

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

October 29, 2009

Title: Dan Barber - A Perfect Expression of Nature (Conscientious Cooks VI) / Backyard Chickens IX

**Producer / Host: Jon Steinman
Transcriber: Alicia Grudzinskas**

Jon Steinman: And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner – a weekly radio show and podcast broadcast around the world and produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman.

On today's one hundred and fifty fourth episode of this show we re-visit our ongoing series *Conscientious Cooks* with this part six featuring well known Chef Dan Barber of New York City's Blue Hill restaurant. Dan has also become quite notorious for his efforts to introduce in North America a more humane and sustainable method of producing one of the most controversial animal products – *foie gras* – the fattened livers of ducks or geese that throughout most of the world is produced by force-feeding. When Dan Barber met a farmer in Spain not too long ago he discovered the origins of *foie-gras* and in doing so, now tells a wonderful story that effectively communicates our collective departure from traditional and natural methods of producing food, to the unsustainable and industrial methods now feeding most of North America.

And in the latter half of the show, we hear once again from Bucky Buckaw and his Backyard Chicken Broadcast. Two episodes from Bucky will round off the show including a well-thought out plan for President Barack Obama to implement a White House backyard flock of chickens. In the second episode, Bucky lends his wisdom to backyard chickeners on how to get yourself off of processed chicken feed and seek to feed your chickens a more readily available diet.

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However we look at it, agriculture itself as it's now existed for 10,000 years, will always be a departure from acquiring our food as nature intended. By extension, agricultural and food production methods will always be debated on their merits of balancing natural systems with the social needs of human populations. But what if the line between social needs and natural systems disappeared and the two were to become one and the same. Well the story we're about to hear on today's broadcast introduces such a scenario playing itself out on a farm in Spain

and which is producing a food that, for the most part, is one of the most controversial out there – *foie gras*.

Telling the story is Chef Dan Barber of Blue Hill restaurant in New York City. Dan began farming and cooking at Blue Hill Farm in Great Barrington, Massachusetts and later went on to open the Blue Hill restaurant in 2000. In 2004, another restaurant was opened at Stone Barns and the Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture in Pocantico Hills, New York.

Dan was recorded in 2008 at the E.F. Schumacher Society lectures held in Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

Male Announcer: The 28th Annual E.F. Schumacher lectures were held at the First Congregational Church in Stockbridge, Massachusetts on October 25th 2008. The E.F. Schumacher Society is a membership supported organization. For more information about the E.F. Schumacher Society, write them at 140 Jug End Road, Great Barrington, Massachusetts, 01230. Call 413-528-1737. Or visit us on the web at www.smallisbeautiful.org

Dan Barber: I got back from Spain a few months ago and I had the best *foie gras* experience of my life. I think I had the best culinary experience of my life. And what I saw - I'm convinced at this point - is the future of food. Crazy, right? *Foie gras* and the future of food. There is not a more maligned food in the world right now than *foie gras*. It is - you know, like having this on your menu is the p.c. equivalent of walking around with a mink coat. It's been outlawed in Chicago, it's pending in California and it's pending in New York.

And it's not like, well it's not like the people who are against *foie gras* don't have a rationale. The rationale is about how they're raised, how they're fed, these geese and these ducks, they're force fed through a process called *gavage*. *Gavage* is, you take a duck or a goose and you jam a tremendous amount of grain in a very short period of time down their throat - more grain than a goose or a duck would get in a lifetime, maybe three lifetimes, in just the span of ten to fifteen days. And the liver expands by six or eight times. So suffice to say, it's not a pretty picture of sustainable agriculture.

The problem for chefs is that it is so friggin' delicious. (laughter) It's fatty, it's sweet, it's unctuous; everything you pair with *foie gras* tastes incredible. So it's not like I can't make a delicious menu without *foie gras* - but you can bike the Tour de France without steroids, right? Not a lot of people are doing it.

So I got an email from a friend who forwarded me a link to a guy named Eduardo Souza - this is going back now almost a year. And this guy Eduardo in Extremadura in the Southwestern portion of Spain is raising what he calls 'natural *foie gras*'. So what's natural about 'natural *foie gras*'? He takes advantage of the geese's natural reaction to when the weather turns cold - right about this time of

year. When the weather turns cold the geese naturally *gavage* - they gorge on everything around them because they're storing up calories for the winter and to fly south. Very simple idea. He slaughters the geese at the end of this period of natural *gavage*.

