

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

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Title: Pedal-Powered Groceries in Vancouver / Tom Stearns on Hardwick, VT

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Transcript: Ruth Taylor**

Jon Steinman: Welcome to Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly radio show and podcast which is *usually* recorded at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia but today, has been recorded at CKDU, Halifax, Nova Scotia... one of the 37 Canadian radio stations currently airing Deconstructing Dinner each week. I'm Jon Steinman.

Just before Deconstructing Dinner hit the road for our east coast tour, we spoke with a young entrepreneur from Vancouver who was involved in an innovative pedal-powered project this past summer that also inspired him to launch his own pedal-powered grocery delivery business. In the first half of the show, we'll hear from Martin Gunst of Grocer Gunst and he'll also speak to us about the MarketCargo project that he participated in which offered market-goers at Vancouver farmers markets an *option* to have their farm-fresh foods transported from the market to their home.... by bicycle!

And in the second half of the show, the first of our recordings from our east coast tour, although with this one, featuring Vermont's Tom Stearns – the President of High Mowing Seeds – a successful organic seed business based in the small community of Hardwick. Both Tom and I shared the podium at Acadia University where we spoke to an audience on the challenges facing our food system and more importantly, the innovative responses to those challenges, which, in Hardwick, seem to be both plentiful and successful.

increase music and fade out

The increasing popularity of urban farmers markets has also been accompanied by increasing challenges for market-goers, which, among them... is finding parking! Now it's probably safe to conclude that the accessibility challenges of some markets might limit the *quantity* of foods being sold at the market. And then there are the walkers and cyclists... those who are traveling to the market without much capacity to haul a large load of groceries home.... well....in comes Martin Gunst...an enthusiastic and passionate 21 year old student at the University of British Columbia (UBC) who participated in a unique summer employment project known as MarketCargo In partnership with the UBC bike co-op, Martin offered his pedal-powered services to market patrons using an 8-

foot steel bicycle trailer. Martin Gunst spoke to Deconstructing Dinner over the phone from Vancouver.

Martin Gunst: I am 21 years old from California. I grew up in the San Francisco bay area and I came to Vancouver after I graduated from high school. I came up to UBC it was 2004 at the time and I was concerned about a potential draft, a military draft in the United States, and I didn't any part of that so I came up North and I've been going to UBC for four years.

MarketCargo is a project of the UBC bike co-op. So, I got to know Kevin Cooper who's the president of the bike co-op. I'm an avid cyclist I ride my bike to school everyday I like cycling for fun. MarketCargo, the concept was from Kevin Coop and the bike co-op applied for a grant from the federal government from HRDC their Canada summer jobs program which they can hire a full-time student for a full time position for the summer-time. And they received one of those grants to run this project and I was hired to be the co-coordinator for MarketCargo. So it was not actually my concept but I helped develop it and push it out, with Kevin. What exactly we would do... so market cargo ended up being a project that aimed at helping support local farmers and consumers who all support local farmers. We offered a home delivery home service by bicycle from two of the four local farmers markets in the summer in Vancouver. People would come to the farmers market do their shopping and then leave their groceries with us and we would cycle their groceries to their home for them. The aim was that with this service people could more easily leave their cars at home when they came to the farmers market this way they wouldn't be limited to how much they could carry home if they were cycling or walking or taking transit. A lot of people may be new to bicycling and they want to bike to the farmers market but they also want to buy a whole weeks worth of produce and they cant carry that on their back without squishing it or they cant fit it all on their panniers. So the UBC bike co-op has a fleet of cargo bicycles we have big trailers, long tail bikes, very large panniers where we can put bins on the back and we can carry ice coolers on the backs of these bikes so we can carry meat and fish and more sensitive bicycles home for people without damaging them. We did that and also as an incentive to also get people to bike to the farmers market cause we were from the UBC bike co-op we also offered free bicycle tune ups for market patrons neither Kevin nor I nor our volunteers were professional mechanics but we're all pretty apt at fixing bikes and so we offered basic tune ups services we would pump up tires align derailleur, tighten and align brakes. We definitely drew a lot of people to our table and to our services with that.

Jon Steinman: With the infrastructure and interest already in place to be transporting food using bicycles and trailers, Martin Gunst also did deliveries each week for the University of British Columbia's farm which operates a community supported agriculture (or CSA) box program. Martin even extended his services to help support a new urban farming *business*, which similar to our recent feature on Nelson Urban Acres, does not own a motorized vehicle.

Martin Gunst: and then with MarketCargo we also did deliveries for the UBC farm for their CSA program. All of the deliveries on the west side of Vancouver every Saturday

we would delivery those boxes to peoples houses. Where as previously they would not deliver to these people everybody who had a CSA share would come to the farm to the UBC farm on Saturdays to pick up their boxes I think generally driving because the farm is kind of a ways away. You have to cross the endowment lands and go up a hill. We had I think six deliveries every Saturday so those were six fewer car trips being made every Saturday.

