

Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY
Nelson, B.C. Canada

March 26, 2009

Title: Hosting a Community Dialogue on Local Food Systems

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Transcript: Erika Steeves

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. This show is provided free of charge to campus community radio stations across the country and is financially supported from listeners such as yourselves. I'm Jon Steinman.

Over the past few years Deconstructing Dinner has involved itself with a networking group based here in Nelson called Community Food Matters. Like many similar community groups operating throughout North America, Community Food Matters is made up of organizations, businesses and individuals interested in enhancing the local food system. On March 24th 2009, I, along with Community Food Matters, hosted an event that was designed to stimulate awareness and collaboration within the community, and to also act as a model for how communities who are concerned *with* local food security could meet once a year and share their work and future plans.

What resulted was an amazing snapshot of what one community is capable of when seeking to tackle the difficult but critical task of fostering a viable local food system.

On today's broadcast – part 1 of two episodes where we'll listen in on recordings compiled at the event. Today's broadcast will likely feature the largest number of voices ever included as part of a single Deconstructing Dinner episode. And indeed, what past episodes of this show have certainly stressed, one of the most important preconditions to localizing food systems is a lot of awareness and a lot of participation.

increase music and fade out

And a quick reminder to listeners that if you do communicate with your friends, family, colleagues on Facebook, Deconstructing Dinner does maintain a presence of Facebook, and you can link to our Facebook page from our website at deconstructingdinner.ca.

Today's broadcast will explore only a sampling of the voices heard at the March 24th event held here in Nelson. While not all presentations will make it onto this series, for those of you interested in learning more about the groups represented at the 2009 Community Food Matters gathering, Deconstructing Dinner will be posting unedited

audio from the event on our website at deconstructingdinner.ca and posted under the March 26th 2009 episode.

A number of groups made this event possible, and while Community Food Matters was the host organization, it would not have been possible without the support of the province-wide Community Food Action Initiative, which, in the interior of the province, is administered by Interior Health. Support also came from the Kootenay Country Store Co-operative, Oso Negro Coffee and the Preserved Seed Café. Kootenay Co-op Radio's Deconstructing Dinner was of course on hand to record the event.

And as an organizer and facilitator of the event, I was tasked with welcoming the 75 people in attendance, where I stressed why an event such as the Community Food Matters Gathering is so vital to any community wishing to work towards healthier and more responsible food systems.

Audio of Community Food Matters Gathering

Jon Steinman: So first I just want to extend a big welcome to everybody on behalf of Community Food Matters for coming to this first of what hopefully will become an annual gathering. My name is Jon Steinman. I've likely communicated with probably most of you here over email about this event. I do want to quickly introduce Community Food Matters. I think, for most of you, you probably had a chance to at least get a little bit of a taste for who we are through the invitation, if you didn't know about us already as a group.

Just quickly, to recap who we are, Community Food Matters is a coalition of businesses, organizations, individuals, and institutions who are involved in the Nelson food system, and/or are working on enhancing the local, regional food system, just like all of us here today. And as a group we maintain a vision and a mission. The vision is to see Nelson as a well-nourished, striving community where everyone has the opportunity to enjoy abundant, locally-produced food that is grown in a sustainable and socially responsible manner, and our mission is to engage the whole community in the development of initiatives, activities, and policies that create a locally sustainable food secure system. And no doubt I imagine all of us here share that same vision. And I think recognizing that we all share that is important to really capture why it is this type of gathering we think is so important, and I'll get to that in just a moment.

In terms of what Community Food Matters' role is within the community, if I could just get the next slide, shortly after Community Food Matters was formed out of the Nelson Food Coalition, which was about the time I know when I joined which was mid-2006, we hosted a forum in November 2006, which you see up on the screen here, and this was the first even that I think we know of in Nelson that took place that was really a gathering—a community dialogue—around this topic of food security. This wasn't really that long ago, but given what's transpired since then, it does seem like ages.

And so this is just quick outline—again, you probably received this in your invitation—just in terms of what we've been up to. In 2007, we hosted a few community potlucks, just as a way to bring people together, talk about food security, and enjoy food together, as we will today as well. We hosted the Eat Local Challenge, which was back in August 2007, and that challenged the community to eat as locally as possible. And as Matt Lowe who is here today will also testify, that's, for him, what led him to create the Creston Grain CSA, or conceive the idea. He'll talk about that later.

We participated in The Future of Food in the Kootenays Conference, which was organized by Andre Piver as well as a number of others. Andre is here today. The GE Free Kootenays group was first hosted—the first meeting hosted by Community Food Matters in 2007. In 2008 we launched our e-newsletter, which if you're not already on (I think Tara was asking everyone if you'd like to receive that). Right now we're up to over 200 people on the list and I imagine we'll be able to increase that soon. There was a fall fair; we've done some film screenings. There's a spring printing workshop. And then the last one I just want to expand upon because that was really one of the more recent activities, which was a presentation to the city of Nelson. I want to expand on this just because for us that was I think a big step for us as a group as well as a nice example of what we're about as a networking organization.

