter) (applause)

...that we would never, ever give up our freedom of speech to a corporation, and that we would never give up our right to take you to court and we would not sign the document.

Monsanto said if you don't sign the document we will not remove the plants. We said then OK we will remove the plants and charge you. And they said we wish to remind you those are not your plants on your field, they're our plants. So the argument went back and forth for probably a week or two, and we said get your property off our property, and then they kept saying you're not allowed to do with it what you want.

So we hired two other farmers plus myself, we removed all of the plants by hand ourselves. We notified Monsanto and we asked Monsanto what do you want done with the plants now? And that's another story, but I won't go into that, but anyway, it cost me \$640 to pay for my neighbors to help me remove the plants. So we sent Monsanto the bill. Monsanto wouldn't pay it because...unless we signed the document. So that took five, six months, and finally, we decided, my wife and I, we would take Monsanto to small claims court. So for six hundred and...(laughs)....

(applause)

So the judge agreed with us, issued Monsanto a summons, and it went to court in March of this year, of 2008. And it went into the courtroom and ended. In fact, the trial did start and Monsanto agreed to pay out of court, without going through court, the \$640 and \$20 cost...it was \$660...and there was not gag order, and we could take Monsanto back to court tomorrow if they contaminated us.

So it was a major, major victory of ten years of legal battle against Monsanto. It was never the six....

(applause)

The issue wasn't really the \$660, the issue was...it was the liability. And now any farmer, basically, in the world could take Monsanto to court or any other company, if they are contaminated.

So it now is a way for farmers to...if you are an organic farmer or conventional farmer, you have now a way to protect yourself if you are contaminated. So it's a major victory for people and farmers and gardeners around the world, with Monsanto settling out of court, it has now set a precedent.

So as I said, after ten years, it was a great victory.

(applause)

I mentioned before – there are so many issues – to the issues of GMOs. And why did farmers in 1996 start growing Monsanto's GMOs without a licence? And there were a number of reasons. And if I look back to what Monsanto especially said, they said first of all, increased yields, more nutritious. But I think most of all what farmers listened...or caught their ear the most was when Monsanto said less chemical use. And as you know, as many people know, it's costly and expensive for farmers, but not only that, farmers realized the harm we were doing to human health and also to the environment with the massive use of chemicals.

There were also...there were buzz words, like...we'd always have sustainable agriculture, now we'd be able to feed the hungry world. That's what farmers were told. And believe me, after two years, everything different started to happen. Not even two years, even the first year. First of all, the yields started going down, and the yields go down drastically. Soybeans, you can expect at least a 15% decrease, canola a minimum of 10% decrease, but the worst thing, you have a massive increased use of chemicals, three to five times more chemical use with GMOs or GE than ever before. And these chemicals that you have to use now are now more toxic and more powerful, more highly toxic and more powerful than we've ever seen before in chemicals.

So that's what started to happen. Also what started to happen was that we had a new superweed develop. And that superweed has now spread all over the prairies. You'd be hard-pressed to find one field in Western Canada that does not have that new superweed in it. But it also has spread into our towns or cities, our municipalities, our golf courses, our power corporation property. And new expense, not only for canola farmers, but also for all the other people I mentioned to control this new superweed. And you may ask what is this new superweed? A new superweed is a regular, conventional canola plant that through cross-pollination has taken on the genes from not only Monsanto's GMOs, but other companies.' LibertyLink, Pursuit Smart and some of these other varieties, and those genes are now...those GMO genes are now all in one regular, conventional plant, making a new superweed. And believe me, very, very difficult to control.

Three years ago, what did the companies say, including Monsanto? No problem! We will now come out with a new super chemical to kill the new superweed. And indeed, they have. In Roundup, Monsanto's herbicide Roundup, is now four times stronger than it was in 1996. They added a new surfactant to it, to make it more...and it's one of the most highly powerful and toxic chemicals now on the face of the earth which there is a lot of

residue from. That's Roundup. This is what we're using. We're killing ourselves now with chemicals with the introduction of GMOs.

Another important thing: GMOs does not only affect the plant you introduce the GMOs into. Canola comes from the Brassica family, and I'll give you that as an example. And in that Brassica family you have turnips, radishes, cauliflower and so on.

Through cross-pollination, the GMO from canola is now going into those market garden crops, making more crops. Conventional farmers cannot raise...or organic farmers, especially, can't raise organically because of the cross-pollination. So more crops now with the GMOs in it.

Many people have asked can you ever bring back out of the environment once you introduce a new life form like a GMO? And the answer I have from scientists from all over the world, at the present time, we do not know if it ever can be recalled back.

And that's why it's so important in regards to GMOs...you can have chemical spills, you can have oil spills...eventually you can clean them up. But we don't know, ever, if you ever can clean up a genetic introduction...a GMO introduction...and that's why it's so important never, ever even to start.