And then there's one other part of the project which is there was an urban farm centre on 57th and Cambie. It was a new urban farm this was their first harvest season and they sold their produce at only one farmers market, one each week, and Kevin and I cycled all of their produce and all of there market gears their tents, tables, chairs, tablecloths and signs down to the farmers market every Wednesday and then back up to the farm on Wednesday evenings. So, they were able to operate completely car free the whole summer. All the farmers none of them have cars they are 5 women who work the land there and during the week to do their farming work they would all cycle to the farm but on Wednesdays they were going to need a van or find some form of automated transportation to get the produce there if hadn't have been for Kevin and I.

Jon Steinman: Now it's quite the new idea to offer bicycle delivery services to customers of a farmers' market, which was the focus of the summer MarketCargo project. And so MarketCargo worked with the vendors to help inform market customers of the pedal-powered transportation option.

Martin Gunst: We had little quarter sheet flyers that we had left with all of the farm vendors we had talked to the farm venders to let them know about our service and about how our service could benefit them. Because there are a lot of people who come to farmers markets on their bikes and may choose to buy less then they would have if they weren't on their bikes because they can't carry a whole flat of apricots for canning or cant carry meat that needs to be on ice home with them. And so we told the farm vendors about our service and left these quarter sheet flyer next to the cash boxes at the vendors tables and market patrons would see our flyers. Otherwise we would try to yell at people across the market at our table and attract people to our tables the best we could and we definitely did get to talk to a lot of people cause seeing bike tune ups being done at the farmers market is not something people are accustomed to and so we definitely drew a lot of attention that way. We had our large cargo bicycles prominently displayed next to our tables which a lot of people I learned had never even heard about or a lot of the people had never seen a cargo bike so we definitely drew a lot of attention to ourselves that way.

Jon Steinman: Martin Gunst.

The idea of offering pedal-powered delivery service at a farmers' market does of course seem like an option that would likely catch on, especially among regular customers... but MarketCargo did *not* receive a level of interest that both Martin and Kevin were hoping for...

Martin Gunst: As far as the deliveries went I would say our success was moderate. We would do on average I would say 2-6 deliveries each Market. Kevin and I were both expecting it to be, at the beginning of the summer, to be doing more than that but that was as many as we got. We had a few regular customers there was one restaurant in particular who we would actually do deliveries for every week quite a large volume of food prior to MarketCargo they would send the cook to the farmers market in a taxi and then they would take a taxi back to the restaurant with all their food. After they had heard about us they would send that cook to the farmers market on a bicycle and then we would bike that produce back to the restaurant for them so that eliminated the whole car trip ... we had around 2-6 deliveries each week. I think that people are perhaps not used to the concept of leaving their groceries with other people to take home for them it's not something that I had really seen anywhere. There were a lot of kind of seniors, older people, who would use our service I think they were more comfortable with the idea than young people who maybe the concept of self sufficiency is more important to them I'm not sure exactly what the reason for why we didn't have a very high demand for the home delivery service was. I know that our service was good we never failed to make any deliveries we never damaged any goods we had no bad reviews from anybody. I would say our success with deliveries was moderate.

Jon Steinman: Certainly one of the challenges also faced by MarketCargo was the lack of diversity in foods found at the market.... Even with the rising popularity of farmers markets across North America, there is still a challenge for customers to access *all* of their grocery needs at one market and therefore less interest in the idea of bicycle delivery services. The Vancouver markets where MarketCargo was set up are an example of this, where there is little to no options for items like meat and dairy and other staple foods. And so it's the prospect of perhaps these markets expanding the diversity of the foods offered being among other reasons that gives him hope that MarketCargo will be more successful next year and he believes the service will continue to be offered.

Martin Gunst: As far as next year I think the project is going to happen again next year. We were not able to come up with a better way this summer of marketing the project. What I hope that came out of the project if it was not so much that we were actually changing peoples behavior from a week to week basis to reusing our service was that we were showing people what was possible to do with bicycles. That it was possible to carry to do all of one's shopping on a bicycle to carry even an entire farms worth of food and all of their gear to the market. I hoped that we were inspiring people to think more seriously about using their bicycles for self sufficiency and not feeling like they need to rely on cars for anything other than the most basic shopping needs so I'm hoping that kind of in the long run people will start thinking of bicycles in a more different way than they had potentially before, as kind of leisure tools.

Jon Steinman: On today's episode of Deconstructing Dinner, we're hearing from Vancouver's Martin Gunst – a 21 year old student at the University of British Columbia who last year participated in the MarketCargo project which among other services, offered bicycle delivery services to customers at a number of Vancouver farmers' markets. A link to more information on MarketCargo including photographs of Martin

and the 8-foot bike trailers being used is posted on the Deconstructing Dinner website at deconstructingdinner.ca and listed under the October 1st 2009 episode.

