

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

**May 7, 2009**

**Title: Deconstructing Dinner at the Dairy Farmers of Canada/ Rallying for Farms, Farmers and Food Security**

**Producer/Host: Jon Steinman**

**Transcript: Ruth Taylor**

*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. This radio show is broadcast on stations around the world including CFUV 101.9FM and CKMO 900AM, both in Victoria, BC. All of our episodes are archived on-line at [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca) or through our Podcast.

Well we've been mentioning it on a few occasions now over the past few months, back in February of this year Deconstructing Dinner was invited to the annual policy conference of the Dairy Farmers of Canada – an organization who likely maintains the most influential voice of any agricultural sector in the country. We featured a short segment of my talk on our recent episode featuring Mountain Valley Farm and Kootenay Alpine Cheese, and on today's broadcast – we'll listen to the talk in its entirety. The presentation was titled, Emerging Trends, Emerging Opportunities, Emerging Responsibilities.

That recording will take us to about the 40-minute mark of the show, and then we'll listen in on recordings from the April 18<sup>th</sup>, Farms, Farmers and Food Security rally hosted on the grounds of the BC Legislature in Victoria. The rally was hosted as a tool to raise awareness of food and agricultural issues leading up to the May 12<sup>th</sup> provincial election. We'll hear the voices of Jordan Marr a farmer and rally co-organizer; we'll hear the familiar voice of Brent Warner of White Loaf Ridge Management, Linda Geggie of Lifecycles Project Society. And we'll hear from another of the rally's co-organizers Tom Henry – the editor of Small Farm Canada. I chatted with Tom over the phone following the successful event.

**increase music and fade out**

*JS:* In late 2008 I was invited by the Dairy Farmers of Canada to address their annual policy conference to be held in Ottawa on February 5<sup>th</sup> 2009. The invite was the first time that Deconstructing Dinner was invited to share our alternative perspectives on food and agriculture to one of Canada's commodity sectors. The Dairy Farmers of Canada is the national policy, lobbying and promotional organization representing Canada's 14,600 dairy farms. According to the organization, they strive to create

favourable conditions for the Canadian dairy industry, today and in the future. They work to maintain policies that foster the viability of Canadian dairy producers and promote dairy products and their health benefits. The organization is run for producers, by producers and has existed since 1934.

To help speak to the organization's interest to prepare for the future, my talk focused on the rapidly changing perspectives of food and farming by Canada's urban populations. Certainly the interest to learn of such trends by such an influential organization like the Dairy Farmers of Canada is a testament to the influence that Canadian eaters are having on Canada's food system.

Now my talk was certainly *not* void of the *critical* approach that Deconstructing Dinner uses when covering the many issues addressed on the show. Used as a foundation for the talk was a magazine-style publication titled *The Real Dirt on Farming* – a tool designed to communicate agricultural education to Canada's urban populations. *The Real Dirt on Farming* was prepared by the Ontario Farm Animal Council in 2006 and republished in 2007. Support for the publication came from *all* commodity sectors across the country such as the Alberta Beef Producers, the Ontario Berry Growers Association, the Ontario White Bean Producers, and dozens of other groups including trade associations like CropLife Canada and government bodies like Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Now throughout the talk, images *from* the publication were projected onto the screens, and while not necessary to enjoy the broadcast today, we've made that presentation available on our website for any of you interested in following along. The slides are linked to from the page for our May 7<sup>th</sup> 2009 episode at [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca)

And in also helping provide a *context* for this talk, it is worth mentioning that speaking in the hours leading up to the talk, was Canada's Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Gerry Ritz, the Secretary General of the European Dairy Association Joop Kleibeuker and Canada's Chief Agriculture Negotiator Steve Verheul among others. So certainly Deconstructing Dinner was quite set up to provide an *alternative* set of perspectives.

And so here it is, recorded at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa, Ontario on February 5<sup>th</sup> 2009, at the Dairy Farmers of Canada's annual policy conference.

*Jon Steinman at Conference: (clapping)* Well thanks Bruce for the introduction. And first I'd like to extend just a warm thank-you to the Dairy Farmers of Canada for inviting me here today (repeats in French). I am deeply honoured to be speaking to a farmer's organization who maintains such a strong voice as you do it is an honour. Looking at the line up of speakers who you've been listening to over the past few days and in particular today I think I'm probably the most unknown on the list and certainly catching at least the last half of the last speaker I'm pretty sure I'm presenting a whole other perspective on, as he mentioned, challenges facing all food sectors and some of the opportunities as well that exist.

And so who am I? I think is a question that I'd like to first address. And how did a city slicker who grew up in Toronto end up in your annual policy conference to talk about agriculture? And for me it starts at the University of Guelph, as Bruce mentioned, a school I imagine a lot of you are familiar with. I was there to earn a Bachelor of Commerce in Hotel and Restaurant Management and by all standards that I knew at the time it was a great program, it was known as one of the best of the country. But there was something pretty important missing from that education because never at any point throughout those four years was I exposed to the world of agriculture. Certainly perplexing given at the time the Agricultural School at the University of Guelph was I think the largest in North America and may still be. And here we were learning to manage food but there was no interaction with agriculture in fact my only genuine interaction with agriculture started in first year living in Johnson Hall which was a residence that was most frequented by "agies" and I think I see a few heads nodding. So, sure enough my first year roommate was a farmer and it was a classic tale of country mouse meets city mouse. I can assure you that just as he was interested in learning about urban culture and city life I was just as interested to learn about farming and about rural life. I had no interaction, this is 18 years old now. And to a small degree then and to a much larger extent today for me this captures one of the fundamental problems with our food system today where we have these increasingly larger urban populations across the country completely disconnected from the rural areas and the rural disconnected from the urban. And this can't be a good thing. It can't be a good thing for eaters. It can't be a good thing for farmers. And at that time of recognizing this it concerned me.