For other crops, one good point about this...there have been no new GMO crops introduced in Canada in the last twelve years since the introduction in 1996 of the four crops I mentioned. They wanted to introduce GMO wheat, GMO rice, GMO alfalfa and GMO flax. And they've been stopped. I don't know about GMO sugar beets, I am told that there are some that have been introduced, but they have not received regulatory approval on that.

So we've been able to stop any more new GMOs, because we have found the damage GMOs have done to us in 1996. And another thing I would like to mention tonight; if GMO wheat was ever, ever introduced, it would totally, totally destroy the organic farmer, because wheat comes from the grass family.

Two important things come out of this: once you introduce GMOs, there is no such thing as co-existence. After a few years, as what we found on the Northern Plains of the U.S. or the Prairies of Western Canada it all becomes GMOs. When choice is gone, you no longer have a choice. There is no canola seed left on the Prairies that is pure if it's now all GMOs. There are no pure soybeans left on the Prairies if it's all GMOs because it's the dominant gene and it takes over whatever seed or plant you get in and renders it GMO. So no such thing as co-existence, you no longer have a choice left.

The other important thing: you cannot contain it. I've just spent quite a bit of time this year already in Europe, and the farmers in Europe are being told the same thing that we are being told now: that you can have co-existence and also that you can contain it. Believe me, you cannot contain pollen flow, you cannot contain seeds flown in the wind, and it doesn't matter what distance you have, eventually it will spread. And that's why

we have GMOs all over Western Canada now, especially in canola and soybeans. So no such thing as containment and no such thing as co-existence.

JS: And this is Deconstructing Dinner. You're listening to Saskatchewan Farmer Percy Schmeiser speaking on July 10, 2008 in Castlegar, British Columbia. Percy was invited to help launch the Genetically Engineered-Free (or GE-Free) Kootenays campaign. The campaign is working towards the creation of a region that declares itself free of genetically-engineered plants and trees.

Today's episode will continue into next week's broadcast as we continue to track the evolution of this campaign.

PS: Why did they really bring out GMOs? The whole issue is to get control of the seed supply and ultimately the food supply. It was never, ever meant to feed a hungry world, it was meant, as I said, control of the food supply, and the seed supply, and the farmers' rights, where they can never, ever use their seed from the year. And I maybe should go into that a little bit, but before I do, there are many areas where farmers have started to use GMOs. How do you talk to farmers that have started maybe on some corn or maize or some other crops that regulatory approval was given? And I think that a good way to talk to them is this: number one, back in 1996, farmers didn't realize by growing GMOs, my neighbor didn't realize by growing GMO canola that he would contaminate and destroy fifty years of research. Farmers didn't know that then, they weren't told that.

But farmers now know that if they use or plant a GMO crop they will contaminate their neighbor, and if your neighbor is an organic farmer, he will destroy his neighbors' ability or choice is taken away to grow organic crops. So a farmer knows that now.

Also, a farmer knows that there will be a massive increased use of chemicals. And then also, I think it should be pointed out to a farmer that is thinking about growing GMOs that you cannot get insurance for GMOs, or what we call genetic drift. You can get insurance, a farm insurance on all the other type of contamination, chemical drift, drought and all that, but you cannot get insurance on genetic drift.

And I think it should be pointed out to a farmer that if he grows it and he contaminates his neighbor and his neighbor sues him, then he has no insurance to cover it. So I think the whole issue of liability should be pointed out to a farmer that is thinking about growing GMOs or growing GMOs.

I often have said it's a moral and ethical issue also, because I believe that no farmer...if he believes that he can get better yields for whatever reason, wants to grow GMOs, but in the process destroys his neighbor's ability or takes his choice away to grow conventional crops, it's wrong.

No farmer should have the right to destroy the property of others, and that's my feeling on that. No one should be allowed to do this, because it's a moral and ethical issue also.

There are many other issues, and I think there's the pharma plants and if I have time this afternoon I think that's a very important issue, part of the food issue, what happens with our food with the introduction of GMOs.

But before I go there, I'll give you some information which you'd never, ever hear about with the introduction of GMOs. I think it's total freedom of speech and also really a human rights issue. And I think the human rights issue with the introduction of GMOs is a very important issue.

I have with me...I'll just give you some examples – a contract from Monsanto. And briefly, it states a farmer can never use his own seed, he must buy the seed always from Monsanto, he must buy the chemical from Monsanto, he must pay Monsanto \$15 an acre licence fee each year on his acres. If he commits...a farmer commits some violation of the contract, he must sign that same disclosure statement that Monsanto wanted from me, where he can never talk to us, never to the press...what...if Monsanto made him destroy his crop or take all the profits from this crop, he has to give up this freedom of speech or expression.

Another clause, he must permit Monsanto's police force to come on his land for three years after he signs his contract, and they can go on your land, they go in your granaries, they can get your tax records, your farming records, anything that they want with or without your permission.

A new clause for this year is that if something goes wrong with your crop, and you want to take Monsanto to court, you give up your right, you can never, ever take Monsanto to court. You give up your right even to sue them with this contract. So it gives total control over a farmer by, in this case, Monsanto.

