

Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
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Jon Steinman: And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner – a syndicated weekly one-hour radio show and podcast produced in Nelson, British Columbia at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY. I'm Jon Steinman and once again we'll be continuing on with our Local Grain Revolution series that comes on the heels of our August 20th part 9 when we listened in on past meetings of the Kootenay Grain CSA – Canada's first community supported agriculture project for grain underway in the interior of British Columbia. On today's part 10, we continue with recordings from the more recent April 2009 gathering, when the three CSA farmers and steering committee members gathered once again to discuss, among other things, the prospect of incorporating businesses into the CSA – that is to allow local bakeries, retailers, and restaurants to purchase shares in this local food project.

For individuals, the model has already reduced the distance that food consumed in the area has travelled, it has compensated farmers with more money per acre than most grain farmers could ever imagine, and has been providing the eating public with a much more direct connection to where their food (and in particular grain) is coming from. And so this idea of inviting businesses to join the CSA might very well have exponential benefits.

While community supported agriculture models tend to focus exclusively on serving individual members, with the Kootenay Grain CSA now opening its doors to commercial members – a new model seems to be forming that might more accurately be labelled as a RSA model – or retail supported agriculture.

And so in the last half of the episode we'll listen in on a rather fascinating discussion that weighed the pros and cons of such a prospect.

And in the first half of the episode, we'll revisit with CSA member Lorraine Carlstrom, who, shortly after CSA members received their grain in late 2008, offered a series of workshops designed to educate members on how to use the 80 plus pounds of whole grains received following the first successful harvest of the project.

We last heard from Lorraine on part 8 of the series when she spoke to members on the ins and outs of making and using sourdough, and today we'll hear some segments from her workshop on the benefits and techniques of sprouting grain.

increase music and fade out

For those of you who use social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter, and have not yet joined our page, Deconstructing Dinner does maintain both a Facebook and Twitter presence and you can link to those groups from our site. And adding to those two we also just recently received an email from Kirk - a fan of the show in Burnaby, British Columbia who has just set-up a Yahoo Groups page where any listeners of Deconstructing Dinner, who prefer that networking tool, can sign up to chat about recent shows or whatever food and farming thoughts you might want to share. Again, a link to that page can be found from our website and a big thanks to Kirk for setting that up and for also becoming our most recent monthly subscriber.

Deconstructing Dinner relies predominantly on listener support and we continue to encourage all of you who listen to the show and appreciate our work to support this ongoing radio project in order for us to continue to bring you unheard stories on food and agriculture and the many inspiring examples of how communities throughout North America are redefining their local food systems. Information on how to become a monthly or one-time donor is posted on our site and a continued thank you to all of you who have in the past and continue to support this show with your generous financial assistance.

soundbite

Whole grains are all the rage and while they have been for quite some time now, there's much that we eaters continue to be unaware of. For one, the standard highly processed white flour might very well be devoid of almost any nutrition (unless it's been enriched with vitamins), but it also, does not contain high levels of phytic acid – a natural preservative found in the fibre of grains that prevents the seed from germinating. Phytic acid as we learned on a recent episode is not digestible by us humans and so any indigestion from eating white flour is not as common as that that would be found from consuming flour derived from whole grains in which the fibre remains. Phytic acid is also an anti-nutrient – preventing our bodies from effectively absorbing the minerals found in grain.

So fermenting the grain through the sourdough process is one way of degrading the phytic acid content of your grains – (we learned of that process on part 8 of this local grain revolution series). And yet another process to use is that of sprouting which, beyond the reduction of phytic acid content, has many other benefits that help increase the nutritional profile of the food.

Members of the Kootenay Grain CSA have been eager to learn of such benefits since receiving their whole grains late last year.

Just as the CSA has inspired many spinoff projects in the Nelson and Creston area, another initiative launched because of the CSA was by shareholder Lorraine Carlstrom

who created some part-time employment for herself by offering up a series of workshops to the CSA's membership.

Deconstructing Dinner descended upon some of those workshops including this one – on sprouting grain.

Lorraine Carlstrom: So I always say you switch to whole grain and you join the first Canadian grain CSA and okay, what do I do with all these grains? Today the main focus is sprouting, and I was telling you earlier there was so much response about sprouting—I was amazed. It's not my favourite way to do grain, but I do it. But I mainly use mine as bulgur flour, which is sprouted, dried, and then ground.