This presentation to the city, it took place over about 20-25 minutes, and the idea was to introduce Community Food Matters to the city—that was the main purposes—but the other purpose was to introduce this topic of food security to stress what the role of food security is within the community and why it's important for those of us in this community, whether it's policy makers, businesses, organization, individuals, why it's so important for us to pay attention to this within the city limits. And while there was a lot of support for this idea of food security, there was still, as I'm sure there is within the general public, this idea that food security is a regional issue; it's something that's beyond our municipal borders and it's thereby something that takes place in the rural areas. Of course we in Nelson, as I imagine most of you agree, we do play a role here in the community and that's what this presentation was about. It was about talking about the economics of how a local food system can drive a local economy, and why those of us within the city (businesses and organizations) play a role.

I've always sort of looked at—the word I used in that presentation—I've looked at Nelson as a vacuum that we, here in Nelson, in terms of how we consume food, we act as a vacuum for food coming from outside of the city limits. And so what we choose to eat really plays a big impact on where that food is sucked from; whether it's coming from the local area, the regional area, or from California, or abroad. And so that's really the main reason why Community Food Matters maintains such a Nelson-centric focus and so often, as we've identified, social movements for change often look to stimulate this change by looking to the top—the decision of the decision-making pyramid—trying to influence federal governments, provincial governments, corporations, and that may work (indeed it has) and I think that plays a role. But it's a pretty big mountain to climb, looking up at the top of the decision-making pyramid when many of the shortcomings found within our food system started up at the top and not down below at the grassroots.

And so what Community Food Matters recognizes is that change begins, first and foremost, at the grassroots level: in the kitchen, and more specifically within our community here in Nelson.

Community Food Matters, we meet once a month and really the structure of our meetings is quite simple. We get together, we each go around the table and we share what it is our groups are up to and what it is we're planning on doing. As simple as that may sound, it proves to be incredibly effective in working together and collaborating on whatever project we may be working on over the next few months or a year, and just that simple sharing of information has a huge impact on our individual work. That's exactly what formed the idea for this gathering, is to really expand that and that's exactly what we're going to do today. Instead of seven of us sitting around a table talking about these things, there's going to be likely 70 of us in this room, 35 different presentations for five minutes each. After those meetings, we communicate really what we're up to through our e-newsletter and communicate that to the public. Of course, that's a critical piece in the whole picture.

So the one thing—just before I get to the purpose of the gathering—one thing that was recognized in putting this gathering together is – and just looking at how many groups are represented here today – is that what makes all of our individual work, work well and be effective is when we have a community of people working on various projects. Just as we find diversity in nature, it's important to find diversity within our community and our work. One thing I want to rehear that I sort of realize as I was helping put this event together, is just as all of our work here is focused on enhancing the idea of community, we can't expect to build community if we ourselves are not trying to foster that community among each other. And so really that's what this event is about: trying to foster community among each other so that our work in trying to foster a greater community outside of us can exist and be more efficiently arrived at.

So the purpose of today—three things: to expand our awareness of what's going on in the food community; to generate ideas for our own work and for our collective work; and to foster collaboration and dialogue.

End of opening segment of Community Food Matters Gathering

Jon Steinman: This is Deconstructing Dinner. You're listening to a recording from the 2009 Community Food Matters Gathering in Nelson, British Columbia. The event was hosted to foster increased awareness and greater collaboration among those within the community working on enhancing the local food system, and it also acted as a possible model for any North American community wishing to host a similar event. Deconstructing Dinner recorded the event for that very reason.

Now one of the critical pieces of the gathering was opening it up to the business community and inviting them to learn about the many organizations and projects underway that they might choose to be a part of. Of course the business community

comprised of restaurants, bakeries and grocery retailers is a critical piece to any viable food system, and so roughly a dozen local businesses were in attendance.

For the remainder of the broadcast we'll be listening in on just a sampling of the hours of presentations and dialogue that comprised the event. These recordings will extend into next week's show.

And a quick note that the websites for all of the groups featured on today's episode will be made available on the Deconstructing Dinner website at deconstructingdinner.ca. Today's episode is posted under the show titled, "Hosting a Community Dialogue on Local Food."

Getting to the presentations... the first group that we'll hear present is the Kootenay Local Agricultural Society represented by Abra Brynne.

Abra Brynne: The Kootenay Local Agriculture Society was born out of many kitchen table conversations at many different farms over this region over many years. A lot of what was driving us was a vision to really increase production of food in this region, because some of us are pretty concerned about what's coming down the pikes, as a lot of us are aware of. KLAS came together with an idea, with a vision of how to more effectively support farmers, and all farmers in this area. We wanted to do it through networking, through education, through providing resources, through market access and recognition, and through support of sustainable production practices. The idea was significantly increasing the possibility of local food self-reliance.

We were formed in March '08 and we have 70-plus members across the region that we serve, which is basically the regional district of Central Kootenays boundaries. Amongst the goals and projects that we have underway or in planning is a gene bank. Currently we've got a seed bank underway, and in that seed bank we have localized, locally-adapted varieties. We have 37 potato varieties, 3 kale, 7 Jerusalem artichoke, 11 fava beans, 13 pole beans, 9 bush beans, 9 mustards, 37 tomatoes, and 8 corn, all of them adapted to this bio-climate.

We also have the intention of developing a gene bank for perennials and for livestock because we think it's going to become more and more critical to have locally-adapted varieties and species.