So when I left university I was pushed away from the status quo and became drawn towards working within restaurants that were fostering personal relationships with farmers as their suppliers. These were chefs that were decreasing the distance between the two both physically and socially. Long story short I began to observe just how important local food systems can be to a community, to health, to culture, to wellbeing, to the economic health of farmers. What I also observed at that time was that the growth and encouragement of more localized food systems was indeed possible, it was working in these restaurants just on a small scale.

Now given how important a role the media can play in delivering information to the general public I chose to become the media in 2004 writing a weekly column in a newspaper about food, in the Niagara region of Ontario and then I ended up in Nelson, BC where I launched the weekly one hour radio show Deconstructing Dinner. So, what's the idea of the show? Simply put the show is designed to deconstruct our food. Where it comes from? Who grew it? How it was grown? What impacts our food choices have on ourselves, on our communities and the planet? These are certainly questions that more and more urban populations in this country are asking and that's about half the content. The other half is exploring the alternative models to the dominant food system that people are engaged in and primarily in the area that I live in because there's some amazing things happening in the area I live in but also across the country and abroad. And because of this rising interest in this topic the show is now broadcast on 35 Canadian radio stations, one here in Ottawa and is available over the internet. What

makes me so excited to be speaking with you today is that while many farmers do listen to my show mostly small scale farmers who have access to the show they are inspired by the content. Most of my listeners are urban and in most cases very disconnected from agriculture and farming, I of course having once been one of them and to a large extent still am. But that role I guess has flipped and now here I am to inform you as a farming organization, and a voice for farmers, what I observe are the perceptions of agriculture by a growing percentage of urban Canadians.

Now to just give you a quick idea of some of the dairy related topics that I've covered to sort of give a feel of the nature of my show. Of course Raw Milk, that's the big one in the news today that was one of the first topics on dairy I covered about two years ago, certainly a hot topic. I've interviewed Doctor Alan Fredeen of the Nova Scotia Agricultural College who has researched the environmental footprint of intensive grazing systems for dairy versus indoor systems, that research I think was funded by the Dairy Farmers of Canada. I interviewed Ric Llewellyn of Jerseyland Organics in Grand Forks, BC, that's western Canada's first organic dairy. We produced a show that explored Canada's supply management system, something that most Canadians know nothing about, I can assure you that. For dairy in this case and examine the pros and cons of that system. Shortly after that a one hour episode exploring Kraft Foods, the company itself and the food manufacturing industries increase in use of imported modified milk ingredients that have been replacing real Canadian milk. We even conducted pretty extensive research into the history of margarine, which includes exploring the long standing battle over yellow margarine in Quebec. But the show is also having some impacts beyond just the listeners and the people who hear the show.

The most significant impact that I think the show has had, with respect to dairy, was when CBC Marketplace contacted me in mid 2007 to pick my brain as to what stories would be ideal for their October 2007 episode on productive Canada labeling and how true that label was. And at the top of my list when I sat down with the producer was the imported milk ingredients that were replacing Canadian dairy, and sure enough they ran with it. And that episode of Marketplace, I think has no doubt played a major role in changing public perception of dairy along with changes I think were seeing today in the legal use of that label Product of Canada. And another quick example in late 2007 we filed a complaint, we with Deconstructing Dinner, with Advertising Standards Canada and were successful in getting Unilever to change their website for their Breyers brand. And the reason, because while doing our research for a series of shows we noticed that within the section of their website titled, Ice Cream were products which in Canada were not legally permitted to be called Ice Cream, because of the absence of the required protein in the product derived from milk solids. And the company then changed the heading of that section of the website to read Frozen Desserts about a month after that complaint. And Therese Beaulieu of the Dairy Farmers also talked a lot about that issue on that show.

Now shortly I'll be sharing my thoughts on the changing urban perceptions of food and agriculture but I'm also going to at the end of my talk, which I think is the most exciting part, share some inspiring stories from my neck of the woods because in the West

Kootenays of British Columbia where I call home there are some pretty shining examples of how communities right across the country are beginning to actively redefine how they access food. And I think one of the messages I'm hoping to bring to you today is that I think that's only going to be increasing. And some of what I'll be sharing with you may come across as radical, may come across as eccentric, but I'll submit that it's within eccentric ideas that we can find also tremendous opportunities.

"Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric." – Gertrude Russell.

And there is one idea out there that was once eccentric and in some cases still is and that's organic food yet organic food is one of the fastest if not the fastest growing sector in food retail today and it's not so eccentric anymore. And there's hydrogenated oils, I know at home I have a book sitting on my shelf called *Margarine the Plastic Fat and Your Heart Attack* and that was published right here in Canada but the most interesting thing about this book was when it was published and it was published in 1962. And the author of that book wrote about the hydrogenated oils the exact same way as they were being spoken of less than ten years ago when Canadian policy makers started listening to the decades old concerns of hydrogenated oils and trans fats. And that book was no doubt eccentric at that time. Today more likely than ever before innovative and new ways of thinking are ripe for being adopted and applied. We live in a period right now of monumental change; no one seems to know what's going to happen, no one knows how climate change will effect us, no one knows how bad this recession is going to get or how many more jobs will be lost. There's no idea what the future holds. To me that sounds like a great opportunity to try something new. So what's the latest eccentric idea in the world of food? Well local food is one of them and that's the one I spend a lot of time talking about on my show. And demand for local food is already outstripping supply. So what I would propose to every sector in the food system is to just simply pay attention to this interest in local food and the measures people are willing to take to access it. Because some of those measures, as we see with the raw milk debate right now, are pretty amazing.