And use it in any of the recipes that are what we're used to in our recipe books which are quick, let's just get some muffins right away. You can use that right away and that's what's really neat. And I'll show you the idea in my brain, when I pull out an old book like this—Canadian Mennonite Cookbook, and...oh, yeah, where's those soft ginger cookies, which I made for you today. I can just go down there and ex out flour and put bulgur and I always put a little arrowroot in, to lighten it up. So you can kind of see how I've manipulated it, you can do that with any recipe. I mean, I manipulate a lot of other ingredients. I take the sugar out and maybe put Rapadura instead of the white sugar. So I kind of manipulate, but this is a good way to do it when you sprout it.

So the history of sprouting, it's kind of interesting. The Asians kind of get all the credit for the early sprouting. They actually were known to carry mung sprouts or mung beans, and then sprout them on their trips, and they never got scurvy, like some of our other European sailors. So they are what we think of as the first but, I was very fascinated when I started looking into the history of it. Beers, many beers are made with sprouted grains and so we've making beers for many, many years, way back. And also, bulgur, which is what we're going to learn to do today also, came out of the middle east, and usually it's coarsely ground, but you can fine-ground it.

This is my most amazing thing when I started, is we in North America actually indirectly were already eating a lot of sprouted grains. And I'll read it: According to enzyme specialist Dr. Edward Howell, which has a great book on enzymes, in the past we ate most of our grains in a partially germinated form. Grains standing in sheaves and stacks standing in open fields often began to sprout before we brought them into storage. But modern farming techniques has taken that away. So really, we were already having bulgur wheat all this time until quite recently, so there goes that recent time frame that I talked about in that other class. It is so short a time that we have stopped doing this, and what consequences has that had on us?

Well, why should you sprout? What is the reason to sprout? So why should you? Well the process of germination is not only...I'm going to read it straight out her book, which you guys have...It not only produces the vitamin C that of course kept the sailors from getting scurvy, but it also changes the whole composition, so that's sort of...it's a magical thing that keeps coming out once you start sprouting. Sprouting increases vitamin B especially

B2 and B3 and B6. Carotenes increase dramatically, sometimes eight-fold. Even more important, sprouting neutralizes the phytic acid. Now some of you guys that weren't in my class before, phytic acid is in every seed of every thing and what it does is inhibit the grain from sprouting prematurely in nature so it is sort of nature's incredible way of storing itself, right, and then it won't release it, but phytic acid in our systems doesn't do so well because we don't have stomachs like a cow. The phytic acid actually blocks minerals that we need to absorb from the grain.

So actually over a long period of time if we depended on straight whole grains without doing anything to them without the sprouting or without the soaking or the sourdough. Those things all break it down and soon we get low on minerals and all of a sudden we start having issues later on and many of us will have problems digesting it. We'll have digestive issues, and that's why we hear about gluten intolerance or people who just say I don't do well on grains. And it's sort of like well, maybe you do great on grains, and I know I have because I am a great example, I have a very sensitive stomach, but if I do something to my grains, if I sprout or if I soak or if I use sourdough, I'm fine. I've heard many testaments of that. So before we used to do it...okay when did this all start changing? Well we know maybe only 50 years ago with this sprouting which I just quite recently found out about that, about that it was already pre-sprouted, probably most of the time, because it sat out on most of these big fields and the moisture got to it and then they'd bring it back in, it would dry, and we'd sell it. And they'd grind it and we'd get the flour. Of course, in the 40s, 50s, 60s, we were just getting the white wheat which is just part of this endosperm, which really doesn't have very many nutrients in it. It actually doesn't have that much of the anti-nutrients like the phytic acid in things. So anyway, it breaks that down, it inhibits and neutralizes our own enzymes and we've talked about that before, and it also has enzyme inhibitors in the grain, which inhibit our own enzymes. So there is another reason why we need to do something, sprouting is a great thing to do. The sugars that give you gas get broken down, so that's great. And a great thing is the aflatoxin, which is a mold that's sometimes are on our grains also it inactivates the molds. So that's another great reason to sprout.

Jon Steinman: Lorraine Carlstrom here on Deconstructing Dinner. As Lorraine's grain sprouting workshop continued, she took workshop participants into the kitchen where sprouting techniques were then learned.