We have educational programs, which include things like providing hands-on training for the Grain CSA farmers over in Creston, something they really wanted, to help some of them shift into sustainable production practices.

We currently have a bee keeping course that's been so popular we've had to offer two concurrently running courses and it's going quite well and it will go through the full season through to harvesting of the honey, which will be very exciting for some of us newbies.

We're bringing Mario Lanthier who's going to do a composting workshop in the next little while and Ann Clark who runs the Organic Program at the University of Guelph is going to be coming, and her specialty is the integration, the mutual working of grass systems and livestock. So that will be really useful for our region.

One of our other projects was really to increase market recognition and establish sustainable standards. We've developed a brand, working with a local graphic designer, and labeled it Kootenay Mountain Grown; it's pretty self-explanatory in terms of where it's from, and only people who produce in this region and certified to our standards could use that label.

In terms of our certification system, we've adopted iPhone's participatory guarantee system, which, to a degree, goes back to the early days of organic standards, organic certification where farmers were working together to provide assurance to their direct markets about the standards to which they adhered. So that's a system that we're following. Any farm who certifies to Kootenay Mountain Grown standards also takes a pledge of sustainable practices, humane livestock, handling, and a whole slew of other social and environmental values that we espouse.

We're providing bulk purchase and currently we've got a group purchase of beekeeping equipment and bees, as well as for poultry, because as everyone knows there's a real increase in interest in poultry production here now that we'll have some docking stations for the mobile poultry unit out of Cranbrook, and that's something that we're also supporting, is establishing licensed docking stations.

We have a tool lending library in development, and we also have a farm internship program in development.

Jon Steinman: Abra Brynne of the Kootenay Local Agricultural Society. And next, another farmer organization, the Kootenay Organic Growers Society, represented by Suzanne Miller.

Suzanne Miller: The Kootenay Organic Growers Society, also known as KOGS, is a not-for-profit, Kootenay-based certifying body dedicated to the production and promotion of organic agriculture and products. We are committed to supporting and strengthening sustainable agriculture and related businesses in our home region. We support the goals of community food security, which means that all people have dignified access to food which is safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate, and which has been produced in a manner that is environmentally and socially sustainable.

As a certifier we are responsible that only farmers and processors that meet the standards for certified organic agriculture can market their product as B.C. certified organic. We are one of 11 certifying bodies in B.C that are accredited through this Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia, the COABC. We have been certifying farmers in our area for over ten years.

Organic certification provides traceability from seed, plant, or animal, to the final sale, and this gives consumer confidence that products certified as organic are as free as possible of contaminants.

Jon Steinman: Suzanne Miller of the Kootenay Organic Growers Society. Next up we'll hear from Aimee Watson of the Kaslo Food Security Project. The Village of Kaslo recently became one of only a small number of Canadian municipalities adopting a food charter. Aimee Watson spearheaded that initiative.

Aimee Watson: I'm just going to give you a really quick overview of what the Kaslo Food Security Project has done. We started in February 2006 with the Food Forum, similar to Nelson, same idea. Out of that we determined that we needed to do a feasibility study on a community and/or a commercial kitchen, as well as developed a small steering committee that would look at all the other things that the community indicated we wanted to focus on in regards to food security. So with that came the UBC Funding Union of B.C. Municipalities funded our first year of food security. In our first year we did food policy, which is our food charter, and I'll get to that in a second, education and awareness, we did eight speaker series, bringing people up like the Post-Carbon Institute, to local flavours, to some local food developers and farmers just to raise the awareness in the community and see where people wanted to go.

We developed a bulk food club using only local food. We did farmer outreach and market analysis to try and increase the connections between farmers and markets; we provided cooking classes, canning classes, created the Community Garden Society of Kaslo, and a program called Food for Families, which was our very tiny version of a food pantry.

The following year in March 2008, we developed farmer mapping, was what we called it, was created into the West Kootenay Food Directory, which is available online. And please, this is run by people so if anything that needs to change, or if you're not in here and you want to be in here, you have to let us know; we're not continuously researching the market anymore. This is an online document you can just keep us updated about. So that was in March 2008. In April 2008, we launched our program, which we are currently running, which is Lawns to Gardens where we're converting lawns into food producing and native plant gardens with many educational workshops as well. We've got three fallow lawns converted to food and native plant gardens in the first year, which we calculated out to saving over 1,500 kg of greenhouse gases—that's using the Local Food Directory calculations—which is a Vancouver-based program.

We also started looking at what a food economic development centre would look like for Kaslo, which is more often to what we call the Kaslo Food Hub, where we're looking at building a community root cellar for consumers as well as farmers, and a place to house our Bulk Food Club, which moved over 5,000 pounds of local food this summer using an 8x12 shed. We lost over 200 pounds of food in December with the freeze, so it's kind of our main line when we write to funders, that we really need good storage.

January of this year we developed the Farmland and Farmer Database, which is also available online, and it's also now run by the local people; if you let us know that something needs to change, or you've found your farmland, you need to let us know. That's all online.

JS: Aimee Watson of the Kaslo Food Security Project. Again, the websites for all of the groups represented on today's broadcast will be linked to from the Deconstructing Dinner website under the March 26th 2009 episode.

We'll hear more from Aimee Watson on an upcoming broadcast and more specifically the project linking farmers up with available land. So stay tuned for that.