Now the MarketCargo project was only operating on a few days of the week, leaving some time available for Martin Gunst to concoct yet another innovative idea using a similar philosophy. Martin launched Grocer Gunst – a pedal-powered grocery delivery business offering farm-fresh foods to customers in the city of Vancouver. The idea is certainly one that could be applied in any city as even today with the rising interest to support more responsibly produced foods, it's still difficult to access those foods close to home. This is exactly what inspired Martin to launch Grocer Gunst.

Martin Gunst: it was actually Karl Hann's eggs which I grew accustomed to eating every week when I was working with Sprouts we would get eggs from him. It was some time towards the end of the school year last year I wasn't at school that day and I needed eggs and I went to my local grocery store, an IGA in town, and that was in Vancouver and I bought the free range organic eggs. And I took them home and I made myself an omelette or something like that and I just noticed that the eggs did not taste nearly as rich and as full as the eggs that I had gotten from Karl all year had. The yolks were not as rich in color the yolks were whitish and the whites were thinner the eggs didn't hold together as well when I cooked them and I realized that I didn't want to go back to eating these standard store bought eggs. I really wanted to continue eating good high quality eggs and I didn't really know where to find them in town. So I called up Karl and I asked if he would start delivering eggs to my house. He agreed that he would and I set up an egg buying cooperative amongst people that I know. I had around 30 people come to my house every week to pick up their eggs and I was selling them for pretty much no mark up. I was making 25 cents on a dozen just to get my eggs for free basically for my troubles and the egg co-op became very popular. And so I started buying produce from Karl as well and people really like the produce its very high quality stuff that you otherwise have to go to a farmers market to get and a lot of people can't always make it to the farmers market you know in the morning on the weekends its out of peoples ways and I remembered the success of the Sprouts box which was the home produce delivery service by bicycle initiative that I helped start with Sprouts last year. And I figured why not do the same thing I know that a lot of people really like good fresh produce they don't always have time to go to the farmers markets and it's hard to find produce of that quality in conventional grocery stores. So it started out with produce just from Biota Farm from Karl and talking with Karl I started to learn about biodynamic farming and I became very interested in the concept behind the farming and I got in contact with other biodynamic farmers and started grocery Gunst. I started buying biodynamic produce every week and putting up posters around town and putting hand bills in local cafes and pretty soon I had a bunch of regular customers and I had my own business and I was self supporting this summer for the first time.

Jon Steinman: Martin Gunst.

Regular listeners of Deconstructing Dinner might be familiar with the source of Grocer Gunst produce and eggs as Biota Farm has been featured on the show on two occasions

including one of our first broadcasts back in January 2006 and then once again when we recorded Karl Hann offering a workshop on the importance of microorganisms and that episode aired in April 2008.

Now for Martin, it worked out well to be at the market offering the MarketCargo service there because the market also then became the distribution point for the farmers supplying Martin for his Grocer Gunst business. From the market, Martin would transport his food to a space run by the Toast Collective – a collectively-run space in Vancouver that helps build capacity in the community by hosting and facilitating do it yourself projects & workshops.

And then, once a week, Martin distributes that food to his customers.

Martin Gunst: During the height of the summer I had around 15-17 deliveries every Monday. Right now I have like 10-15 on a weekly basis most of them are regular customers who have been with me through the majority of the summer or from whenever they heard about me. Each week in a box there are usually between 6 and 9 items depending on the size of the box that you order from me. I have a small, medium and large box sizes and all of them with or without eggs. A medium box will generally have 8 or 9 different items in them between 1-3 fruits and then the rest are vegetables and it really depends on what is being harvested by these farmers each week. It's like the CSA box which probably many of your listeners know about in which a person is a shareholder in a farm harvest and they get in their weekly box whatever is being harvested that week. And so, I'm buying from actually 4-5 farms each week and so I get perhaps a bit more variety than a CSA shareholder would in my box but I'm still limited by you know... these are all very small farms so every week there's a degree of uncertainty as far as what is going to be harvested, the quantity of the vegetables that are going to be harvested and the quality. My small box is anywhere from 19-22 dollars a week and you get a pretty substantial amount of produce for say like 1 person if your living by yourself. The prices are comparable to what you would pay in the farmers market but your getting a home delivery service included in that price and see on August 24th a small box got a pound of pears, a pound of tomatoes, heirloom tomatoes, a half pound of blueberries, a pound of mixed beans, a pound of winter squash, two ears of corn and a bunch of radishes. You actually in many cases I think get more than what you pay you get more value for what you would pay at the farmers market for 22 dollars I don't think you would be able to get that much at the farmers market so I'm actually offering very competitive prices.