Lorraine Carlstrom: So first what you do, it's really simple, sprouting's really simple, you just take any of your grains. Any of them will work. You can sprout any grains. I find the soft ones sprout quicker and they seem to get the moisture in them quicker, but this is a hard wheat. I'm going to go over to the sink here. You just put it in a jar and then you just fill it up with water, and this is going to just sit in this water like this for about eight hours, overnight is fine, just stick it in this jar and then it will absorb a lot of moisture. So you just sit it like this, and then the next day, so say you did that the night before...the next morning you're going to put a little top like this on it or you can find one of those fancy screen meshes that screw on and then you rinse it. Well, you're going to dump out the water, but you rinse it. It's best three times a day. But if you work, do it in the morning, do it when you get home from work, and do it before you go to bed, if

you have a regular nine to five job. And always make sure that you're tilting it up to make sure it doesn't ever sit in water. Because what can happen is it can rot. And you don't want them to dry out too much because then it'll stop sprouting. So it's got to find that balance of getting moisture, rinsed out, but not sitting in water for this sprouting time. And then this one...Tuesday in the morning...so it was done yesterday morning and...I'm going to pass it around. You can start to see how it sprouts. Little sprouts are coming out. They're just so magical.

voice: And at what stage is it deemed sprouted enough?

Lorraine Carlstrom: Well, technically, once it starts coming out, that would mean you've broken down a lot of those enzyme inhibitors and you've broken down a lot of the phytic acid and you know how vitamin C on that little end, there, but most people recommend that you try and get a sprout that's about as long as the seed is. And this one has a pretty good length. This is what I made the bread with today. You can start to see it gets really thin and curly. And that's ideal, it's what most people recommend. But still this one would be okay too.

voice: Did you say where the best place to leave this is?

Lorraine Carlstrom: It's highly recommended that you keep it in a dark place, but I found it doesn't really matter to me. I've never had an issue, because I've left it outside. Oh, yeah, was supposed to put that in the dark, and I always forget. So if you do have a darker place, that's recommended, so maybe it will sprout faster. So once you've done that then you can decide, okay, what am I going to do. This looks like I'm ready to go...do I want to make...and you guys can all come over here, do I want to make a pilaf? And I just stuck it in the rice cooker and put a couple herbs in. A this one, if you're vegetarian, you don't want to taste it, but I did it in a chicken bone broth, because when you use bone broth, they help you utilize the protein in pretty much anything, whether it's meat, or in the grain, the protein in the grain. So that's why I decided to cook it in there today for something different. I want to go grind it. So we'll take the whole thing. We'll try the small amount. So you just stick it in the food processor. The Essene bread, I put in sesame seeds and I also added currants but it really, it's actually just sprouted wheat. I find salt is really a nice additive, but it's not necessary in the traditional bread. But my recipe has all those ingredients. And then you just grind it for quite awhile. They must have spent hours with the mortar and pestle to get it into the sprouted form.

food processor sound

Lorraine Carlstrom: I already have some that's done, but you see how long it is taking? A very long time, but if you go long enough, I'm going to pass this around. This is what I made the bread out of this morning, six am I put it in my crockpot. I gave you guys also a recipe on the crockpot, because it's a slow way to cook it and it keeps the moisture, but you can also do it in an oven too at a slow temperature. But this is what it feels like, I put currants in it and you can feel, that's the kind of consistency you want it after...it's about five to ten minutes in this...took awhile to get it. So they really did work hard at making

it into a paste. And if you want, you can do Essene crackers or little ones that size and put them in your oven. And I've also done crackers where you roll it out really thin and you just cut it out and put it in and dry it in your oven, if you want it raw. It's quite doughy, it's quite sticky.

voice: Some pieces are still quite wet.

Lorraine Carlstrom: Right, and when you slowly cook it, it's chewy, you'll see the bread, it's really chewy. Have you had it before, that kind of Essene bread. Now if you don't have a crock pot, you can also do it in your oven, like at around 150 degrees. If it's at real low temperature, it's about four hours, five hours, and it ends up a little drier bread and some people like that.

voice: Because it's so moist.

Lorraine Carlstrom: It already is quite moist, for sure. And the crackers really do dry out to be quite crispy. Or the third choice, and this is what I always use mine for. My family's not really keen on the bread, but they love all the stuff I bake with it. So once I've sprouted it, I've taken it on a tray, I've taken just the sprouts, and I've put them on a tray, put them in the oven, about 150. I'm going to be baking with it, so I can go a little higher, 150 to 200 degrees, and then it gets all dry. You can pass that around, it gets all dried out. And then I put it through a grinder, and if you have access to someone who can grind it for you, great. I actually keep it...this is the one that I have...I keep it in my fridge once it's been sprouted and dried and then I just grind it when I need it. Or you can take it in to get it ground and keep it in the freezer or refrigerator.

voice: How long would you keep it in the fridge?