And he gets a liver that's - that he claims is better than *foie gras* - that's what he's been claiming on his label, *Pateria de Souza*, which has been around, it's been no secret, it's been around since 1812. His great grandfather - great grandfather started *Pateria de Souza*. But they've been doing it really quietly ever since until last year when Eduardo won the *Coup de Coeur*. The *Coup de Coeur* is the most coveted gastronomic award in France. It's based in Paris; they award it to the best food products. Eduardo's natural *foie gras* won. It beat out 10,000 other entries and it won for best *foie gras*. When I asked about this later when I finally met him he said that really pissed the French off. (laughter) And that's how I got to meet him, because it was actually on the front page of *Le Monde* because he was accused of cheating. Never in the history of the *Coup de Coeur* had a non-Frenchman won a *foie gras* prize - first time. So, naturally they accused him of cheating and paying off the judges - it's found not to be true. But I saw a picture of him, when I did a little more research, this does not look like a guy who's paying off judges for a *Coup de Coeur*.

And I was intrigued by this notion because of my love for *foie gras* and the sort of ecological complications and ethical complications. I don't have it on my menu at either Blue Hill. So, I decided to go and see him, to visit him in the southwestern portion of Spain and check out an operation that was both utterly complex when you looked at, and as he described it, as I got a lay of the land, but in the end sort of like all beautiful things in nature, really simple. And I arrived to a scene like right out of a movie. He was lying in the grass with his cell phone - like this - taking pictures of his geese. And I was very excited to meet him and quickly started peppering him with all these questions. And almost from the first moment that we met he was going like this to me. You know, that's not the first time people have done that to me, but he did it continuously throughout the day, and I kept trying to speak slower, you know, I kinda got excited and I just, you know, was going with the moment and he was telling me to slow down but I was slowing down a lot and he kept going like that. It wasn't until late in the afternoon of that first day that I realized that he wasn't telling me to slow down, he was telling me to be quiet because I was upsetting his geese. When I lowered my voice and I spoke, really, at a normal pace, the geese came right over to us within a minute, in two minutes, right next to us by the fence. And he never told me to go like that again; he didn't have to. This guy is, you know, he's the goose whisperer. So he communicates in these weird ways.

Anyway, the fence itself, this paddock that he moved around the property to have the geese always feed on fresh grass and all the rest of the things that his farm offered was designed by him and it was something that I had never seen before and I thought it was brilliant. It was a two-sided fence. The inside of the fence

was not electrified; the outside of the fence was electrified. And when I asked him about it he said; 'When my geese feel manipulated, they don't eat as much. They're not as happy and they don't eat as much. But, if I keep them here and I give them everything they want, they don't wanna leave, but they're free to leave, and they know it. They feel more comfortable and they eat more.' The electrification of the fence was to keep out predators and protect them. His biggest challenge, I thought, was Extremadura which is this region that he is in.

Extremadura translates as 'extra hard', 'very difficult terrain'. But over the course of a hundred and sixty years, hundred and eighty years, his family had transformed the landscape through animal husbandry into this kind of Garden of Eden. These geese were eating grass that was as lush as Berkshire grass; but they were also eating olives and figs and everything else that the climate would grow. And it was literally striking to stand there amongst the beauty but also sort of the lushness. You felt like you were in this Amazon of variety and diversity, all of which was free for the taking for the geese. In fact, he told me that he made more money selling the olives and the figs than he did selling the *foie gras*. But, he said that the geese were free to take whatever they wanted and what was leftover he then sold. And he said that - when I asked, 'cause then confused, how could you throw away profits? He said, 'No, no, no, the geese are always fair.' (laughter) I thought I tended to anthropomorphize everything, this guy brought it to another level.

His biggest challenge was really us, was the marketplace, because at least initially, because the marketplace demands - and this is the way I was trained - demands yellow *foie gras*, bright yellow *foie gras*. That's how I was trained to recognize the quality of *foie gras*. But because he doesn't perform *gavage*, the *foie gras* is, was, off-yellow, little gray-ish and he couldn't attract the buyers for the *foie gras*. So he discovered that the geese love a wild bush called the yellow lupine bush. The geese don't eat the leaves on the yellow lupine, they eat the seeds. And he discovered they eat the seeds, it turns the *foie gras* bright yellow. So he went throughout the Extremadura landscape when the yellow lupine bush went to seed, collected the seeds, planted it in his Garden of Eden and in late August has this bloom of yellow lupine and then the seeds that the geese would gorge on yellow, the *foie gras* would turn bright, bright yellow.

So, he's telling me all this, you know, and it was like, at this point that I was just like, he was really arti - this was through a translator - he was really articulate, really gentle and you sort of had to draw this stuff out of him, and I felt like, you know I was at that - I'm kind of a skeptical guy, like, you know, like all of us, I'm really skeptical, and I'm like, is this guy really to be believed? I mean, is he really, like - yah, how does he make money doing this and is he putting on kinda a show for me considering he had an answer for everything that was so pure and squeaky clean it was like, you know, your natural reaction was like where's he - where are the holes in this thing, right?