Next up at the Community Food Matters Gathering was a familiar voice here on the show – Matt Lowe of the Creston Grain CSA.

Matt Lowe: We chose that Community Supported Agricultural Model (the CSA) because we wanted to rectify a lot of the problems that are inherent in our agricultural system. Mostly we wanted to ensure farmers a good and secure income for their efforts. Now, the outcome was very successful in its first year. We had hoped to produce 100 pounds of grain for each share; we ended up producing just over 80, and this was a combination of five different grains. I think that the shareholders by and large were very happy with the outcome. We've also heard of other similar projects that have been started as an outcome of this project. We are expanding our project to 600 shares; we've already sold a lot of those shares. We've also created a retail-supported agricultural model. As I mentioned, we have the Au Soleil Levant in our program already. We're going to make room for many more businesses. The businesses get a reduced rate for taking on more responsibility in terms of purchasing more shares. Our ultimate goal is to provide grain for the Kootenay region using this community-supported agricultural model.

JS: Matt Lowe of the Creston Grain CSA. Also representing food projects in Creston was Gail Southall of the Creston Valley Food Action Coalition.

Gail Southall: Our long-term goal is to make Creston a food-secure valley where we are never at risk of not having enough to eat and not having access to fresh, healthy, adequate, appropriate food. And our short-term goals will be to support those projects that go towards the long-term goal. In the next few months we will be working on a food mapping project. We will be surveying our farmers to find out the crops specifically that they are growing, or thinking of growing, and identifying gaps and then working with our farmers to address those gaps. This project came specifically from requests from farmers hoping that they could actually work collaboratively with each other to feed a local market. So we're really quite excited about that.

JS: Gail Southall of the Creston Valley Food Action Coalition.

Another integral part to any food-secure community is the increasingly popular farmers market. Here in Nelson, the markets are hosted by the West Kootenay Eco Society. Here's the Society's John Alton.

John Alton: We want to really remake our market and really focus on the farmers a lot, and, I guess, move it and see it as a larger market in terms of a farming focus and local food. We see we have to recreate the market to do that. You know, I think down at Cottonwood it's been a good little market, but we wanted to see it grow; we wanted to see more people and a diversity of people like a market that more of a cross-section of people would come to. So we really want to rebrand it, change it. To that end, we have to start fresh and do some research, market research, we've got to go to the population in Nelson and look and see where it would be acceptable to put that market, what people are looking for, what farmers are looking for. We really have to do a business plan in order to remake the Saturday market.

We also have an idea of starting a West Kootenay virtual Farmers Market website. We think that this is important because it'll really support farmers as getting more of a market for their products beyond just a weekly or bi-weekly Farmers Market, and it'll be a year-round place for them to be able to market their products, and local people in town that are buyers – I heard some folks here that have businesses, they're buyers, so farmers could list what they have, how much they have, what day they come to town...

JS: John Alton of the West Kootenay Eco Society. This is Deconstructing Dinner – a syndicated radio show produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman.

You're listening to just a sampling of recordings from the first of what will likely become an annual event – the 2009 Community Food Matters Gathering held in Nelson, British Columbia. As part of our involvement with Community Food Matters, Deconstructing Dinner helped organize and record the event with the hope that the Gathering might act as a model for other communities wishing to either bring all of those involved in the food system together under one roof to discuss local food concerns, or as a resource to lend insight into what types of organizations, businesses and individuals can help contribute to growing a healthier regional food system.

Today's broadcast is the first of two-parts that will explore just some of the groups represented at the event. All of the audio segments as part of the series are only samples of the 5-minute slots that were allocated to each group, and if you are interested to hear more from the over 35 groups in attendance, you can listen to unedited recordings from the event posted on our website at deconstructingdinner.ca and listed under the March 26th 2009 episode.

increase music and fade out

Jon Steinman: Now the next presenter we'll hear from might be a familiar one to some of you as it was back in mid-2007 when Deconstructing Dinner documented the launch of a

Community Supported Agriculture (or CSA) project for vegetables at Soil Matters Farm. Here's Laura Sacks.

Laura Sacks: We provide a box of fresh veggies for about a 30-week period from mid-April until the middle of November. We're a pretty small CSA right now—25 to maybe 30 members max this year. We're also asking our members to have a working commitment. This has been one of the more exciting, I think, aspects of our little CSA is these harvest work parties that we've had every Thursday through the harvest season. We have about six home-schooled kids coming out regularly as well as an about equal amount of adults, and we would do all the harvesting. I'm hoping that with this working commitment for the members this year that it's actually going to get these other people involved that haven't had the chance to come out, to really be a part of it and have work parties and be participating together in the production of your own food. I really think that that's where the meaningful parts of this is. I'm excited to provide those boxes of vegetables—and that's a really important part—but I think the other important part is having the community and the collaboration between them.

JS: Laura Sacks of Soil Matters Farm CSA.

And from the social services sector, here's Laura Gareau of the Nelson Food Cupboard Society – one of a handful of food banks operating in the community.