*JS:* This is Deconstructing Dinner. If you are just tuning in, you're listening to a recording from a talk I delivered on February 5<sup>th</sup> 2009 in Ottawa, Ontario at the annual policy conference of the Dairy Farmers of Canada.

It was at this point in the talk that the PowerPoint presentation kicked in, and as mentioned earlier on the show, those slides are available on our site at [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca) and posted under the May 7<sup>th</sup> 2009 episode.

The first slide that was put up on the screen as you're about to hear was a press release headline issued by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency on January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2009, and that headline read, "BLACK DIAMOND BRAND FAT-FREE MOZZARELLA PROCESSED CHEESE SLICES MAY CONTAIN SMALL PIECES OF PLASTIC MESH."

*Jon Steinman at Conference:* So what's driving this idea of local food? And I think there's many reasons. I'll just give you one quickly. Next slide please. So this is an example of the messages that the Canadian public is receiving today this is just a random one that I put together when I was putting together this talk it happened to be on the top of the list to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency website. And as a commodity sector you could sit back and say this only has to do with the manufacturer of food it doesn't impact our image. But I would say it does impact your image, you and every other sector and in a big way because with the level of consolidation and branding that we've seen within our food system over the past few decades the public identifies much more with this incident and incidents like this than ever before. When the listeriosis outbreak hit Canada, as an example it wasn't just Maple Leaf foods that hurt from that it was the overall perception of our industrial food system that took a big hit. I think if the Maple Leaf incident was isolated we'd have a different story but Maple Leaf was just one of many especially in the past three years similar food recalls and food safety scares that have gripped Canadians and North American and people are losing trust in the industrial food system and not everyone but certainly a notable number of Canadians. I'll speak as an eater to you as a not just a radio show host and I know some may disagree with me but one thing that I am pretty certain of is that so long as the food system continues to consolidate the way it has been so long as it continues to embrace the very same models that are in many cases proving not to work, food safety incidents and recalls will only increase in frequency.

I'm going to use myself as a quick example and what I see as a growing segment of the Canadian populous and granted my food choices are one extreme but it's what's in between the status quo and where I stand I think that's important. I don't trust industrial food system but I have access to other foods that I can counter that distrust in or with. And a lot of that is the result of knowledge, of course I'm sitting every single day, well five days a week, researching for this show and I'm acquiring knowledge and that knowledge is changing how I perceive food and that's what's happening I think with urban populations they're not sitting in front of a computer and reading books as much as I am but certainly the medias starting to pick up on this topic more and more.

I'll use myself as an example again. My diet is a diet of illegal meats, illegal eggs. I consume raw milk. And I love unpasteurized apple juice. Now according to the information found on the website of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the many health authorities operating across the country I should by all accounts be dead, eating a diet like that or at least very ill. And I've been consuming that diet now for quite some time. Now food safety aside our way of life has and is contributing to rapidly changing climate we know this our economy is unraveling. On January 26<sup>th</sup> alone, 60,000 new layoffs were announced by some of the biggest names in American businesses. And what was and is the response? Well more consolidation. More money being thrown in the direction of the companies that in many cases, one would argue, have caused this mess and the status quo continues to be upheld. When the word food security, in the circles that I interact with on an ongoing basis comes up often one name that comes up is Wayne Roberts, he's with the Toronto Food Policy council. He's one of these people whose been working on food policy issues for a very long time and he's

making great headway in Toronto. And He used the example of a carrot to the capture the world we live in. He suggested that when a carrot grows into the ground it may encounter a rock the carrot grows around the rock and continues to grow. While we humans keep banging our head up against it. And he suggests we could learn a lot from carrots. Next slide please.

So that brings me to the public perceptions of farming and food it's clear that there's a lot of confusion out there as to where our food comes from, how it's grown but at the same time there a growing urban population in this country who are becoming pretty knowledgeable about farming and food they may not understand soil or weather or what a cow looks like when its ill but they do see the big picture, the relationship's between food and everything else. Next slide please.

Now here was one of the most aggressive efforts by the various sectors in Canadian agriculture to respond to this confusion. And in some cases what was perceived as confusion I would submit as well you're likely all familiar with this publication it was produced in 2006 with an urban audience in mind and it was designed to dispel the confusion around farming. And the Dairy Farmers of Canada were among the many groups who contributed to this publication. I think the idea behind this publication is amazing, it's great, it's clear that all sectors who were part of this recognized the need to communicate to the public and that's like I said earlier what we need, more dialogue between both sides. But there's another side to this publication that I have to be critical of and frankly there's much within this publication that gives it an air of being almost an instrument of war against the consumer.

And so I want to deconstruct a few sections of this kind of similar to how I would do this on my show and share with you how I believe many Canadians, especially those working on encouraging more localized food systems like the ones I interact with would react to some of the statements found within this publication. And my hope is that by taking this publication apart that some thought at the very least will be provoked around whether the general publics' perceptions about farming should be challenged or embraced or maybe just a little bit of both. Next slide please.