So, I'm standing there with him and all of a sudden I hear from above this loud noise, this sort of clap (clap, clap, clap, clap) and it gets louder and louder and louder and there's these wild geese flying over his paddock of domesticated geese and he grabs my arm and he says: 'watch this; duck under this tree'. And the wild geese fly over and his geese start making a lot of noise up to the wild geese louder and louder and the wild ones louder and louder. And so right after they pass the paddock, it's like air traffic control called them back. And they circle, and they circled, and they circled, and they landed. And I looked at Eduardo and I said no way, you know, your geese are calling up to the wild geese to say - and he said - I said, quit calling up to the wild geese and convincing them to come for a visit. And he interrupted me and said: 'No, no, no. They're coming to stay.' They're coming to stay. Geese - a goose's DNA is to fly south in the winter and north in the - and he said: 'No, no, no, that's not a goose's DNA. A goose's DNA is to find the conditions that are conducive to life. And when they're here, they don't need to leave.' And they don't. They reproduce with the domesticated geese and that's how he gets his next flock.

Can you imagine a wild boar coming upon a factory pig farm and deciding to stay? (laughter)

Jon Steinman: This is Deconstructing Dinner.

You're listening to executive chef and co-owner of Blue Hill restaurant in New York City, Dan Barber. Dan was recorded in October 2008 speaking in Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

Today's episode is archived on-line at deconstructingdinner.ca and posted under the October 29th 2009 broadcast.

Dan Barber: So, how did it taste? It was incredible. So, to be fair to the audience here, you know, I was so drinking this guy's kool-aid, he could have fed me feathers and I would have thought it was a culinary revelation. (laughter). But it was a culinary revelation. I had *foie gras* that - I don't want to say was the best *foie gras* I had in my life because I think it demeans his *foie gras*. It was on a whole 'nother level of experiencing a fattened liver. It was so absolutely filled with flavours of the landscape, really; it was sort of breathtaking. I mean, I really - I was really dumbstruck by eating it when I sat at this table with him at his local restaurant and he'd brought in some and we were sitting there. I couldn't stop eating it and I was asking him, you know I kicked into my stupid chef mode and I said okay, so there's star anise here and there's da-na-na and I started listing this thing and each time between mouthfuls. And he looked at me and said 'no, no I don't use star anise, no I don't use da-da-da-da-da, saffron no.' I could have sworn there was saffron in there.

So I went to this list of, like, you know, twenty spices and finally I just, I'd said okay, so what do you do? You take the liver and you salt and pepper it, and then

what? He said, 'no, I don't salt and pepper it' (laughter) 'I just take the liver and I stick it in a jar and I cook it, I *confit* it'. So you don't put salt and pepper? 'No.'

Later that day he showed me the pepper - wild pepper plants that he makes sure are in abundance and the plants that provide salinity. It was at that moment that I looked down as I was scribbling notes and I wrote who's the farmer and who's the chef?

When I asked him at the end of the meal, at the end of this lunch, why, if I had just tasted the best *foie gras* of my life, and it was so readily apparent that this was something that was just magically delicious, how is it that so few people have heard of him? I mean, the most famous chefs in the world right now are in Spain; Ferran Adrià, the number one chef in the world, couple hundred miles away from this guy. But how does he not have this on his menu? And I asked this a few different ways and he never seemed to answer it and then at the end of the meal really - I really put it to him. I said really, Eduardo, why don't chefs have this on their menu? And he looked up at me and he said 'because chefs don't deserve my *foie gras*.' (laughter)

He's right. Because when chefs cook with *foie gras*, or really, anything else, all the vectors point at us. We pair it with an interesting ingredient, we turn it into something else, our ego is slathered all over the plate. He said, in so many words, this is the perfect expression of nature, there is no reason to put it in the hands of an egotistical but talented chef - no reason. And, even got religious - I'll bring that in this room; he said 'my *foie gras* is god's work. It is god telling me that I've done right and it's a gift. There's no reason to do anything more with it.'

I was on the plane home and I'm reviewing my notes. I took, you know, a half a little black notebook of notes about this experience. And in one sort of half way through I had circled an answer he gave to a question that I asked him, which is what do you think of conventional *foie gras*? What do you think of 99.9999% of the *foie gras* that is out there in the world? And he said, 'I think it's an insult to history.' And I wrote an exclamation point because I thought that was a nice was to - but I also put a question mark because I didn't really know what it meant. And I meant to follow up with him, so I had circled it and I never followed up with him. So I got back and a day later I phoned him - he only uses his cell phone to take pictures, really, and I sent him a few emails, he never returned my email. Shows you what an impression I made on him.