Laura Gareau: For those of you who don't know, we operate out of this space – the door is at the back that you see there; that's where the Food Cupboard runs every Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, providing barrier-free access to healthy food for people in our community who are experiencing food insecurity. Our barrier-free policy means that we trust people to know when they need food and therefore do not require them to provide any personal information or justify why they need to come. And we don't place any limits on how many times they can access the Food Cupboard. We strive to create a respectful and welcoming environment for all people, and we strongly believe that good food is a human right, regardless of one's income level.

On average we serve between 600-950 people a month, and over the past few months we've actually seen a steady rise in customer use. In February, we served over 1,000 people, and that was just a short month of 28 days, and based on the numbers that we've tallied so far for March, it looks like we're going to surpass that number as well. Over 1,000 people is actually more people per month that we've served ever dating back from our statistics back in 2003.

The Nelson Food Cupboard has been a progressive food bank since the time it got started over 10 years ago. In terms of alleviating food insecurity, food banks are a necessary emergency solution and they are also a Band-Aid solution to much larger issues that perpetuate poverty and hunger around the world. What makes the Nelson Food Cupboard unique is that in addition to addressing hunger, it's actually actively engaged in food system transformation by supporting the local food system. So we have an access to fruits

and vegetables policy that was developed to make sure that every time somebody visits the Food Cupboard they have at least five selections of produce to choose from.

Another unique characteristic of the Nelson Food Cupboard comes out of a local food sourcing policy that was developed a couple of years ago. We strive to source our food as locally as possible, and to do that we buy CSA shares from several local farmers. We also have a Grow Row program where people can pledge to grow a row in their garden or on their farm and donate it to the Food Cupboard.

JS: Laura Gareau of the Nelson Food Cupboard Society. One of the many food-based businesses at the Community Food Matters Gathering was Nelson coffee roaster and café – Oso Negro Coffee. Here's Jesse Phillips.

Jesse Phillips: For those of you who don't know, oso is Spanish for "black bear." We chose that name because we hoped that a foreign name would help to remind people how far coffee travels to reach us, and how culturally removed we are from the sources of this fine stimulant. As well, a black bear is an apt symbol of our local, so hopefully when you drink the coffee you are reminded of where it comes from. All the beans are fair trade, which means it likely comes from a co-op and then its organic and the growers get a fair price for their beans.

One of our projects that started last summer was a rooftop garden. Our goal was to make as many salads and use as many fresh herbs as we can from our local rooftop garden, just coming a few metres away, picked fresh and eaten fresh. We're planning on putting a solar dehydrator in up-top so we can dehydrate the herbs and dehydrate some fruits and use those in muffins and biscottis. The reason we're doing this is to pursue sustainability as a concept and to show other local businesses what we can do and that it's possible to be local—as local as we can.

JS: Jesse Phillips of Oso Negro Coffee.

And next we have Sandi McCreight of the Kootenay Food Strategy Society.

Sandi McCreight: The Kootenay Food Strategy Society started as a sub-committee of the Castlegar social planning committee in 2005. We quickly evolved into a regional committee within months and then we formed the society in November of '06. Our goals and priorities include ongoing education, awareness and support, and networking with food security groups and other relevant organizations, including policy makers of course.

We also act as a host agency. We provide project supports, including application, process, media relations, budgeting, accounts payable, and reporting to funders.

JS: Sandi McCreight of the Kootenay Food Strategy Society. Also at the event was Earth Matters – another familiar organization to Deconstructing Dinner's past episodes.

Here's Colleen Matte.

Colleen Matte: I just wanted to start by saying that I just came back from Abbotsford where I attended a transition town's training. That's something that's also going to be presented—Donna McDonald and I, city counselor, went. I just wanted to mention it because I'm really encouraged that in this room we not only have all the foodies that we regularly see at these functions, but also bigger businesses and social service organizations, and it's really the three pillars of environmental, economic, and social services that need to work together to have a sustainable community in the future, and to become a resilient community for the changes that we're going to see ahead.

Earth Matters has been involved in community projects in 1995. They started as a group with a couple of youth who did a project called Hands On. Some of the projects that happened along the way have been community gardens. Often I'm approached by new people coming into the community and wondering, you know, Nelson is such an environmentally conscious community, but we don't have any food-growing community gardens. And they're just shocked. Castlegar has them and Kaslo and all the places around. We did have them at one point. Earth Matters did have a couple of community gardens and we have a wealth of resources at our office about projects that have been done, locating good spots, identifying areas to have community gardens. I think, really, we're struggling right now with capacity to be able to move that forward.

We also had a great project that I first became involved in Earth Matters, was the Farm to Table High School Education Program, where we'd go into high school classes, do education around food choices and their impacts on our environment socially and environmentally. And then the really great part was bringing them actually into the grocery store and demonstrating the corporate domination of our food systems that we are currently working under in our main grocery stores. That was really an eye opener for them, and really kind of surprising that the grocery stores would let us come in and kind of tell all the bad stories about what was happening behind all these products. But it kind of also showed the disconnect that even the grocery stores had to the food that was in their stores.

So things that are still actually happening with Earth Matters right now are the community medicinal herb garden down at Cottonwood Falls. It's an interpretive garden that we have; the community is welcome to go and pick what they need. There are interpretive signs letting you know what plants are for what. For the future projects, I'm working on a composting business plan to support the city and the regional district to provide composting services, and just talking today with the folks that are working on having chickens in the city of Nelson and supporting that, and also being able to provide composting services beyond Nelson as well.