So that may be a little small to read for everyone but ill read it there. The section highlighted there read: "For every dollar earned in gross sales Canadian farmers paid out from 83 cents to 91 cents in operating expenses, as the price of fuel and other essentials out pace income earned farmers must become ever more productive to stay in business." Now this presents a pretty absolute position that the only way out of increasing input costs is to become more productive. I would submit that the local food movement would whole heartedly disagree with such a position because there are many examples and emerging alternatives out there for farmers to stay in business without having to simply be more productive and I'm going to be sharing a few examples of that in just a moment. Next slide please.

This section here reads: can we return to smaller more traditional farms. And the answer, no not unless many Canadians are prepared to leave cities to go back to the

farm work long hours and pay much more for food with only 2% feed and the rest of us its impossible to go back to many small farms. Now I would say regardless to what extent small farms can play a role in providing Canadians with food, there's one thing that's certain and that the answer to that question could be yes. And I would say it should be yes. And I'm going to share examples again with you as well. As for Canadians prepared to leave cities, one thing that I have been covering a lot lately and I've been meeting a lot of people who are in this position is that there's a growing population of young people who are not being raised on a farm but are coming from cities and wanting to become farmers most often small scale organic farmers. Next slide please.

What are natural or organic foods? And the answer posed there on the screen, all unprocessed food is natural the question is how it's produced. Now I think this is a good statement this is something I would commend within this publication, it's a great example of the confusion that exists among the public. Natural and organic, even I'm confused. But I would say the efforts in this guide are only going to create even more confusion. And for one, there are many Canadians who do not believe that all unprocessed food is natural. Next slide.

And lo and behold here in this publication is what I think is a shining example of why the general public doesn't not believe all unprocessed food is natural and it reads, "Live stock and Poultry still use traditional breeding methods for improvement research continues into improving animals with bio-technology but isn't on the market just yet for example work is underway on an enviro-pig which has transferred a gene from a mouse into a pigs salivary gland to allow the pig to digest more phosphorous and eliminate the need for supplements."

Now I know that some would view this as natural but there are a lot of Canadians out there who don't and I don't think any further comment on why is needed. Next slide please.

Are organically produced foods healthier or safer? And the answer, "there is no evidence that organic food is safer or healthier than non-organic." Now I think this is an important part of this publication here because Canadians are starting again as I said earlier to pay a lot of attention to food, food news and food studies. As someone who has been researching this stuff I happen to know that this is not true. It may have been true in 1980 but there are many peer-reviewed papers that have plenty of evidence that support both sides the organic side and the conventional side, they exist. So, the statement's not true and I imagine most Canadians that were aware of that would pick up this publication and not feel trust after reading this. Next slide please.

The Irish potato famine a cautionary tale, in 1845 a strange disease struck the potatoes growing in the fields of Ireland almost one half of the crop was destroyed what later became known as potato blight was caused by a fungus at that time all farming was organic and there was nothing to be done to save the essential food crop by modern fungicides which greatly decreased the crops vulnerability to massive losses. This is a

clear case where modern agricultural practices increase the reliability and security of our food supply.” Now this is the one that stands out for me the most as a journalist because this to me is a complete misrepresentation of the Irish Potato Famine in this one paragraph here, I think, I would submit cancels out all of the good stuff within this publication that I think should be commended.

For one, the Irish Potato Famine was about so much more than just farmers not having access to modern technology. For one, potatoes aren't native to Ireland so we have an adaptability issue. Number two at the time of the Irish Potato Famine there was predominantly one variety of potato planted, the Lumper. So here, a complete lack of biodiversity and it was planted in such large numbers because yields were high for that variety. Unfortunately the Lumper was a little less nutritious than many other varieties, starting to sound like the modern day food system. Number three, the Irish Potato Famine was also an issue of inequality not so different from the inequality we see today and there was an abundance of food at the time of this famine it just wasn't making its way to the people who were starving it was getting put on boats for export. The Irish Potato Famine also struck the poor of Ireland, not the rich, and the poor grew potatoes as a staple because it was nutritious and cheap food and I can almost guarantee you that the poor of Ireland would not be able to afford modern day fungicides as this publication here suggests. Next slide.

“Hunger today is generally the result of political, economic and distribution problems not the lack of productive capacity. Globally more food per person is available more than ever before.” Now this is I believe the most commendable paragraph in this publication because for so long in the years I've been doing this I've heard the ongoing rhetoric from big agriculture that we need modern technology, more effective pesticide, more production to feed a growing global population. This statement here seems to be representing the truth. Next slide please.

Unfortunately a few pages later this statement: “One thing is certain if we are to feed growing human populations while preventing damage to ecosystems in natural processes on which all life depends, agriculture must continue to advance.” And this is in the context of technology, so we have two sides here. Next slide.

This is the last one I'll use here: “Activists of any kind are not usually interested in finding solutions but prefer to focus on problems and dramatic examples to generate funds and support.” And I would beg to differ. Next slide.

This is an image here taken in July of last year 2008 in the Creston Valley of British Columbia and on the left of the screen there or on the right are a group of activists and on the left is Roy Lawrence a third generation farmer. These activists here in this picture are members of Canada's first Community Supported Agriculture projects or CSA for grain and CSA's are a popular model and increasingly being adopted by Canadians in many communities from coast to coast to coast. Most often for vegetables but this particular model here in this image is for grain. They're standing in a field of Khorasan wheat, which most often is referred to as Kamut but in this case it's not the trademark.