Jon Steinman: Grocer Gunst also offers grass-fed meat; organic chicken, organic fertilizers and Martin will also transport soil for any backyard gardeners in need.

Now it was inspiring to learn that Grocer Gunst is in a position to significantly expand its customer base which in part has been helped by Martin restricting his delivery area to a small area of the city. This introduces the importance of developing food security projects that are able to view individual communities within the larger urban community. So

often, food security work within cities tends to try and satisfy needs on a city-wide scale but Grocer Gunst has been successful by maintaining itself within what it sees as an appropriate scale.

Martin Gunst: I would be able to accommodate quite a few more customers if I had the interest. Right now I'm doing this one day a week throughout the whole summer and could probably easily accommodate 30 customers or more even in a day because I've limited the area to which I do my deliveries, its kind of central east Vancouver, I deliver from Cambie in the west out to Nanaimo in the east and then up to Hastings in the north and down to King Edward in the south. Because for the most part all of my customers are in a fairly concentrated area the number of boxes that I deliver I'm not really limited to how many customers I can accommodate because its not really far to bike it doesn't take much time to do a delivery itself what takes time is just getting out and covering distance to different deliveries and I have, because of this job with the MarketCargo, I've been able to use this eight foot long steel bicycle trailer all summer long in which I can carry I think 16 grocery boxes on one run so I can do quite a lot of deliveries without making to many loops over on my self. Last summer I worked as a bike courier so I have a fair amount of experience with routing myself through the city to find the most efficient path on my bicycle. I've been thinking a lot about next summer about expanding to other parts of the city. I've talked to a lot of people at the farmers markets about my project, about Grocer Gunst, and there was a lot of interest there but a lot of those people live outside of my delivery area with the way that my summer was set up this summer I couldn't really expand to more than one day a week and do more than the one neighborhood of the city that I've been servicing but I think hopefully next year I will be able to expand the project and cover more parts of the city and be able to reach more people with this produce.

Jon Steinman: And in closing out my conversation with Martin Gunst of Grocer Gunst, he shared yet another project that he'd like to work on for next year. Launching a community supported agriculture (CSA) project for Karl Hann of Biota Farm. Martin's interest to support Karl is an inspiring example of the passionate concern that urban eaters are beginning to have for their local farmers, and also how that concern can so easily be directed into action...

Martin Gunst: I'm hoping this winter to set up a CSA for Biota Farm which is the farm ran by Karl Hann. Over this past year I've become a friend of Karl's and I've gotten to know him and about his history as a farmer better. I know that he drives into the city of Vancouver two days a week and on those two days he is not working on his farm which is what he likes to do and what he should be doing. He works by himself he doesn't have hired help and so on those two days his farm is just sitting. His farm is a lot of work he's very I guess hardcore I would say about farming biodynamically he uses little to no mechanization. He does all of his own composting, fertilizing, planting, weeding, harvesting. His farm is set up in a very complex manner there are no identifiable rows on his farm his plants are all inter-planted amongst each other he has hundreds of varieties of plants, I only recognize a handful when I go put to his farm. His plants support themselves because of the biodiversity that you find on the farm. He uses no pesticide no

herbicide so the plants get a lot of vigor from being supported by the balance of nutrients and the harboring of pests and predators in the plants that are around them. And it's a lot of work to maintain hundreds of varieties of plants and to keep them in order and I know that he's had struggles with being able to do it all himself. And from what I understand about CSA's a farmer doesn't have to spend his or her time marketing his produce selling his produce going to farmers markets and not reliably being able to sell everything. With the CSA a farmer has all of his produce pre-sold at the beginning of the season so they can plant reliably exactly as much as they are going to sell and so they don't have to do more work than what they would otherwise have to do. I know Karl is often throwing out a lot of produce because he just can't find people to buy it and it's excellent produce that he grows and it's a real shame. So, I want to set up a CSA for him so that he doesn't have to spend his time commuting over the Port Mann Bridge and trying to sell his produce to restaurants and to people like me who are buying it. I want him to have a reliable income to have less risk for what he's planting I don't want him to risk not being able to sell what he grows and I want him to be able to do what he loves which is working with his plants and working on his farm. So, I want to set up a CSA for him so that he can do what he does best.

Jon Steinman: You can learn more about Grocer Gunst on-line at grocergunst.com and view some photographs on the Deconstructing Dinner website at deconstructingdinner.ca and posted under the October 1st 2009 episode

Jon Steinman: This is Deconstructing Dinner – a syndicated weekly radio show and podcast produced in Nelson British Columbia at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY however, today's episode has been recorded in Halifax, Nova Scotia at CKDU Dalhousie University where I recently spoke as a guest lecturer to an introductory course offered by the University's new College of Sustainability. The event marked the final leg of a Deconstructing Dinner speaking tour throughout Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and just before descending into Halifax; I spoke at Acadia University in Wolfville at an event hosted by the Acadia Community Farm, Friends of Agriculture Nova Scotia and BALLE Nova Scotia (otherwise known as the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies). As part of BALLE's launch here in the province, they invited Vermont's Tom Stearns to share his inspiring stories of not only his successful organic seed business – High Mowing Seeds, but also the story of Hardwick, Vermont, where Tom calls home. The small community has become a focal point of innovative food and agriculture initiatives, and following the first half of my talk in Wolfville which deconstructed a standard North American meal, Tom shared his thoughts on the current state of our industrial and globalized food system and how his community has responded.