JS: This is Deconstructing Dinner. That was Colleen Matte of Earth Matters.

As mentioned earlier, one of the financial supporters of the 2009 Community Food Matters Gathering was Interior Health and their administering of the province-wide

Community Food Action Initiative. As an ongoing member of the Community Food Matters group, Tara Stark addressed the 75-person audience.

Tara Stark: Community nutritionists like myself have been involved in food security for a lot of years. But recently food security was recognized as a key determiner of health and it's now one of 21 core programs in public health. That's really exciting; it means we're getting more recognition and food security is becoming more mainstream. It also means that health authorities are provided with a little bit of money that's earmarked for food security.

I'll just tell you a bit about the Community Food Action Initiative. It's a province-wide initiative and what it does is it aims to increase awareness about food security; it aims to increase access to local food; to increase food knowledge and skills; and to increase community capacity to address local food security issues; and it also aims to increase the development and the use of policy that supports community food security.

JS: Tara Stark of Interior Health.

Also acting as a notable supporter of the Gathering and also a member of Community Food Matters is the Kootenay Country Store Co-operative, the most active independent member-owned co-operative food store in Canada. The store has been featured here on the show on a few occasions.

Here's Michelle Beneteau.

Michelle Beneteau: I'm sure many of you have shopped at the co-op and know the co-op, but do all of you know that we have 8,000 members living in this community? And what you might not also know about the Co-Op is that we support our community through the way that we operate. One of the founding principles of cooperatives is concern for community. This is a guiding principle that we live by everyday—it is how we run our business. We stand also for sustainability and fair trade—it is how we operate. We do not believe in the lowest price possible. We do believe in an ethical exchange of money for product. Although everyone appreciates a good deal, and our buyers are always looking for the best prices to pass on to our members and our customers, we believe in our business as helping to sustain the livelihood of the farmers, producers, artisan manufacturers, and suppliers that we do business with.

Purchasing locally has always been a priority for us at the Kootenay Co-Op. We have hundreds of local suppliers and many small businesses have gotten their start by supplying to the Kootenay Co-op. We are always looking for and encouraging new and potential suppliers. We are currently in our third session of the Kootenay Co-op cooking school classes. They're a series of classes have become overwhelmingly popular and are filling up almost as soon as they're announced. We also have monthly community donation days, and contribute donation requests on an ongoing basis.

What are we up to in the near future? For the month of April we will celebrate Earth Month with our Bulk Bin Bounty where we will be promoting our bulk food aisle as a way to cost-effectively eat organic whole foods while reducing waste from excessive packaging and transportation. It's basically a back-to-basics idea, getting people to eat more close to the food that they are consuming, rather than processed.

JS: Michelle Beneteau of the Kootenay Country Store Co-operative.

Another integral part to any vibrant local food system beyond education in the kitchen, is agricultural education, and while no formal programs exist in the interior of British Columbia, there are a number of independent courses being offered.

Here's Frank and Libby Ruljancich.

Libby Ruljancich: Over 30 years ago Lib and I decided we wanted to have some food security for our local community. Of course our local community consisted of Libby, me, and our two boys, and that's it. Since then our goals have been to grow as much of our own food as we can for ourselves, and also to try to reduce our impact on the environment in other ways as much as we could, or at least as much as we were willing to do, let's put it that way. Over the 30 years we've learned a lot of things on how to grow food and how to preserve food, and during that time we made a lot of mistakes and we continue to make a lot of mistakes, but we continue to try to learn and get better at what we do and add more to what we grow.

Last year we decided to try to share some of our 30 years of experience of growing with other people, and so we started a course. It's called Growing Through the Seasons.

Libby: Last year Frank had this brilliant idea of having a garden and orchard course that would occur through the seasons so that people could come to our place and once a month learn about what we do and about gardening and orcharding, and then see how things progress through the seasons. Originally, last year, we called it Growing in the Kootenays, and I made this nice sign to put down on the side of the road so people could know where to come to the course. Well, I think Growing in the Kootenays has a little bit of a connotation (audience laughter) and somebody stole the sign immediately. So we changed the name to Growing Through the Seasons (audience laughter). This year we offered the course again and on Sunday we had our first session. Last year we had actually two sessions we had so many people, and it went really well and we got good feedback that people indeed did learn some things.

We actually start in the early spring with things that you would start with like the soil and preparing a garden and starting plants, grafting and pruning of fruit trees, planting fruit trees, and training fruit trees. We also talk about extending the growing season. We do harvesting and storing of food, and canning and freezing and drying and seed saving.

JS: This is Deconstructing Dinner. That was Frank and Libby Ruljancich of Growing Through the Seasons. Frank and Libby's presentation was just one of the 35 5-minute

presentations that made up the 2009 Community Food Matters Gathering in Nelson, British Columbia. As the first of its kind in Nelson, the event was designed to bring a diverse array of groups involved in the local food system together to help generate ideas, collaboration, and dialogue. Through our involvement with Community Food Matters, Deconstructing Dinner helped organize the event and recorded it with the hope that other North American communities might be able to use this event as a resource for how a more vibrant, regional food system might be fostered.

Links to all of the groups represented at the event will be linked to from our website alongside unedited audio recordings of all of the groups you're listening to today. The segments we've been airing are only a sampling of the presentations that comprised the event. We'll be continuing with some of these recordings into next week's broadcast as well.