So, I looked up the history of *foie gras*. Turns out the Jews invented *foie gras* 5000 years ago. They were looking for an alternative to schmaltz. They discovered that in the late fall when they killed geese, there was this perfect layer of delicious fat that covered the livers and they could use this as an alternate source for cooking, for the kosher laws. And they *confit* the livers and they took care of the geese in a way that produced this beautiful fat. The Pharaoh got wind of it and demanded that the Jews supply that fat all year long. And the Jews, for

the sake of their life, I suppose, invented *gavage*. They invented *gavage* to supply this goose fat out of the fall all year long. And that's the beginning of what we know today as conventional *foie gras*.

That was the insult that he was talking about. And, if you think about it, it's not just an insult to the history of *foie gras*, but what we're looking at and through this story, it seems to me, is the way we grow food in this country is an insult to history. It's an insult to the basic laws of nature. Whether we talk about - and I'm sure we will today - megafarms, feedlots, chemical amendments, chemical agriculture, food processing, long distance travel, you name it, it's an insult to basic laws of nature and of biology. The way we raise cows in this country, the way we raise chickens, the way we raise broccoli or Brussels' sprouts. We are in a General Motor's mindset of farming; take more, sell more, waste more. And for the future, as we can all see, with General Motor's bottom line, it's not going to service us.

There is a great quote from Jonas Salk. Dr. Salk said, 'If all of the insects disappeared, the world as we know it in 50 years would disappear. If all human beings were to disappear, within 50 years the world as we know it would flourish as never before.' He was right. We need at this moment, critical moment, to visualize a totally new conceptualization of agriculture. One in which we are not sacrificing the health of the planet for the bottom line. One in which we are not degrading our natural resources, converting them to cash as quickly as possible, under this guise of cheap food. And we can't afford to treat animals like they are widgets on an assembly line, as if we have some kind of inalienable right to endless amounts of protein. We don't.

What we need in this new paradigm of agriculture is to look to people like Eduardo it seems to me. Farmers who are looking themselves to nature for answers and solutions, in the words of Janine Benyus, 'listening to nature's operating instructions instead of imposing our own.'

A guy like Eduardo teaches a chef like me, and anyone really who cares about food and cooking, that the most ecological choice that we make when we buy food is the most ethical choice. And it is almost always the most delicious choice. I have never in my experience as a chef tasted a delicious carrot or a perfect cut of lamb and found bad ecology behind those pieces of protein or that vegetable, never once in my life and I bet I never will. They're one and the same.

Without going into an infomercial, I do come here from the Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture. I do think the Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture is a good example of looking at an alternate food system that we can see as an example for the future. We raise vegetables on 80 total acres of property; we have 8 acres of vegetables, 23 thousand square feet of greenhouse growing through this time of year. We have 20 acres of pasture. We raise chickens, ducks and pigs and lambs, honeybees, turkeys and now geese.

That's where the story goes. I arrived back from Spain, I was in my office, and I swear I will only tell the truth because of where we are right now, Craig Haney, whose the live stock director at Stone Barns, walked into my office 9:30 Thursday morning when I returned from Spain Wednesday night. And he started to talk about this late spring rotation into early summer and he said, 'by the way, we're going to be raising some geese.' And I said, 'you kidding me.' And he said, 'no, it's the perfect rotation, they're going to follow the sheep, and the chickens are going to follow the geese and we're going to give this a try.' And I said, 'you know I was just in Spain visiting a guy, and I told him the story and I said; this is perfect. We can raise *foie gras*.' And he looked at me like I had just suggested we go out and hit baby seals over the head. (laughter)

And I said, no, no, no, Craig, this is really, this is natural *foie gras*, this is like the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. 'Took a little convincing. We separated 40 geese out of a flock of about 150 and we fed them a little bit of grain, did the same kind of rotation that Eduardo did, minus the figs and the olives, and got to the point two weeks ago where the weather started turning cold, really cold. And, I said, this is it, this is when we're going to bring out the corn and we're going to get these geese, we're going to get these livers fattened up. But I had invested so much in convincing the farmers that this is something we should do, and meanwhile, they were doing the work, and I'm always, you know, I'm not the most popular guy on the farm often, 'cause I have these wacky ideas, right? And so I desperately called Eduardo because on the first day of feeding the geese they didn't eat a lot of corn, they didn't take it. They kind of took the normal amount they were taking for the last couple of months. And the farmers I could tell were both ecstatic when I heard that news and also sort of resolute that they'll never do another experiment with me again.