Lorraine Carlstrom: Two to three weeks, maybe up to a month. Yeah, it's dried, it certainly doesn't have the preserving qualities of the non-sprouted, so that's why you've got to make sure in the fridge or freezer.

voice: So you just dried that as is?

Lorraine Carlstrom: I just sprouted it, took the sprouted things, put them on here, dried it, and then, the same size of the sprout, you can see most of the sprouts have fallen off...but this is called bulgur wheat and this is called bulgur flour once you grind it. Now a lot of people like it coarsely ground and that's how a lot of the bulgur salads are made. It's just cracked, and so it's not fine, so just ask it to be, you just release the stone so it's further apart and it just cuts it up like steel-cut oats. And that bulgur wheat, a lot of people make salads out of it, and they cook that like rice, and then they make a salad or they do it raw and let it soak.

But one nice thing about when I do it this way then all the recipes that are quick like muffins and cookies, and I did make cookies for you guys today to taste, you can use it straight and feel good that oh, it's actually not going to be full of those preservatives,

which are nature's preservatives, but it's still preservatives, on our system. It's like all the recipes that you love because that's the hardest thing people tell me. Oh, if I soak my flour and then I try to make banana bread, it just doesn't taste right. And I agree, It's heavier and it's just not the same. But if you do this stuff, you can just use it pretty much one for one. Sometimes you have to add a little more, and you can adjust your own recipes, but yeah, it's a great way of using that flour straightaway.

Jon Steinman: This is Deconstructing Dinner.

Available on the Deconstructing Dinner website are some resources available on this topic of sprouting grains. Those resources include links to articles on the many health benefits of sprouting grain including the significant increase in vitamins that result from preparing foods in this way.

Today's episode marks part 10 of our Local Grain Revolution series here on the show where we've been audibly participating in a grain-sprouting workshop offered by Lorraine Carlstrom – a resident of Nelson, British Columbia and a member of the Kootenay Grain Community Supported Agriculture (or CSA) project. Later on the show we'll be listening once again to recordings from the meetings of the CSA, so you can stay tuned for that.

But to first close out this grain-sprouting segment of the show, here once again is Lorraine Carlstrom as she wraps up the workshop and presented the participants with a number of dishes that incorporated sprouted grains into the recipe.

Lorraine Carlstrom: Well, if you want to sit down and I'll switch everything up so you guys can taste everything, all the different things, and give opinions about it, because I definitely have a hard time selling my family on Essene bread. There's kind of three ways when you sprout a grain. I did three kinds of recipes for you guys today and it was really hard for you guys to do every stage because it takes awhile. But we will get up and we will start looking at all the things. But one of the ones that you do is you just sprout it and then just grind it, and then bake it. And that one has many names but one of them is Essene. It's called the Essene bread. The Essene bread, it's very unusual, moist and sweet. It's really dense. It's not my kids' favourite bread, but a lot of people really like it. They were a Jewish sect; they only existed from second century BC to the second century AD. But they were pacifists, they lived communally, they never engaged in commerce, and they followed a very strict diet. And this is one of the things they did—they sprouted their grain. And so that's one way of doing the sprouted, the other thing to do with sprouted is you could sprout it and then do it like you do rice. And it's like a pilaf and I gave you that recipe too. So that's one way, that's the easy way, you just sprout it, use it right away, and cook it in either water or bone broth. And then the other way to do it is sprout it, dry it, in either the sun or...not in here, I rarely have days that I can do it in the sun...in your oven. And then use it as bulgur. You kind of break it down to cracked wheat so they can make salads out of it, or as flour. And that's what I use most.

voice: And the heat doesn't kill anything?

Lorraine Carlstrom: Well it does. Vitamin C is very heat-sensitive. So yes, what you can do, as long as you keep it below a temperature, for approximately 150 degrees F, you see, my kids laugh because this sounds like cutting wood, right. And I agree, it's very thick and very hard, grinding this thing down. This one's not as hard as the last one, so this is good. And this one has sesame seeds in it too, that I put in with my wheat when I was sprouting.

voice: So you sprouted the sesame?