Tom Stearns: I want just to give you a little introduction of my background so you kind of know where I'm coming from with this. I started a seed company, an organic seed company, as a hobby when I was 19 I began sharing seeds with people, helping pay my way through college, got a degree in sustainable agriculture. So, this hobby grew and expanded over those years and now it's a little bit bigger there's people there working right now so that I can be here coming to share some of our story. But I'm in a very unique area also; I'll tell you a little bit more about that. I wanted to first also talk a little

bit about how we got to this place, because we didn't plan on it this way, now maybe Cargill and some of the corporations have been acting perhaps for a hundred years with major strategy in mind to get us here. But you guys remember in 6th grade social studies class I don't know what you guys do up here in Canada; it's a mystery to all of us. Well okay, so I had Mrs. Brolls, the social studies teacher. I remember making dioramas in shoe boxes of hunters and gathers or early agriculturalists and learning about the dawn of agriculture and this may sound... it may jog some memory for you but the very first farming and the first act of farming and plowing the ground was done by priests this was a very sacred thing that was very carefully done and cared for. And the dawn of agriculture is something that at that time allowed culture to flourish, music, and art, government, and architecture all of that began to flourish much more when people had much more stable food supplies and could stay in one place and not be roaming all over the place following game or following the seasons and gathering food. So this is 10,000 years ago to 5000-6000 years ago. But even as much as a few thousand years ago we were still sending food all over the place now one of the things that Jon brought up that you guys are no doubt keenly aware of is that our food travels really far right now even a thousand year ago we were sending food 1000 miles 2000 miles away but it was things like salt and spices and sugar and for people who could afford it chocolate, coffee, tobacco, they were the accents to our meal they were not our staples of the meal they were the things that allowed us to preserve what we were producing locally. Salt for example is used to preserve so was sugar and the spices again made a lot of sense to transport these tiny little things and I think it still does now and it still will... but the staples my god how far have we come that were shipping drinking water all over the planet, your getting to such a core staple. And I don't know if this fact is true but I did hear last year that the amount of bottled water that was sold in the world would have been enough to solve the water issues, the drinking water issues for clean reliable drinking water, on a permanent basis for everybody on the planet that didn't have it. Just one year of bottled water sales. So it's really quite a different story that we've gotten into.

Okay, so then go back a couple hundred years, the industrial revolution, oil, and this beginning of shipping everything everywhere. Again we did not plan on doing it that way so what we now realize is this broken world food system is not something that we set about to figure out how to mess up so royally, but we certainly have. The biggest user of energy on the whole planet... and you think about some of the biggest issues today energy's clearly one, health cares a big one, climate change is another big one. Biggest user of energy on the planet is agriculture and the food system.

I had a friend who's a broccoli farmer in California and he shipped most of his broccoli to New York City. This is a big scale, not an organic guy; big big scale many thousands of acres of broccoli. It cost him 3 bucks to get a bushel of broccoli to New York City. That's 3 bucks for the broccoli, the box, and the shipping of that box so were talking about bushel of broccoli fresh in a refrigerated truck delivered 3000 miles for 3 bucks so when the price of oil last summer went to 145 bucks a barrel it cost him 11 bucks to get that same bushel of broccoli to New York City. His response was to buy land outside of NYC and he bought 5000 acres of land outside of New York City. He wasn't thinking of

doing this for any other reason than that this made sense if oil was going up he needed to be closer to the market, just made sense.

All the people who started going to farmers markets to buy locally produced spinach from people they trust when e. coli came in a couple of years ago this was a shift for them and there are many people that are shifting now. Not for maybe some of the reasons that die hard like all of us have been doing this already but many more reasons. New demographics new populations of people I can feel this consciousness shifting its happening in a big big way the challenge that a lot of us face especially these folks that are not within these circles as much is that they don't have very many good examples of what a healthy food systems actually look like. Now that they're awaking to the fact that it's broken so severely they don't have necessarily a farmers market that they can go to, they don't have an understanding of why its challenging to get local food into the local school lunch programs, and certainly its very rare that they might have a CSA in their town or a place that they can connect with local farmers. What you have at least in the United States and I imagine here as well is sort of a scattershot of cool things happening in agriculture around the country. You've got an interesting organization over here you've got flourishing farmers market in this town over here you've got a new piece of infrastructure like an incubator kitchen that's built so that people can come in and share the facility but they're scattered around. And one of the challenges is that the food system that we have that is so broken is systemically broken and the models that we need to help inspire us to do this better need to be systemically healthy models, not scattershot models. And so I am thrilled to hear about your region and to come here and visit this town and see any other places anywhere in the world that are ahead of the rest of us that can help lead the way towards this systemic healthy food system change.