Now in many cases CSA's are simply informal co-ops, members of a community get together and essentially become members of a farm. In the case of the grain CSA's seen here residents of Nelson and Creston BC reached out to farmers and they said we want to access locally grown grain and we want to ensure you as a farmer get paid fairly. Three farmers in the Creston Valley immediately said yes and all of these three farmers came from very different backgrounds, very diverse backgrounds. Roy here, for example is a third generation farmer who had long been growing conventionally until the transportation costs in 2007 had gotten so high he wasn't really seeing a future in farming much anymore. In came the CSA and absolutely wiped out that cost. I'll show you an image in a second on how we did that. And for him the CSA provided a way for him to also transition out of conventional growing into more natural growing which is something he wanted to do as a farmer.

The CSA model for this project looks like this at the beginning of the season so this is last spring 180 members invested in a share worth \$100 dollars along with one business, a bakery who invested in 20 shares, and members were told that each share would be worth 100 pounds of locally grown grains grown using organic principles. And so here's the mark difference of the CSA model to the one our food system is built upon today because the members are now assuming the risks of farming because if yields are lower than expected the farmers still going to receive the same amount of money invested by the members, the member just may receive lower yields which is exactly what happened this year. Because so many of those middle men in the process are being taken out there's this direct connection between the farmer and the consumer. Because the CSA covered seed costs, bagging costs and marketing and transport were being taken care of all by the CSA these farmers walked away in the first year of this project with \$1000 per acre to be put towards their time, taxes and other miscellaneous expenses. And remember no off arm inputs were used.

Now, Roy here for example only grew 5 acres this year for the CSA but he has a 160 acre farm and has every intention to turn his whole farm into production for the CSA once the CSA grows. And the CSA for next year is going to triple in size. Next slide please.

So this is where we started to eliminate transportation costs this generated so much interest within the community that a group of sailors came forward and said we want to sail the grain from Creston to Nelson. Creston and Nelson happen to be on Kootenay Lake and I believe it's the second largest lake in British Columbia. And this was just huge outpouring of support from the community to come and do this.

That's Drew Gailius that's another one of the farmers loading some of his grain. Next slide please.

This is now back in Nelson where CSA members came out and unloaded the grain from the boats. Next slide.

An image of the excitement with children coming out and seeing the whole process of getting their grain from one place in the Creston Valley, to their home. Next slide.

And a lot of media coverage media is really starting to pay attention to this stuff, not just me. Next slide.

This is the front of a flyer for the celebratory event we had in the community well funded by some of our local foundations and businesses. Next slide.

This is on the left the Western Producer November 13<sup>th</sup> talking about the CSA, starting to get into some of the big agricultural publications. And on the right, Globe and Mail article in May about the CSA. Next slide please.

That's an article I authored there on the left in Small Farm Canada and on the right this is a smaller publication out of Regina that did a whole issue on all of these food movements and a lot of it talked about the up and coming farmers the young farmers.

So what about dairy? I'm going to quickly just talk about dairy. I want to give one quick dairy example of what's happening in my neck of the woods in Nelson BC just as an example. The closest fluid milk producer in Nelson is over 320 kilometers away. The closest organic fluid milk producer, certainly a growing market, is twice that distance away in the lower mainland of BC. And in terms of cheese, as an example, within a four hour radius around my community there is only one cheese maker or there was one cheese maker up until just recently. Next slide.

So this was just constructed last year this is Kootenay Alpine Cheese in Lister, which is also in the Creston Valley, owned by the Harris family. And the herd here on this farm numbers around 160. And the food for the herd is almost entirely grown on the farm in fact Wayne Harris has been coming out to the CSA meetings because of how inspiring he finds the CSA meetings to be as almost a small scale supply management system as he calls it. If you sit down with Wayne he's incredibly optimistic he's seen his cheese sales over the past few months and he doesn't hesitate to say that the reason his cheese is becoming so successful is thanks to this growing interest in supporting farmers, supporting local food, supporting in his case organic. People are craving local food. I sat down with Wayne before I left for Edmonton where I just came from, arrived this morning. I sat down with him and talked about why and how he got into this and he had said that he's interested in producing fluid milk but for him the cost to construct a processing facility in the community is just far too high but the demand is clearly there. So he instead opted to construct a cheese making facility that you're seeing in this picture here in order to keep his milk in the community and that was his intention was to keep the milk in the community instead of transporting it to whatever processing facility was taking it at that time and for him that's either 600 kilometres west or 1,100 kilometres to the east.

One thing that I've observed that is certain, and I think this is an important point here, is that with this growing interest from urban population especially with the environmental

impact of their food, when they hear statistics like this they will become much more interested not only to support local producers and keeping their product in the local community but maybe even looking for alternatives instead of supporting those products if they don't exist. When they do find out that the miles are attached to this and most consumers again don't understand the supply management system, they don't understand how milk can be pooled and go from one place to another but consumers are starting to understand these things. And quickly that logo on the right there's an interesting story but I won't get into it is a new logo, or a new branding, that's started in the community which is a local label and it's a group of certified organic farmers that are now moving beyond organic recognizing that for a whole host of reasons I won't get into that they need to move beyond organic and so this is an interesting example of another movement of farmers.