Lorraine Carlstrom: Yeah, but you know what's interesting, my sesames didn't look like they sprouted that much, so I'm wondering, and I don't know, if they might have got irradiated. A little bit of the pilaf here to try, it's kind of chewy. I got up at six this morning and put it in the crockpot.

Jon Steinman: Lorraine Carlstrom. Links to recipes for Essene bread and grain pilaf will be linked to from the Deconstructing Dinner website at deconstructingdinner.ca.

soundbite

Jon Steinman: This is Deconstructing Dinner – a syndicated weekly one-hour radio show and Podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman and you're tuned in to part 10 of our ongoing Local Grain Revolution series.

As part of our ongoing efforts to document the evolution of the Kootenay Grain CSA, we've also been compiling a pretty extensive list of media coverage that the CSA has received to date. The Deconstructing Dinner website includes links to news clippings, radio interviews and television broadcasts and the more recent media attention paid to the CSA came from CBC Radio's morning show, Daybreak South, which airs throughout the southern and southeastern interior of British Columbia. Here's a segment of that show featuring CSA co-founder Matt Lowe.

Daybreak host: And this is Daybreak. We're coming up to 18 minutes now before 7, before 8 in the Mountain Time Zone. In Kamloops, 94.1 on your FM dial. In Creston, you're listening to us at 100.3 FM. Well, it's grain harvest time and that's nothing new if you live on the prairies. It's not so common anymore in the Creston Valley, but right now farmers are harvesting about 100 acres of grain; it's part of the Kootenay Grains Collective. Now this collective is just in its second year. It's already tripled in size. The founder is Matt Lowe, and Matt is on the line. Hi there Matt.

Matt Lowe: Hi Marion, actually I'm one of the founders and my friend Brenda Bruns is my co-founder.

Daybreak: Alright, well, you and Brenda, how did you come up with this idea?

Matt Lowe: Well, we were both working on environmental issues, trying to get the people of our region to choose alternatives to fossil fuels. There was a ecological challenge issued in our...

Jon Steinman: The Kootenay Grains CSA's Matt Lowe on CBC Radio's Daybreak South. That segment aired on September 1st, 2009. Now we heard quite a bit from Matt on our previous episode of the series and that was part of Deconstructing Dinner's ongoing coverage of the CSA's administrative meetings. And we've chosen to record the evolution of this project in such detail as we imagined that other communities will become inspired to take on similar local food projects as indeed some already have. And these recordings lend some pretty detailed insights into just how easy launching such a project can be so long as there is a committed group of farmers and eaters getting together to make it happen.

Our last episode of the series left off with such recordings, and those from the January 2009 meeting of the CSA steering committee. One recording from that meeting, in particular, did not make it onto the show but is definitely one worth sharing today. As part of that meeting a discussion had ensued as to whether or not the CSA – which (outside of the farming itself) had up until that point been administered by volunteers, should instead seek to hire a coordinator to manage the three-fold increase in members that has since taken place. It was Matt Lowe who proposed the idea, and responding to the proposal was, among others, farmer Joanne Gailius. Joanne introduced a rather thought-provoking response to the proposal that the coordinator be paid \$20/hour as part of a \$20,000 contract. The discussion became one that, in a broader way, accurately captured the long-standing and continued disparity that exists between what farmers financially receive for their work versus what most other professions and labourers receive. Here's Joanne Gailius, followed by farmer Keith Huscroft, co-founder Matt Lowe, and committee member Abra Brynne.

Joanne Gailius: We've put a ton of time into figuring this out. We know what a wage would be and all that but I can tell you, looking at farm income, that's a whole lot more than what farmers would make and I can't see that feeling comfortable, as Abra said, the whole point was to help farmers survive. But my guess is if you look at what the farmers earn from this year's project, it was a lot of volunteer hours on their part in the end as well. So, to look at \$20,000 going to a coordinator, that is far more than any farmer would earn.

Keith Huscroft: Okay, but I would concede, though, that if there was any time to spend the money...maybe we don't have to do this every year. If we had someone in here who did it, said that, planned it, or had a plan, a consultant brought in and set it up, just the person who could bring the right people in to help them to set it up, right. You don't have to do it yourself or have to know it all yourself or you'd probably be making a lot more than \$20 an hour. I'm willing to say, okay, I'll sign off on that this year, and if I'm satisfied with the results and they do a good job with it, I'm sure that that money is going to be money very well spent, right. It doesn't mean we have to do it next year because the

plan is in place, we're building, it's the foundation that we're doing, and we've got to have a good foundation.