Who are Monsanto's police? Monsanto hires a company out of Saskatoon, and they hire former...ex-RCMP. Last year they had 35 former RCMP officers doing nothing but policing, harassing and interrogating farmers. So that's the contract.

Another important issue, I have with me a document, and this one is from Monsanto, and it's a brochure from Monsanto, but they also advertise this on radio stations. Down below here it states if you think your neighbor is growing Monsanto's GMOs without a licence from them, report your neighbor to Monsanto, and if you do this, you get a free gift from Monsanto.

(laughter)

In Saskatchewan, in the west, if a farmer happens to do this to his neighbour, he will get either free chemicals from Monsanto or he'll get a free leather jacket from Monsanto. Believe me, there's not many farmers wearing Monsanto's leather jackets in Western Canada...

(laughter)

...but what happens...and to me, as a former politician, I think this is one of the worst things that could happen to our freedoms. They send two of their police investigators immediately to a farmer's home, and they'll say to a farmer we have this tip or rumour that you're growing our GMOs without a licence from us, and the farmer will say I'm an organic farmer, I'm a conventional farmer. We don't want your seeds, and we never bought them.

And then Monsanto's police will say – we call them gene police – and then gene police will say to a farmer you're lying, if you don't confess we'll take you to court and we'll do to you what we've done to Percy Schmeiser, and you won't have a farm left if you don't confess.

So you can imagine what goes through a farmer's mind when these investigators leave a farmer's home. A farmer will immediately think was it this neighbour over here or this neighbour here, or this neighbour over here that has caused me this trouble?

So now we have a suspicion. Farmers are scared to talk to each other about their crops and what they've planted. So we now have that suspicion, and if anything, it's breaking down our real social fabric, it what they are doing; divide and conquer.

And I often think back in my own family; my grandparents came to this country over a hundred years ago. And my grandparents and my parents had to work together with our neighbours to build our country, our roads, schools, hospitals, churches and so on. Now we have a breakdown of a real social fabric. And I think that is one of the worst things that could happen.

It goes deeper than that. I don't know how many phone calls my wife and I have had from farm women crying on the phone and saying Monsanto's police have been here, they threatened us, we won't have a farm, what should we do? And we'll try and advise them, where they can get legal help. But they know it's going to cost them money to stand up for their rights.

That's some of the things...quickly, one other item, and I think also a very important one. If Monsanto cannot...and I'll single out Monsanto on this one...if Monsanto cannot find a farmer at home, or his wife at home...they'll send what farmers call...and what we call...extortion letters. We don't know how many thousands of these have been sent out to farmers in North America, especially in the Northern Plains and the Prairies, so Western Canada.

And in it, it states we have reason to believe that you might be growing Monsanto's GMOs without a licence from us. We estimate you might have 200 acres, 500 acres, and in lieu of us not taking you to court, send us \$200,000...\$300,000...\$100,000...in two weeks' time and we may or may not take you to court...because we *think* you might be growing GMOs without a licence.

Can you imagine the fear in the farm family when they get one of these...what we call extortion letters...send us \$200,000 in two weeks' time because we think you might be growing Monsanto's GMOs.

So another clause in here, it states you're not allowed to show this letter to anyone or we will fine you.

(laughter)

Total suppression of freedom of speech and freedom of expression. So those are some of the things that you never hear about besides the introduction of GMOs, it's a total suppression of farmers' rights. And also the whole new fear culture. I should just mention another method they use to check on farmers, and it's quite...it's not funny, but anyway a lot of people laugh over it. If they cannot find a farmer at home or a farmer has found that they were trying to come onto his land without their permission...first of all, they'll go to the municipality to get the farmer's land location. And after they've got that, they'll take a small plane or a helicopter and they'll use a Monsanto herbicide Roundup spray bomb. And they'll fly over the centre of a farmer's field...and normally our fields are 160 acres, and they'll drop this herbicide spray bomb.

And after twelve days approximately after that chemical has had...Roundup has time to activate, they'll fly back. And if where the area – and it's normally about 30 feet across – and if the crop has died, they know the farmer has not used Monsanto's GMO canola. If the crop hasn't died, they know...after spraying with Roundup...they know the farmer was using Monsanto's canola. So those are some of the other things they do to control farmers.

Now I know this one farmer not too far from me, when he noticed it, well he notified the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Environment because one of the quarter sections was where he was getting his water supply from, and he was very concerned with them dropping herbicide spray bomb on his field.

Those are some of the things that they do to people.

JS: And that was Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser, speaking on July 10, 2008 in Castlegar British Columbia. You can tune in next week to hear the continuation of Percy's talk along with a short presentation from Andy Morel of the Genetically-Engineered (or GE-Free) Kootenays Campaign.

Today's broadcast has been archived on our web site at deconstructingdinner.ca under the title GE-Free Zones, part 2.

(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 Adam 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. Support for the program can be donated through our web site at deconstructingdinner.ca or by dialing 250-352-9600.