I can stand up here and talk about all the examples of these interesting models happening, about this movement of food security, you see the media coverage here it is starting to come here to Ottawa. Just a few weeks ago I sat in on an online summit with Liberal MP's Caroline Bennett and Wayne Easter on the topic of food security this was the first talk of its kind that I had ever heard of, the Liberal Party addressing this subject. And the idea of this e-summit was to start a dialogue towards working towards a food policy something we don't have in this country and I think the summit started off on a pretty fitting note because one of the speakers that was supposed to be part of this e-summit was the Public Health Officer of British Columbia Perry Kendal and he wasn't able to attend because of that Avian Flu outbreak that happened that day in Abbotsford BC.

Last summer the NDP hosted a similar tour going across the country hearing about food security that was Member of Parliament Alex Atamanenko with the idea that the NDP would develop a food policy that they could bring to Ottawa. And as a quick aside, the Grain CSA that I was just showing you images of was mentioned in the House of Commons back in April of 2008 when there was the debate over Bill C-33 on bio-fuels. There's a group right here in Ottawa, Food Secure Canada they just hosted their conference a few months ago 300 plus people from all across the country coming to talk about this same topic of creating a national food policy and so something's happening.

*Jon Steinman:* This is Deconstructing Dinner, produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman. Today's broadcast is archived on our website at [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca) and posted under the May 7<sup>th</sup> 2009 episode. On that page you'll also find the series of slides that were used as part of the talk you've been listening to. The talk was recorded on February 5<sup>th</sup> 2009 at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa at the annual policy conference of the Dairy Farmers of Canada. The Dairy Farmers are likely the most influential of all agricultural commodity groups in the country and Deconstructing Dinner and yours truly was invited to share how the urban perspectives of food and agriculture are changing. Used as a foundation for the talk was a publication released in 2006 and republished in 2007 by the Ontario Farm Animal Council in partnership with all commodity groups from across the country including receiving support from trade associations and government. The purpose of using that

publication, as was heard, was to critically analyze (or deconstruct) the messages that Canada's commodity sectors are communicating to Canadians in light of the rapidly growing interest by urban populations to know where their food is coming from and how it was produced. The glossy magazine style publication titled, *The Real Dirt on Farming* was widely distributed including as an insert in the Globe and Mail back in November 2008. A link to the full publication will also be made available on the Deconstructing Dinner website.

And to conclude my talk, I ended with a slide of a website for, Home on the Range Raw Milk Dairy – a cow sharing program in Chilliwack, BC that has been using the shareholder model as a means to circumvent the strict laws *against* the sale of raw milk.

*Jon Steinman at Conference:* And I'm going to rush through the next slide. This is another thing that is also happening, of course we hear all the news about Michael Schmidt, this is the farm in Chilliwack that is a similar story they're also in a legal dispute right now. They have a different model I'm not going to get into the details just for sake of time. They have 300 members, it's a cow sharing program similar to CSA's and they believe that they'll win in May they'll be in court and they believe they're able to find, again I don't have the details for this, some of the wording in the BC Milk Act that will help support the existence of what they're doing. I just wanted to throw that up because again this something else that there's a lot of movement around, raw milk, you look south of the border many states allow it. There are viable industries of raw milk, small scale. Although in California there are some larger dairies there.

So in closing, I think my message to the Dairy Farmers of Canada is this: I'm suggesting to embrace these innovative ideas and explore just how a group with a powerful a voice as you have can encourage the spread of food sovereignty, of local food security and more diverse food systems. Because I don't think any sector, and I think this was touched on a bit in the last talk, should be putting all of there eggs in one basket. In the case of eggs, to go on that analogy, 98% are produced using the same model and most of those hens in those barns are of the same breed. And I would say this is a recipe for disaster and when you start to look at more localized or regional food systems those don't lead to nationwide food recalls as much as were seeing today.

And on the topic of that food policy one thing I do no is certain from watching how this food movement has evolved as much a it has and I think I kind of came on board with this stuff right when the 100 mile diet was really starting to enter into the radar. One thing I know is certain is that there will be a food policy in this country, it could be in a few years it could down the road but it is going to happen and there no doubt that within that food policy will be supports for the encouragement of local food systems regional food systems throughout the country, I believe that to be true. And is it all possible? Well anything's possible, according to the bailouts both here in Canada and abroad there is a lot of money to be thrown towards keeping our economy in check to keeping it healthy. A diversified economy of resilient local economy seems to spell out a much greater security than any models that we see today.

I was just in Edmonton at International Week on the topic of Global Food they also had their first Local Food Security Conference the week before. Frances Moore Lappé the author of *Diet for a Small Planet* was there she's the keynote speaker. And she opened up with an interesting quote and I'm going to end on that quote, "it's not what we seek in evidence but what we achieve through action." And I think some of those models that I was putting up and many more really prove that to be true and thanks for your attention I imagine there are some eager questions and comments. Thanks. (clapping)

*JS:* And that concluded my talk delivered at the annual policy conference of the Dairy Farmers of Canada recorded on February 5<sup>th</sup> 2009 in Ottawa.

## **soundbite**

*JS:* And to take us to the end of today's episode of Deconstructing Dinner, we'll check in with some recordings from an event that nicely ties in to the subject of the talk you just heard. Just as that talk sought to capture the growing interest among Canadians to support alternative models for producing and distributing food, on April 18<sup>th</sup> a rally was held in front of the British Columbia Legislature in Victoria titled, The Farms, Farmers and Food Security Rally. The intention of the rally was to raise awareness of the many underreported concerns around food and agriculture leading up to British Columbia's May 12<sup>th</sup> provincial election.