Matt Lowe: The reason we set on the price that we did for the first year is to really start to take care of the inequity. But we also have to be realistic and realize that every one of us pretty much operates in a world of our incomes are fairly high. You know, even you guys, I think, in your other line of work, right. So, because we operate in this consumer, high materials standard of living world, to think that we're going to hire someone for about the same wage that you would pay to work at A&W or something, we're not going to get a person that can do this job well. And I would also like to see that farmers get paid better over time, but I think it's a step by step process.

Joanne Gailius: My question is that two and a half days a week? I'm actually not questioning the hourly wage; I'm questioning what the lump sum is in the end. I think this is a real flux time and I'm not trying to be the queen of frugal, but I can tell you these guys spend as little as possible to produce their best product. I know that Drew has spent countless hours trying to find old cleaning equipment he can fix up, and these guys don't drive new vehicles. Their way of working is not in a way that spends money easily.

Abra Brynne: I'd like to tell a wee story if you guys don't mind. And it's following on your thing, I was on the Board of Kootenay Organic Growers for a long time and I vividly remember a meeting we had January I think it was 2007, maybe February. And Brenda and Gail Elder had just come back from Mexico. And while they were down there, they toured an organic farm and they were talking to the farm labourers there, and they found out that the farm labourers on that organic farm were making a \$1.25 an hour. And the farmers, including Jeremy, were laughing around the table about, well, gosh, NAFTA's working really well, because that's how much *we* made last year. And I mean they were laughing about it and my jaw dropped to the floor, and I mean it was one more heart-breaking farm story for me. And it makes me so angry that that is the world we live in. And I agree we can expect to get someone who necessarily will be able to do the kick-ass job we need to set up the CSA so it's going to run nice and smooth with a little bit of tinkering from the tech equivalent of Drew. But, I think we have to move forward with a real clear understanding of this is the world we live in. We're saying \$20 an hour in front of farmers who couldn't dream of getting that, so we need to be really respectful of that.

Keith Huscroft: This is a great thing for us. I can see nothing but good stuff happening, and just trust that everything is going to fall into place. A little bit of magic's going to happen and it's all going to take off...because it is. Putting this little bit in there, just trusting that this coordinator, or that things are going to happen, let's just do it. You know, it's worked for us so far. Somebody's getting the blessings around here and the rest of us are hanging onto the coattails. So let's get over it, let's move on, let's say yeah, we're going to put out whatever it takes for the coordinator, we're going to pay him that. We don't have to pay him that next year. If it doesn't work out, it's still only a little bit of our income and I'm willing to sacrifice that.

male voice: I would agree with that.

Joanne Gailius: I would agree too, and I think Abra just summed up my hesitancy.

Matt Lowe: And I really appreciate what you're saying too, and it's a crazy world.

Jon Steinman: This is Deconstructing Dinner. Since that January meeting of the grain CSA was held, a coordinator was hired to take on some of the CSA's administrative tasks.

But we can now we can fast-forward to April 2009 when the CSA steering committee met yet again just prior to the seeds going into the ground for year two of the project. As usual I attended that meeting to record the discussion and also lend my own thoughts to the project as I've done in the past. And just before that meeting got underway, a pretty touching moment took place. Because there I was sitting beside the three farmers who had committed to taking part in year two of this local grain project and being handed to the three farmers by CSA co-founder Brenda Bruns were cheques comprising a substantial amount of the money that they were being paid for the season. Now one could look at that moment like any other; farmers do, after all, receive cheques every year when they produce a crop. But this was different, these three farmers had not yet planted any seeds in the ground and of course, had not yet produced a final product. But here they were, receiving money to grow their crop at the beginning of the season. Now of course this is what the CSA model is all about, and we've talked about this at length as part of this series, but I know for me, that this tangible piece of paper with a monetary figure on it that was resting in the hands of a farmer who had not yet planted his crop, was certainly a moment that I know I for one won't forget, and it also helped remind me of just how important this grain project was in establishing a more equitable business model for farmers who are otherwise getting shortchanged by a globalized industrial food system that rewards the handful of corporations controlling the system far beyond rewarding the farmers producing the food.

soundbite

Jon Steinman: On our recent episode of the series, we briefly introduced the concept of Retail Supported Agriculture or RSA. Now the concept is much the same as that of Community Supported Agriculture in that a business, instead of an individual, puts money up front at the beginning of the season to then receive shares, in this case, multiple shares of the grains come harvest. In the first year of the Kootenay Grain CSA – Nelson bakery Au Soleil Levant committed to twenty CSA shares which were valued at a total of 2,000 pounds (or a little over 900kg). The bakery was charged a cheaper rate per share at \$75 instead of the \$100 paid by individuals. So while it might not at this point be so different of a model to go and label it as an RSA one, but as these next few recordings will capture, it's a model that might very well evolve over the next few years into one that is quite different from the CSA model.