So I called my contact in Spain, I said, we have to get in touch with Eduardo because this is gotta work. So she went to work, she got him on the line, she called me, and through translation I said, Eduardo, we're doing your work here, it's been great. And I told him what kind of geese, what they've been eating, and there was a long pause - real long. And he said, 'it's not going to work'. And I said, you can't say that. And he said, 'it's not going to work because you forgot like, the sort of number one rule at the *Pateria*.' The number one rule is you only feed them the landscape. You don't feed them any grain along the way. We had been giving them - I had been requesting a little bit of grain along the way because why not? fatten them up a little bit sooner, right? A little bit extra fat, we could maybe even get it - kind of competitive with Eduardo - let's get a bigger liver than Eduardo. (laughter) And what he said is, 'you've domesticated them. So, of course, when you bring out more grain they'll take what they want to satisfy them because they know you're coming out tomorrow with the grain.' I said, they know we're coming out tomorrow with the grain? He said, 'yes, of course. You won't ever get them to eat more than they want to eat and they'll

stop eating when they're full.' You gotta help me, man. I said. I can't go back to the farmers now. And then he had to go and we got off the phone.

I didn't say anything to the farmers and we did it for two more days and I got a phone call from Eduardo I think two days later. He said, 'I have an idea.' What's the idea? He said, 'you should try and re-wild them.' Rewild them? He said, 'that's right. Take grain away completely for three weeks. Just have them starve on your grass. And then, at the end of three weeks for about a week and a half from now, come out with the grain only for 20 minutes and then take it all away. And do that for 3 days as it continues to get colder and you might - you might summon up this natural *gavage*, this natural gorging. That's your best hope.' So that's what we're doing.

As we speak they are on a crash diet to re-wild them and I hope this works. I'm going to end it there and just open this up for questions because I think, I don't want to make a false ending to a story that's, like, 80% there. Next year maybe we'll come back and wrap this all up and do a type ball and I can serve you all delicious *foie gras*. But thank you for listening.

(applause)

Jon Steinman: This is Deconstructing Dinner – a syndicated weekly radio show and podcast produced in Nelson, British Columbia at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY. I'm Jon Steinman. A thanks to the E.F. Schumacher society for making that last recording available to share here on the show. That was executive chef and co-owner of New York City's Blue Hill restaurant Dan Barber. Dan was recorded in October 2008 in Stockbridge Massachusetts, and you can listen to the question and answer period following his talk by linking to a full un-edited recording through our website at deconstructingdinner.ca and posted under the October 29th 2009 episode. That recording we just listened to also marks part 6 in our ongoing Conscientious Cooks series – and if you'd like to hear more about other innovative and forward-thinking chefs like Dan Barber, check out other episode of our Conscientious Cooks series archived on the Deconstructing Dinner website.

(soundbite)

For almost two years now, Deconstructing Dinner has been featuring the informative and funny episodes of Bucky Buckaw's Backyard Chicken Broadcast produced in New York City for the Sagebrush Variety Show which airs at Boise Community Radio in Boise Idaho.

Bucky continues to maintain a vision where everyone raises and benefits from their own backyard chicken flock.

Taking us to the end of today's broadcast, we'll take a listen to two more Bucky Buckaw episodes with this first one encouraging President Barack Obama to help encourage this backyard chicken vision.

(Bucky Buckaw theme music)

Bucky Buckaw: This is Bucky Buckaw with the Backyard Chicken Broadcast, post-election episode. Although I like to think of myself as a maverick - before mavericks were cool - I see an excellent opportunity this week in following the crowds of commentators rushing to their microphones to say something inspiring in the wake of the election of Barack Obama to the office of President of the United States.

Right now, everyone's thinking big: the economy, the environment, an end to bloody resource wars. My experience is that radical change on a grand scale is made up of seemingly modest proposals. The perfect example is the Bucky Buckaw Agenda. Some people might not understand the vast promise of seeding the nation with backyard chicken operations and will be confused by my focus on urban chickening. What they need to understand is that under my 'Million Small Coops of Life' plan raising chickens for eggs, meat, pest control, fertilizer, soil tiling, and companionship raises resource efficiency, reduces pollution and builds both individual self-reliance and strong community. Plus it raises the bar on the humane treatment of animals.

Because backyard chickening is an inherently local enterprise, our municipal and state elections are more directly linked to the progress of the chickeners agenda than national politics. Fortunately, chickening is already legal in most United States cities; it's one thing that we have over Canada. However, there are other laws and codes on the local level that do have a chilling effect on chickening activity.