One of the co-organizers of the event was Tom Henry – the editor of the national bi-monthly magazine, *Small Farm Canada*. I caught up with Tom after the event and he painted a picture of the scene on April 18<sup>th</sup> in front of the BC Legislature.

*Tom Henry:* You know we had something driving around the perimeter of the Legislature on a tractor on a trailer making all sorts of classic hooting and tooting kind of sounds, that was great fun. We had some 60's era people, professional protestors showing up with good signage and weird hats and stuff and then we had some young people that brought that real useful sensibility that's really refreshing to see in discussions related to agriculture and somebody even brought along a few seed potatoes and tried to plant them in the legislative tulip beds, the security guys dealt with that pretty quick but that was really neat to see sort of your classic polite Canadian anarchists.

*JS:* Just as Tom describes the contingent of young farmers and local food advocates at the rally, the *other* co-organizer of the April 18<sup>th</sup> rally was Jordan Marr – a young farmer from East Sooke who lent his voice to the show as part of our April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008 episode.

*Tom Henry:* Jordan is really the catalyst behind it, I was his second in command and happy to be. Jordan as a smart young guy who's really interested in farming and food security who really feels that the negative situation were in, and I mean outrageous land prices, a commodity driven agriculture situation, a collapsing agricultural infrastructure. He saw that we're talking about 4-6 lane freeway through Delta, car shootings in downtown Vancouver. He saw that we're talking about unemployment in the woods you

know all worthy things for an election discussion but no mention of food, no mention of food at all. No mention of food security and local production and I would just add to that a couple of startling notes from my own perspective. One is seeing the collapse of Vancouver Island from an absolute agricultural powerhouse in the 1930's and 40's, which I was aware of because of my family connections and some historical work I've done. And perhaps most shockingly a comment that former MLA Corky Evans from your neck of the woods said to me at a lunch one day, "you know in all my years in government and in opposition and at meetings we never ever used the word food in it's context of a political issue."

*Jordan Marr:* This rally was organized because we know there are many British Columbians concerned about agriculture and food security in this province. Unfortunately this concern has not been reflected in the actions of our Provincial government. Instead for decades support for agriculture has declined under successive Liberal and NDP governments. This event is called, The Farms, Farmers and Food Security Rally and before I introduce our first speaker I think I should define food security. A basic definition is that food security is a measure of a community's access to affordable healthy food.

So what does that look like in practice? It means making sure BC will have enough young people interested in farming to replace BC's aging farmers as they retire. It means managing an agricultural land reserve so that it actually protects farmland and keeps land affordable for those who want to farm it. (*clapping*) It means creating localized food systems that flourish and not just for vegetables. Our current meat slaughter regulations are severely hampering the trade in local meat and are to be frank disgraceful. (*clapping*) Food security means farmers markets within a reasonable drive of every BC citizen and food banks that stock an ample supply of fresh produce for those most in need. Most importantly it means a stand-alone ministry of agriculture that recognizes the value of BC's farmers and supports them to the same degree that Canada's other provinces do. BC currently ranks dead last in Canada for agriculture in terms of financial support from the BC government. It is time for this to change. (*applause*)

For the next 45 minutes or so you will hear speeches by members of the food and agriculture communities on the island and abroad. As well we have invited representatives from the Greens, NDP and Liberals to share their vision for food and agriculture in BC.

And now to officially start the rally I would like to invite Brent Warner to the microphone. Brent is the Executive Director of Farmer Markets Canada he also runs his own agriculture production and marketing company that works with the individual farmers and governments to assist the farming industry across North America. He was the industry Agri-tour and Marketing Specialist with the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands for 27 years. His career spans over 30 years of working with farm families across North America. Please join me in welcoming Brent Warner. (*applause*)

*Brent Warner:* Thank you. Thanks for coming. Today we now have the cheapest food in the world in North America we spend less than 10% of our disposable income on our food system and with that we have serious issues. We've created an agriculture industry that is basically split into two. We have a large scale agriculture industry and direct marketing/direct sales industry I'll talk briefly about the large scale industry or the commodity industry.

Created in the 50's we had several large commodity agriculture industries in this province and across this country. Currently Canadian live stock industry is basically a commodity industry of almost 44% of the revenue coming from commodity producers. In this province we have a successful nursery industry greenhouse vegetable and flower industry. All of which are very very tenuous based on our huge cost structure in this province with labour and water issues. Some of our other industries in agriculture have not fared very well since free trade. Our processing vegetable industry which used to be very large in the Fraser Valley as of right now the last processing vegetable packer in British Columbia, Snow Crest Packers has closed we will lose thousands of acres of processing vegetables this year because there's no where to send them. So, the processing vegetables we will be eating will be coming from outside of this province. The other industry we have is the direct sales industry that all of you participate in. This year as Director of a national organization called Farmers Markets Canada we did a survey of all consumers across the country. Over 5,000 surveys were done 81% of consumers believed that the food they buy from direct sales producers like yourself is as safe or safer than anything they can buy at a grocery store, 81%. And in another survey just released farmers rated number 3 behind doctors and nurses as to who consumers trust, at over 93%. Consumers trust food that they buy from a farmer, they want to know their food producer. The BC Association of Farmers Markets last year contributed 118 million dollars to local economies in BC without a single dollar of support from any government agency.