And what we will do to take us to the end of today's part 1 of this series is jump to the end of the day's activities – the group discussion... and while the time allocated was not nearly enough to address all of the amazing ideas that were generated from the many presentations, ideally, the type of dialogue that you're about to hear is exactly what we had hoped the event would encourage. More importantly, we hope that this dialogue continues beyond the event itself and becomes part of the ongoing work of the many businesses, organizations, and individuals in attendance.

In this first segment from the group discussion, Florence Christophers of the Nelson Cares Society inquires into the capacity of the region to produce food. As the dialogue ensued, British Columbia's meat inspection regulations entered into the conversation. We last covered this topic in July 2008, and for listeners who did not catch that series titled *Livestock Lost*, the issue involved the new slaughterhouse regulations implemented here in the province back in October 2007 that effectively eliminated the ability for a number of regions to access locally-raised meat. You'll hear Suzanne Miller of the Kootenay Organic Growers Society raise this concern, following which a short segment from Marilyn James, a Sinixt Nation spokesperson and instructor at Selkirk College.

Florence Christophers: Great, I have a new theory, and I just had a question about -- someone mentioned that production is our weakest link in this area, and I'm curious to know how many farmers there are in the West Kootenays? And is it financially viable to be a farmer in this region? And what are the preconditions to their successes? It seems to come up, and I don't know facts or stats or is it on someone's website. How do we get a picture of exactly what our production capacity is, and what are demands might be if we actually continued to run our campaigns of "Eat Local."

Man in audience: I think it is possible to make a living, but you're not going to make the living that people are used to, and if you want to earn money it's not the direction to go. So if you wanted to work on the land, then you can probably make a living.

FC: I wanted to say something about the Meat regulations and how it's actually impacting on the food productivity in this area. Not only are the farmers who have cut

their herds suffering, and their customers' sufferings, but lots of people in their neighborhood who try to grow their own foods are suffering because the manure supply is down, because the animals aren't there anymore. So we've got a provincial election coming up, and we need to make the meat regulations a big priority.

Marilyn James: I'd like to mention something about yes, Selkirk. I believe education should step up to the plate in regard to being able to offer agricultural classes in some of the more complex styles. So I'm putting it out there that Selkirk College listens to its community, and if Selkirk College's community says, "We need agricultural programming, and we're willing to be students of that programming," Selkirk College might step up to the plate and begin offering some of those more complex courses in agriculture. I think Selkirk College's community should also ask Selkirk College to start opening up some of its lands on its campuses for community gardens. I've been bugging for Mir Centre to have a community garden where we could example traditional planting styles, like the Three Sisters Together, non-dryland farming, the kinds of techniques that people can learn and have a part of their growing production.

So all I'm saying is, is that those challenges need to come from our community, and I think if people have the ear of some of the administration at Selkirk College and can put some of these ideas forward in a great way, that we'll begin having some of this commitment from those educational fields.

JS: As the dialogue continued, another interesting topic was raised, that of compost and how local area businesses can work towards diverting their compostable waste to area farms as a rich source of soil fertility. In this segment we hear from owner of the Best Western Hotel and Hume Hotel, Ryan Martin, Earth Matters' Colleen Matte, and Aurora Gardens' Brenda Hyshka.

RM: Someone alluded to it earlier, we have a lot of food waste that goes out, and it just goes in the garbage. We do have an employee that has a chicken farm out in Winlaw, and the last couple of months I've noticed that she has little containers of some of our food waste going to feed her chickens, but it's like a drop in the bucket for what she can actually handle and take away. I don't know if Earth Matters is still doing that service? You guys are providing the picking-up of food scraps?

Colleen Matte: Not right now.

RM: No. I guess my question is, "How do we tap into that? How do we put aside all of our scraps and have it taken somewhere?"

CM: So when we finished our Urban Composting Project where we were picking up food waste from restaurants, we tried to connect everyone with local farmers that would be able to take the food waste: Vienna Café was able to connect with someone, and all of their food waste is being used beyond the - being diverted from the waste stream. So we can provide with some names of farmers that might be able to come by and pick that up for you.

Brenda Hyshka: I am a farmer and I do pick up compost from five or six different places in town. My problem is I don't have any more room in my van to get it home. So when you're coming back from town from your deliveries and you have already that max, but if somebody was willing to bring it out and, as Earth Matters was doing, to take it to a central place, farmers anywhere would be thankful to get it. There shouldn't be any of that going to the dump; it's a crime. Every restaurant in town should be made to compost. [audience applause]

Woman: Would restaurants and farmers be willing to pay for that service? Because I'm just thinking my clients have a truck and they do recycling, so maybe we could do that...

RM: I mean we already pay for Canadian Waste...ship away....

BH: Yeah, exactly, yeah. [cross-talk]

RM: You do pay for it.

BH: The Full Circle gives me \$5 every time I pick up, which is once a week. And they're the only ones that pay me, because everybody else buys food from me, so I do it kind of as a service. It's just one more -- I guess it depends [cross-talk]...But it's also for gas and time. I mean, I could come in just one day a week and load up my van again, but is it worth it for my time as a farmer to take that four hours, plus the \$25 in gas, which is going to cost anybody to come out, that's that weight. Which is why it's better in town and if the community is doing it, but it's not being done.