For instance, one of the first government programmes our local elected's will hopefully reverse is called 'NAIS', or the 'National Animal Identification System'. It's actually a national programme that was introduced in 2002, supposedly out of concern over infectious diseases like mad cow, with the strategy of micro chipping and tracking via database all livestock for quote 'rapid trace back in the event of a disease concern'. Originally no cattle, swine, or fowl would be exempt, no matter how small their flock. Presumably the agri-businesses are willing to deal with the intrusion in exchange for perceived marketability as meat that's safe from disease. More importantly, the plan is logistically manageable and affordable when you look at the centralization, mechanization, and economies of scale of factory farming - but devastatingly expensive and time consuming for backyard farmers.

NAIS has been mostly unsuccessful because of the huge resistance to it from small farmers, particularly in states like Vermont and Kentucky. The corporate

agri-business has still pursued NAIS by shifting their focus from a USDA run nationwide programme to a bunch of state run programmes. And, there's still resistance in key states. But a form of the programme now survives in the shape of supposedly local efforts to track animals. Well, we can be sure another attempt at nation wide tracking waits in the wings for another false rationale, such as the factory farm created monsters, known as mad cow or bird flu.

Eliminating animal tracking would be a good step forward. But state legislators would do well to consider implementing incentive programmes or government sponsored consultation. Heck, every state's representative has a patriotic duty when they apply for state homeland security funds to press the case that a decentralized food production network is much less vulnerable to security threats than a centralized, corporatized one.

On a municipal level, cities can take a more serious look at promoting urban chickens as part of the new, green plans that are gaining so much popularity as a way to reduce traffic congestion, pollution, and other quality of life issues. Bucky Buckaw listeners know I'm an avid bicyclist; but in addition to solutions like bicycle lanes and bike share programmes that have been gaining traction, creating a small chicken infrastructure would produce similar outcomes. Think of all the traffic reduced if fewer trucks are delivering eggs, meat and vegetables to huge supermarkets when consumers make fewer trips to the grocery store because they're feeding themselves from their own, productive backyards.

But the chicken agenda can be helped by a catalyst of change like Barack Obama in his new role as President. The White House could be a bully pulpit with the simple, but compelling act of raising chickens on the White House lawn. There's been much excitement already around President Obama's talk of a First Puppy. I'm just as moved by a cute puppy as the next guy. But I feel compelled to say, for the record, that dog ownership does not set a very good example for sustainability what, with all the processed food they eat, the difficult to compost poop they produce, and the plastic toys they chew through everyday. And the White House dog is not a working dog, protecting flocks of sheep or guarding the White House from intruders.

Imagine the example by contrast the First Family would be setting if they set up a Presidential hen house, complete with, in pecking order, First Rooster, First Hen, and two or three more hens and eventually some First Chicks. There is certainly plenty of space on the White House's sprawling lawn, which is now wasted on heavily fertilized Kentucky bluegrass, which is arguably ornamental. Of course, at first the chickens would have to be penned up away from all the poisons in the White House lawn. But a big enough space could be cleared to call a few fowl truly free range. The First Children, Molly and Sasha, could be the primary coop caregivers, which could provided countless adorable photo opportunities for the press, as well as a chance to educate the public on the fun of chickening.

In the First Chicken Run, the fowl would be able to demonstrate their skill at eliminating bugs and weeds, producing aesthetically and nutritionally superior eggs and tilling and fertilizing the soil for the eventual planting of crops. After about a year at the first site, Molly and Sasha could oversee the relocation of the original chicken run to a neighbouring site. And the original, now thoroughly aerated, fertilized, and weed, seeds scrubbed plot would be ready for a productive victory garden.

Eventually, the entire White House lawn could be transformed into a productive farm that doesn't rely on external inputs ala Joel Salatin's Polyface Farm, now made famous by Michael Pollan's wonderful book on food realities, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. Important White House meals could be made with all organic, completely local ingredients. I might even suggest that the annual symbolic pardon of a Thanksgiving turkey could be made more meaningful when the turkey is a heritage turkey that resembles the original colonial breeds and is actually raised on site.

But now I'm getting off the chicken topic. While all of this is going on, children and adults across our great nation will be transfixed by the ongoing and seasonally changing story of the White House garden. Before long, an inspired population would realize they too could have a piece of the lost American dream. All of this might be irritating to agri-business, since it would threaten their stranglehold on food production, which could cause the Obama administration some discomfort, but they did promise change. And it would be difficult for opponents to attack something as deeply American as a small farm run by cute little children.