So, I want to tell you a little bit about my community and some of the work that we're doing there but I guess first I just want to go back to one thing I mentioned how agriculture's the biggest user of energy on the whole planet. Well of course its the biggest user of water also its the biggest polluter of water too and I don't just mean the streams but I mean oceans and pollution in general. I don't just mean the diesel tractor that's spewing fumes out as it drives through the field but I mean climate change. Agriculture is the biggest contributor to climate change. And health... this big debate is happening south of the border here on health care and it absolutely drives me crazy and the main reason why it drives me crazy is because its all about health care and health insurance its not about health. CDC, which his the centre for disease control down in Atlanta Georgia, came out with a study a couple of months ago that said 70 percent of the people alive in the united states today are going to die from diet related illness, 70 percent. So that's... maybe we eat better than average here hopefully but that's a lot of people and that's not e. coli and salmonella poisoning and things like that that's diabetes and health care these are chronic long term things and these are things that are based on a life of eating a certain way. So, if you just change all of a sudden hopefully your body is resilient enough to be able to recover but in many cases a lot of things have been set in motion by how we have been eating for most of our lives.

So, here we have this global food system that is poisoning our air and water and land. That is sucking the diversity and the life out of our communities. That is giving us all the same boring diet. The trouble with having strawberries anytime you want them in the grocery store is that they always taste bad. They're never fresh, strawberries are fresh somewhere in the world, but in order to get them to you where you are they are picked not ripe. I mean, when the last time you actually had an out of season strawberry that was even worth eating? It's barely edible and same with many many other things. So instead of strawberry season being something... And you guys probably do this... When strawberry season comes in Vermont that's all I eat, a pint a day, we make strawberry this strawberry that whatever it is it's on everything, it's on steaks, it's on yogurt and then we move on to the next thing and celebrating these things and then in the winter time well... we've got to work with dairy and meat and all the things we preserve all year. But it's really wonderful to celebrate those things when they are fresh when they are there and not just have cardboard strawberries year round. And you'll notice this when a kid eats a real strawberry for the first time or a real tomato for the first time and if they've eaten grocery store strawberries and you see the look in their eye, or a grown up who's never eaten a real tomato, and you see the look in their eye and realize they're having this experience eating this thing its like this joy and sadness. The joy is: "oh my god I've never eaten a real tomato before, this is amazing" and the sadness is: "what have I been eaten that I thought was a tomato for my whole life" and that is a casualty of this broken food system is the fact that we don't even know what a real tomatoes taste like anymore and so we definitely don't know what a healthy food system looks like.

My town has a very interesting background and perhaps because it was passed over by so many other things a bit of a backwaters and perhaps the story may sound familiar to you. Janet and I were talking a lot on the way in this evening about the population, the rural distribution, the type of agriculture here; the size of the province is very similar to Vermont. Vermont has no cities it's got Burlington which 40,000 people, that's the biggest town in the whole state. It's the most rural state in the United States which by US definitions means the percentage of its population living in towns under 2,500. And so, in Vermont with only one city or town that's 40,000 your probably about 90 percent live in towns that are under 2,500 and Vermont's also pretty similar in size as maybe half the size of Nova Scotia, so you get a bit of a sense of it.

The town of Hardwick experienced a granite boom it had the biggest granite mines in the world in 1880-1930. And what happened in the 30's is the great depression came reinforced concrete was sort of coming into play a lot more and this granite nobody needed it anymore. And so, just like a big town that has a factory in it that employs most of the town and the factory leaves, Hardwick became a ghost town and this was in the 30's and pretty much by 1940 it was pretty empty. And again this is a community that now has 3,000 people. Back then the granite industry employed 14,000 people and so now it's a community that has 500 jobs in it so from 1940-1970 it was really rough and bad scene it was very poor, no jobs, no industry, nothing on main street was open there was just empty storefronts and it was subsistence people were working really hard they were logging, milking cows, farming, doing their things but it was a really hard time to

be living there and all the kids that grew up during that time got their butts worked off on the farms so hard and none of them wanted to farm.

Jon Steinman: Tom Stearns of High Mowing Seeds located in Hardwick, Vermont.

This is Deconstructing Dinner. Tom was recorded in September 2009 speaking in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. Today's episode is archived at deconstructingdinner.ca and posted under the October 1st, 2009 episode.