JS: This is Deconstructing Dinner where you're listening to a handful of segments of the conversation that ensued as part of the 2009 Community Food Matters Gathering held on March 24th in Nelson, British Columbia.

As was mentioned earlier, the event was host to businesses, organizations and individuals involved with food and who are interested in enhancing the regional food system in and around the community.

We'll be hearing more audio segments from the event at the launch of next week's episode where we'll hear from over a dozen more presenters speaking on the topic of backyard chickens, community farms, linking those with disabilities up with farmers seeking labour. We'll hear from the Kootenay Lake Sailing Association and their ambitious goals of supporting the local food system, and we'll learn of an innovative project that converted a large section of asphalt into a school garden. You can stay tuned for that and much more.

And so to end off today's episode, here's one last clip from the dialogue that concluded the Gathering. Launching the segment is Geoff Austin of the Fisherman's Market, a local fish shop and butcher; you'll hear Robert Agnew of the newly-formed Upper Columbia

Co-operative Council; and rounding off the segment, Nativ of the Preserved Seed Café and Mount Sentinel Farm.

Geoff Austin: I just wanted to make a point. We're from the Fisherman's Market and we've been trying to deal with the local farmers, and we've hooked up with a farmer in Creston now, we're selling his stuff, and one of our biggest problems is customers and realizing we have to spend more money to get good stuff. And that's the bottom line to everything. When I have a AAA steak from a meat packing house in the display case and I've got local, organic stuff in butcher wrap paper, frozen, people will always take the fresh steak over the frozen one. It's impossible to have fresh stuff all the time from local suppliers. So the Creston Abattoir thing is working well, and I think we just need to educate people that if you want to eat local, you've got to put it in your freezer and you've got to take it out everyday when you want it and it works out better that way.

Robert Agnew: It could be one of the biggest problems to this whole relationship between land and farming is the whole question of private land ownership, and what I'd really like to work on, and we've talked about it at Upper Columbia Co-op Council and other places too, is how to provide a third market—not private, not public, but relationships between people who have land that is agricultural land that they're not using and making it available to young people, young families perhaps using existing housing on that land that's not being used by affordable housing. The whole key to be able to support a family, to be able to build a future, the cost of land, which is sold as recreational land in this whole area right now, just makes it prohibitive. So there needs to be another way of having access to that land, security of tenure, housing, training, which involves the colleges, that whole relationship is something that really we need to be creative and find a way of doing it. And that's something that I'm dedicated to working on, and it's probably going to take another 5 or 10 years and it may not be until a lot of young people just start not making it in the city and want to try and do a Back to the Land again. If we can be ready with systems that allow them to grow food and support a family and make a living, I think we can have some of the answers to local food sustainability taken care of, but it's going to take time.

Nativ: I just wanted to comment on what Robert said. Based on what we've seen as our community's grown here, and he touched on something that I think is really vital. It's only when people, when they lose their comfort zone and people get desperate that they'll actually be moved to do something that'll make a difference. Until then it's just an idea or philosophy or something you do in your free time. It's going to take people that are full-on 100% committed to bring about the visions that people are talking about here. It can't be done as a part-time venture, and so that strikes right at the weak link, which is human selfishness. We've all got to face ourselves and say, "I've got to be willing to look at my own self, or just my own greed, and sacrifice that for the sake of making a hope for the next generation."

And there's nothing short of that can really address these problems because all you end up doing is you go round and around in circles. The creativity is here, the ideas, the giftings, but it takes sacrifice. My grandparents were farmers. Their parents came from

Latvia and they left everything behind because of political problems, and they came out and they almost starved to death to start a homestead in Manitoba, and then they passed on that little beginnings they started to their children, and they passed it on to my father, and then things happened and my father lost that farm. But they worked at it for three generations, and they weren't even out of the woods yet. I know our experiences – we've worked at it for 8 years in an old homestead, I think it was formerly a Doukhobor farm, and previous to that it was British immigrants that owned the farm we're on. And so there was a lot of potential there, but it hadn't been farmed for a long, long time, and we had been labouring between 30 and 40 people for eight years now, and we're nowhere near being self-sufficient. That's the reality of it.

In my grandparents day, the only way that they could even make it work was there were clusters of family farms that shared equipment and that helped each other to do things, to bail each other out when they had a bad crop, or to raise a barn—all the things you have to do when you're a farmer: you have a sick cow, you've got to lift the cow up. You can't do it by yourself. You get all your neighbors over. So there's a need for people to come together and to put aside the things that separate people. The society we've been raised up in has trained us to be self-sufficient, which is a fantasy, it's an illusion, there's no such thing as real self-sufficiency. People need to be dependent on one another, and that's the only way we're going to be able to even approach these kind of problems. We've got to start depending on one another and putting our trust in one another. That's what we have to offer as an environment where there's a place to learn how to do that. We would say that even before you plant a garden, you better start looking at those things first because it's a long-range commitment to even have a garden, to maintain it, and develop it—years and years of labour to make that fruitful garden. [audience applause]

ending theme

Jon Steinman: 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. Support for the program can be donated through our website at deconstructingdinner.ca or by dialing 250-352-9600.