It might take the intervention of urban chickeners like us to help people realize they can start a chicken and garden operation on spaces much smaller and closer to urban neighbours than the White House. But the heavy lifting will already have been done. I still remember during the Carter administration how Easterners suddenly became interested in Southern cuisine. My father's efforts to learn how to make grits, okra, and peanut butter soup were how I first became involved in food preparation, which eventually lead to my passion for sourcing superior ingredients and made me the avid chickener and gardener I am today.

If thousands of 22nd Century Americans can be similarly inspired, just one per neighbourhood, imagine the changes to our landscape, the improved local economies, local air quality, and lessened fuel use, stronger communities, and lastly the personal well being of every human participating in the agenda. And ultimately, that's what the chickener's agenda comes down to: personal responsibility and civic involvement. Barack Obama or even the government, can't create a small network of chicken coops for us. It's up to us to say, 'yes, we can,' raise chickens in our backyards and community gardens, and source the balance of our food needs from small farmers operating close to our homes.

This is Bucky Buckaw. I had a good time.

(Bucky Buckaw closing theme music)

Jon Steinman: This is Deconstructing Dinner.

We have one more episode of Bucky Buckaw's Backyard Chicken Broadcast lined up here with this one lending wisdom and advice to backyard chickeners who are looking for ways to become less reliant on processed chicken feed to raise your chickens and instead use more readily available options.

Bucky Buckaw: On an earlier show I discussed the basics of chicken nutrition. My purpose then was to convey the basic tools for making sure a backyard flock has its basic needs met: greens, grain and protein as well as a little bit of calcium for egg production and some grit for proper digestion, and for the most part, it's really not that difficult. But in my own experience and in interviewing my fellow chickeners, I've discovered that there's a lot of space between feeding your chickens adequately and feeding them well. I've also noticed an irony in that many who started chickening to free ourselves from reliance on corporate eggs and vegetables, insecticides, and fertilizers, still are relying on corporate chicken feed more often than we need to.

The problem with commercial feeds is they're designed to fatten up a bird for meat or to deliver enough nutrients for decent laying at minimal cost and effort. They're not designed for long term health and the eggs of a chicken on commercial feed lack nutrients and flavour. And finally, commercial feed is not that interesting to your chicken, who will eat it only to stave off hunger or boredom. Most commercial feeds contain fillers, the most innocent of which is way more corn than is ideal for a chicken's diet, especially since most of it is nutrient-poor byproduct from the corn-syrup and corn starch industries. Even worse filler includes the meat of other chickens, many of whom died of disease. Commercial feed is also likely to contain hormones, antibiotics and arsenic, which is used as an antibacterial agent.

Organic chicken feed is increasingly available for backyard birders from pet or farm stores, but many of my listeners have reported that stores won't consistently stock it because it doesn't sell as briskly as they'd like. And even if you can get your hands on organic feed, it's still processed food, lacking a range of nutrients and flavour that really helps chickens thrive. It's also a step away from the self sufficiency and sustainability that most of us are aiming for when we start chickening.

I do understand how someone with a dozen or more chickens will find they're not generating enough scraps to feed them, nor do they want to spend the time making their own feed from scratch. However the advantage for an urban chicken like me, with a flock of only three hens, is it's very manageable for me to experiment with methods of feeding my flock whole and unprocessed foods

and to strive to generate most of it from my own backyard. I know that the same techniques I develop are possible on a larger but still preindustrial scale, especially since many of my techniques were inspired by small farmers I've read about.

First, I'll talk about whole and unprocessed feed and concentrate on self-contained in a moment. My favourite source of chicken feed has always been kitchen scraps. I cook predominantly from scratch, and mostly out of my own garden. When I do buy my vegetables from a farmer's market or a store, I always go for the ones that are sold with as much of the original plant as possible because the portions of vegetables that don't make it onto my plate are often met enthusiastically by my flock. Carrot tops are a chicken favourite and are very nutritious even though they don't seem like very good eating to me. Same goes for cilantro or parsley stems, celery leaves, cauliflower leaves and broccoli scraps, are all always a big hit. Having chickens to feed has freed me up to be more finicky about cutting off pieces of collard greens, kale or spinach for mere aesthetic reasons because I know they will be eaten by chickens who could care less if a bug once bit the leaf they are about to peck.

And speaking of bugs, when a batch of my oats or couscous gets infected by moths, I am pleased to know that my flock will consider the added protein a bonus. They're also quite fond of heels of bread that have gone hard, provided I either break them into beak sized pieces or soak them in water or soup stock. The bits of rice that have stuck to the side of my rice steamer are one of their staple foods and also helps to keep them hydrated. Just don't cross that line into feeding food that has started to rot. They probably wouldn't eat it anyway, but if they did, it could bring disease to the chicken and your whole operation.