Here again, is Tom Stearns.

Tom Stearns: But an interesting thing happened. In the early seventies, fleeing Kent State, fleeing the Vietnam War, was a movement of back-to-the-landers. And Helen and Scott Nearing before that had moved and settled in Vermont and wrote their book, *The Good Life*, and many others and eventually moved on to Maine. But there was a big influx of very aspirational but inexperienced young people moving up to the kingdom; so this is a corner in Vermont that's called the Northeast Kingdom. So basically they went as far away as you could go and then they landed there and what they found was these hard but struggling intact communities but that were really hard and were very much struggling still but they had town meetings, which we still have in Vermont, they decided things as town, they took care of each other.

Vermont is this interesting thing in addition to being as rural... you all probably watch our presidential election and especially this last one and you see the red and blue things popping up as states win with one candidate or another... okay so you can look at the most rural states and they are all red. Vermont being the most rural state out of all 50 is the most blue, it's the most progressive and the most rural, completely opposite from any other pattern in the rest of the country. And so, you have this sort of Yankee independence that was sort of like this libertarian attitude of don't you dare tell me what to do infused with this community spirit. Probably because we have 6 months long winter, we're way the hell out there in the middle of nowhere, you don't know who your going to need to help pull you out of the ditch, or help you when you need a hand and this community spirit mixed with this independence creates this really exciting dynamic atmosphere where its like, "don't tell me what to do but I will do whatever you need to help you if you need me." And so, what you had is these young people moving up in the 70's meeting these native Vermonters that have been farming, whose own kids remember do not want to have anything to do with the farm, this is a generalization I'm making but you're starting to get the story here. So these young folks they don't know how to milk cows, they don't know how to cut firewood, they don't know how to plow, they don't know how to do any of this stuff and of course these native Vermonters this is what they've been doing their whole life and so they are teaching these back-to-the-landers but with them bring these crazy ideas like co-operatives and organic and growing vegetables and making yogurt and milking, god forbid, goats.

And so, into the hills was spiked with this very interesting assortment of excited people that had the same work ethic and so garnered the same respect from these traditional

Vermonters that were there. Now, they continued to grow and expand but many of them in fleeing the Vietnam War and fleeing many things didn't want to have as much to do with the bigger world. Business was bad, big was bad, profit was bad. So their businesses certainly did well and thrived but they didn't grow and they didn't have that ambition for them to grow. But even as long ago as about 15 years ago we had more organic farmers in our immediate area per capita than anywhere else in the world, so you had this really strong foundation. Now comes the mid 90's these back-to-the-landers and the Vermonters and everyone that was sort of feeling hopeful about this town again had been starting to have kids, of course, and these kids were in their twenties and started to take over the farm or start their own agricultural business but now there isn't so much of this profit is bad and big is bad. You can have a mission based business you can have a business that is connected to the community and it has this social environmental mission. And these are things that now we know as common but 30 years ago it was very incongruous and in many circles it's still very incongruous. So what you've got now is this new generation of food and agriculture based entrepreneurs that are growing their business's, remember I said that there were about 400-500 jobs in this town, well in the last 3 years about 150 new jobs have been created that are all value added agricultural jobs. The 4 biggest employers in our town are sustainable agriculture college, a creamery, an artisan cheese aging facility, and an organic seed company. So these are folks that are employing 30-50 people each so we're not talking about huge businesses but again this is something that I think what's appropriate for our area is these small medium sized business that are in the similar sector that can support and work with each other.

So what's been happening there is that we've begun to think about our food system in a very different way and so now we've got these graphics and these charts and these strategies around how to understand what a real healthy and food system looks like. Start with the soil, seeds, production, processing and distribution and transportation and then after it gets eaten wherever it gets eaten whatever scraps are leftover of course needs to get composted and back to the soil; this is a full biologic system. And so what we're striving to do is to identify where those gaps might be in that, poor energy and resources, in those and seek out the opportunities of either new business or new ventures that will dovetail well or that is already there or that fulfill a need that some of these other companies might already have that they're now getting from somewhere else.

And so because we have been thinking about this and talking about it and working on it in a strategic way and its been so collaborative and again I think because these little bugs like e. coli and salmonella have raised peoples awareness about this what we've found in the last year and a half is a lot of media attention. And I don't know if any of you have heard of Hardwick before now but nobody in Hardwick thinks anybody should care about what's happening in Hardwick, why would they this has been a dying town for most of the last 70 years, so there's been a culture even of, "nothing goods coming out of this town," all the jokes, all the this, all the that, nothing ever good is coming out of here and so people are holding their heads a little bit higher now. But are shocked to see Dan Rather come into town to do a story about this like: "are you serious Dan Rather is here to do a story about Hardwick," they don't know what to think. But he was here just 5 or 6 days ago. So we've been written up in the New York Times and Gourmet Magazine and