Consumers when they go to farmers market spend on average \$30 per visit that's based on our national survey at the market they also spend \$18 on average at surrounding business. Farmers markets are economic redevelopment engines for rural Canada or urban Canada and we should be supporting the development of farmers markets as Jordan said in every community.

What has happened to the Canadian Agriculture Industry in this time period where we split into two groups is that we've lost the family farm in the middle. The family farm that used to be able to sell their products wholesale and survive is gone. And that's particularly obvious in this province if we look at the Okanagan apple industry which is a mere shadow of its former self that used to be there in the 70's which by the way the BC Ministry of Agriculture had 10 extension agents in the Okanagan Valley and now have none. During that time that BC government continued to reduce the support for agriculture, as Jordan has said, to the point we are now dead last in this country even behind Newfoundland. Our average is 4% against the national average of 14%. Yeah it's so funny it's almost sad that Newfoundland supports agriculture better than British

Columbia where we have the best climate in the country and the best soil in the country. We can produce more commodity crops than anywhere on the continent.

*JS:* This is Deconstructing Dinner. That was just some of the talk delivered by Brent Warner at the April 18<sup>th</sup> Farms, Farmers and Food Security rally held on the grounds of the British Columbia Legislature in Victoria. Brent's entire talk will be available on the Deconstructing Dinner website at [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca)

Also at the event was Linda Geggie of the Lifecycles Project Society – a nonprofit organization dedicated to cultivating awareness and initiating action around food, health, and urban sustainability in the Greater Victoria community.

*Jordan Marr:* And now folks were going to have just a few more minutes of speeches. We have a few speakers that are going to be speaking to specific policy needs or reforms that we'd like to see with our next government. So please join me in welcoming Linda Geggie to the stage. Linda is the founder of Lifecycles and coordinator of Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Round Table. Also on the board of the BC Food Systems Network, she lives in Saanich and raises bees, chickens and grows shiitake mushrooms.

*Linda Geggie:* Hey everybody. What a glorious day and I'm so happy to see friends and fellow workers and farmers out here today. So who's a farmer? Put up your hand. Okay everyone who's an eater turn and hug your farmers. Let's have a huggin out here. So food for thousands of years we've known that food is sustenance, food is medicine. What's happened? Where are we now? I had a meeting with Doctor Stanwick, Chief Medical Health Officer. We have an epidemic going on right now with Type 2 Diabetes were going to open new hospital wings in Nanaimo and in this area and there going to be filled the minute the doors open. This is about lifestyle and this is about the food we eat. I'm a mom and I shutter to see what is in the lunches of other kids in my school. And I know that were busy and were trying our best but our options are limited to get local food, our options are limited to get healthy food, were faced with the cheap food culture that believes that you can get things all year round and that everything on the shelves is safe for you. Were eating more fat, more sugar, more salt in our diets and it's killing us, it's literally killing us. My Uncle Ian, dad's brother, died last week of diabetes these things are hitting home to me in a way that its personal and we really need to do something about it. We've had our representatives here speaking to you today about the things that they're going to do. Food is a non-partisan issue and what I want to say today is I want everybody getting out we have one month before the election. I want you going and talking to your friends about why food is important. The grocery store shelves are full, yes, but there's a really bad invisible problem going on were losing our farmers were losing our infrastructure and we can't afford it now we cant afford to look a hundred years down the road and think about what its going to look like when we lose our land and we lose our farmers. I loved what Brent said about all the positive things happening, people are reclaiming a taste for food; they understand that it's an important part of our culture. Agriculture, it's in everyone, we all eat.

JS: Lifecycles Project Society's Linda Geggie.

And the last clip to explore from the event touches on the *election* focus of the rally. Of course British Columbian's will be going to the polls on May 12<sup>th</sup> and rally organizers Jordan Marr and Tom Henry invited members of all three major political parties running in this election. The Green Party's Adam Saab addressed the few hundreds in attendance and so did candidate Linda Popham of the NDP. Both of their talks will be available on the Deconstructing Dinner website, but here's a quick clip of Jordan Marr speaking of the response they received from the current party controlling the Legislature, BC's Liberals.

*Jordan Marr:* Now is the time that I should be introducing to you a representative of the BC Liberal Party. For a month now we have been sending invitations to our most recent Minister of Agriculture Ron Cantelon, the Liberal Party Head Office and to individual Liberal candidates. Unfortunately the Liberals have declined to send a representative. I think their absence speaks much about the party's commitment to food and agriculture in BC.

JS: Jordan Marr, a farmer from East Sooke, British Columbia speaking on April 18<sup>th</sup> 2009 in Victoria at the Farms, Farmers and Food Security rally. A collection of unedited recordings from the event will be made available on the Deconstructing Dinner website at [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca) and posted under the May 7<sup>th</sup> 2009 episode. And a thanks to Jordan for organizing the *recording* of the event in order for Deconstructing Dinner to bring these important recordings to the Canadian public.

Of course with the topic of food security becoming of increasing interest nationwide, there will likely be many more similar rallies hosted as part of *other* provincial elections, and if you're one of those people interested in being part of hosting such a rally, there is a web-only recording from my interview from Tom Henry who shares his suggestions to any other groups across Canada who might hold a food security rally in their own community. And again, you can check out that recording posted under the May 7<sup>th</sup> 2009 episode.

### **ending theme**

JS: 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](http://deconstructingdinner.ca) or by dialing 250-352-9600.