Another way to feed your chickens whole foods that cuts costs and helps eliminate waste in the food stream is to shop at farmer's markets or stores that sell produce that past its prime at a reduced rate. That practice is less common than it used to be. Supermarkets would rather throw food out than let their shoppers think in terms of bargains, but it can still be done. Farmer's market vendors often still do this, especially if you get to know them and explain that you're looking for chicken food. You may get great bargains on wilted, but still good veggies that have been taken off the table for aesthetic reasons. You also might try dumpster diving. Sad fact is that most grocery stores throw out literally tons of vegetables a month because they don't fit their profile and store policy is not to offer discounts.

Even sadder is that most are so opposed to giving anything away that they're dumpsters are locked down with nearly as much security as their jewellery departments. But there are a handful of grocery stores and many health food stores or food co-ops that allow access to their dumpsters. Ideally, you might even find a place where the imperfect vegetables are kept nicely separate from less desirable trash, like rotten food or oils. If you find a situation like this, you're

doing a good deed by putting the nutrients from the food back into the soil in your backyard via your chickens and their poop. However, in most cases, bargain and dumpster hunting can be even more time consuming than growing your own food.

And that brings me to my ultimate goal, which is to feed my chickens mostly from my own garden and get as close as I can to a complete system where nutrients taken in by plants are eaten by me and the chickens and in the case of the chickens, goes into eggs, which are also eaten by me. Then those nutrients are added back in through chicken poop. Just as with purchased vegetables, vegetables you grow for yourself will include bits you might not consume that would be prized by chickens. The percentage of carrot top stems, bug eaten leaves, and stuff like that per vegetable yield will be even greater.

There are many chickeners who actually throw that stuff down their disposal. Others toss it all into their compost bin at once rather than setting it aside in the fridge to ration out to their flock. Furthermore, even in a small space, experienced gardeners can often feed themselves while also dedicating some space to chicken feed crops. For one example, if you're growing salad greens or arugula in the spring there will come a point when the leaves are too bitter to be palatable where the plants bolt. This is a great time to use those vegetables for chicken feed or even open up the bed for the chickens to scratch and peck at for a few days before you plant another crop and fence it back in. Another technique I use is to hold off on weeding. Obviously one should never let undesired crops crowd out the plants you're growing for food, but many people don't realise that light weeds in between rows of plants can actually help retain moisture. Just remember to monitor carefully and clip those weeds when they qualify as chicken snacks but before they get big enough to compete with your primary crops. Not all weeds are nutritious or desirable to chickens, but a few examples of common garden weeds that make great chicken food include goose foot, dandelion, pig weed, chick weed, and grass. And instead of pulling these weeds out I just cut them at the base, which also leaves the soil undisturbed and allows them to grow back.

Other crops that can be grown in the least fertile parts of your garden will also provide food that you can store over winter and feed as needed. Examples are sunflowers and mangle beets. Chickens love sunflower seeds and they're a great, storable nutrition source. Mangle beets were very popular livestock feed before the industrialization of agriculture. They're relatively easy to grow, keep well in root cellars, and are an excellent part of a balanced chicken diet.

One thing to remember is chickens have pretty good instincts when it comes to food. They know what they need, and if you focus on providing a variety of whole, unprocessed foods, you can pretty much trust the judgment of the chicken to pick out what they require. One benefit of feeding your chickens whole food is

that is also makes you think about your own diet. If the chickens are eating well from scraps that means you're eating well from the stuff that makes scraps.

One of my favourite ways to feed my chickens a premium diet on the cheap is the bug fieldtrip. Find out who amongst your friends has a lot of pest bugs in their yard or garden and hasn't laid out any poison to deal with the problem. Offer to bring your chickens over for a supervised de-bugging. I've found that, depending on the size of the yard, you can virtually eliminate their bug problem with a big buffet visit and a follow up or two after a couple of weeks. Because the chickens don't know your friend's yard, it might help if you bring them to some of the known bug hot spots, which is nice because it makes the experience interactive. Although this method takes you outside your own yard and my self sufficiency goal, it is a huge boost to the Bucky Buckaw Agenda, because it is one of the most affective forms of chicken outreach. In my experience, show a friend first hand how powerful a bug extractor the chicken is, the chances are you'll have a convert, someone asking you for advice on how to start their own flock.

I'm Bucky Buckaw. I had a good time.

(Bucky Buckaw closing theme music)

Bucky Buckaw: Bucky Buckaw's Backyard Chicken Broadcast was produced by the Sagebrush Variety Show with support of the Boise Community Radio and the Green Institute.

ending theme

Jon Steinman: And 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.

The 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 programme can be donated through our website at deconstructingdinner.ca or by dialing 250-352-9600.