PBS and all these different things, CBC even did a couple stories on the radio. It's been interesting for all of us to get launched onto this national or international stage and to realize how unique and special what we've got is and how important it is. This is a story that's not just important for our town and what's happening there but it can hopefully be a tipping point or light a fire in other communities elsewhere. And we definitely don't have very many answers at all I think a healthy food system, a locally based healthy food system, by definition is going to be unique everywhere it's going to respond to the needs of that community, the land of that community, the food culture of that community. And so this is not something that's going to be like cookie cutter that the Hardwick model gets imposed upon every town all over the place, heck we're a town of 3,000 people, and the surrounding towns all have like 500 or a thousand people in them. We have this interesting history that I just told you about with the granite industry, and then it dieing, and then back-to-the-landers, that's a very unique history every place is going to have its own history, its own strengths, and its own weakness', but the inspiration I think that can come from tasting the real tomato in Hardwick, or here, or in your community, or anywhere else I think would be really really helpful.

A few more things that I wanted to talk about. There are some important pieces to how this new food system is going to get figured out. We needed basically every idea out there. We are new at this, meaning that this first food system that we created 10,000 years ago, we certainly did with no intention what so ever it just happened. Even starting a couple hundred years ago the industrial food system is not something that was done with a whole lot of intention except for some of the corporations in the last century that have had more of a strategy along those lines. But now we have the first opportunity to really create a food system intentionally knowing what the stakes are and knowing how important it is that we do it well and we do it right. And we cannot fund the new food system with the same mechanisms or the same way that we funded the old food system because we will get the same old problems again.

I'm just going to go into this briefly because I think the funding piece of this is really really critical. What's happened in the united states and I think in Canada as well is that many quickly growing companies have followed this venture capital model that's based on the dot-com era of software companies where every 3-5 years the company sells and that's how the investors make their money. The companies might not even be profitable amazon.com posted its first profit 2 years ago and they've been around for a long time and there's people that have made millions they haven't made a penny until 2 years ago as an actual company on the bottom line but the way that it works is that shares are bought and sold where its publicly traded or privately held a company flipping every 3-5 years is how investors make their money out of it. But if you are a place based company or a mission based company what do you think are the first things that go out the window when you sell. You get consolidated put somewhere else or your place is no longer where it started and the mission is gone. Some cases it preserved a little bit kind of more like a tourist attraction mission not like a really authentic mission. I think independently owned and operated and governed businesses are critical because they do not have the ties to these larger corporations they do not necessarily have the ties to stakeholders that are forcing them to earn a profit and forcing them to provide the greatest return possible to

them. What we need is a broader understanding of what profits and returns means and need to realize that the soil can only yield so much and if you ask more of it than what is realistic you get the mess we're in now. And so, there are many creative strategies that are being used out there and we can get into that more if people have specific questions about it. But I'm very proud of my neighbours and businesses in my area because they have actually not just in the agricultural realm garnered attention for themselves but in the creative investment and creative fundraising realm these are private companies figuring out how to get the capital they need to grow and expand yet remain locally based sustainable based and locally owned and its not an easy thing to do. So right now in the US there are about 2,000 organic companies', organic minded companies natural foods or whatever, but like started by real founders not by someone who invented them like Nantucket Nectars, Tom and Tom. There are no Tom and Tom. So these are like authentic real companies that are in the 2 million to 10 million dollar size right now. That is the gangly teenager size for a company. They cannot afford most of what they're doing yet they need to invest more because if they're growing quickly they need to not be in crisis management mode all the time to be able to do things proactively. So what that means is that those 2,000 companies are prime candidates to get gobbled up by guess who... Cargill, Coca-Cola, you name em', and they are, they're gobbling them up. If we don't have an investment strategy or a way for those companies to still be able to grow and stay locally based, providing local jobs, buying from local farmers and suppliers for making whatever it is they're making then we're just going to end up with the same old thing where every week you realize that that great juice you were buying at the store is now owned by Coca-Cola, not the little guy anymore, and the jobs leave and the products leave and it shifts from being organic to being natural; and you know we all know what that means. So the funding piece is really really critical and we need banks involved, we need angel investors, socially minded investors involved, we need people with 5 bucks, and 5,000, and 5 million and 50 million to do this.

Jon Steinman: And that was Tom Stearns speaking in September 2009 in Wolfville Nova Scotia. Tom is the President of High Mowing Seeds – an organic seed company based in Hardwick, Vermont.

You can learn more about his company at highmowingseeds.com.

ending theme

...and that was this weeks addition of deconstructing dinner produced at Nelson British Columbia's Kootenay Co-op Radio and recorded this week at CKDU Halifax, Nova Scotia. I've been your host Jon Steinman the theme music for deconstructing dinner is courtesy of Nelson area resident Adham Shaikh.

This radio show 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.