With the CSA choosing to triple in size for this year, it was predicted that it might be quite challenging trying to convince an extra 270 families to commit to the project in a

region that does not contain any major urban centres. Most of us do, after all, purchase foods containing grains, or grains themselves, from retailers, and as we learned on our previous episode of this series, it's taking CSA members some time to shift to using grains more often in the kitchen. So in light of recognizing that at least at this point it might be necessary to include businesses in the project in order to really make a dent in the local food supply, Matt Lowe entered into discussions with area retailers before the April 2009 meeting. When Matt shared the outcomes of those meetings with the group, it became clear that not all businesses were ready to purchase their grains at the beginning of the growing season, instead of as they usually do upon delivery. Businesses do of course purchase high volumes of ingredients and food and are faced with different challenges than any that would be posed to an individual shareholder.

Matt Lowe: They raise a number of what I thought were pretty practical concerns, the first of which was they saw it as less convenient because they'd receive the whole grain, and then they would have to arrange milling. And so there would be a cost with that, an additional cost, and there would be the work for them to take the grain to the mill and pick it up, and so on. Another concern for them is that if we use this Retail Supported Agriculture model (or RSA) where, just like an individual shareholder, they take the risk of a less than ideal crop and therefore receive less grain. As a business, they have concerns that it'll really impact their bottom line. So I said that we're not necessarily committed to that model and that we'll certainly expect that we would talk about it today. They wondered about a contract maybe serving them better. So a contract at the beginning of the season where they say we need this, this, this and this much of each thing, and let's sign a contract, they'd pay for what they get. It's something we might want to consider. I'm fully in support of a CSA model where individual shareholders still bear that risk. But businesses, especially small businesses, I think it's hard for them to absorb a shock if they receive a lot less than what they had hoped for.

Keith Huscroft: Maybe we could plan, if we had a large carryover, that could sort of be an insurance policy for the next year. I mean, if we overplant and then we're able to store successfully and whatever, for a year, the grain, even if we did need it, we could use it for seed or whatever...but it would be insurance policy for us too, right. It's pretty hard when we're on a CSA model to switch to a contract model because it's pretty risky. None of us, except maybe Roy, are new at all this so I imagine we're going to get some surprise, but hopefully not this year. But something we could do to kind of lessen the impact, or make everybody a little more comfortable if we plant a little extra, store a little extra, then even if we did have a shortfall, we have stored grain. So that's something we could talk about as farmers.

Jon Steinman: Farmer Keith Huscroft. Now this discussion as to whether or not more businesses should be invited to become part of the grain CSA was fascinating in that it really was a debate on the pros and cons of the conventional way of doing business as has been done for decades versus that of the CSA way, and more specifically that of this newly proposed Retail Supported Agriculture (or RSA) model. On the one hand the idea of issuing contracts was discussed (which is how most farmers do business today) and on the other, the idea of businesses sharing in the very same risks that individual members

had already committed themselves to, that is, sharing the risk with farmers. In between the two models discussed, were hybrids of the two, with these ideas perhaps being more in line with what was suggested earlier that this Retail Supported Agriculture model might very well evolve into something completely new and different from that of CSAs.

In this next clip we hear again from farmer Keith Huscroft.

Keith Huscroft: Okay, if we have a crop failure, then A, we'd have to take it out of our profit, sort of thing, right? Some of it or is the whole thing going to be contracted?

male voice: When you saying contract, you're talking say they want 2000 lbs, is there an obligation to deliver? Like in the commodity market, a normal grain contract, there's an obligation to deliver it, and if you don't grow it, you have to go out and buy it and deliver it.

Matt Lowe: No.

male voice: So that would take that risk away.

Keith Huscroft: Yeah, but we've already been paid.

Matt Lowe: Oh yeah, so, sorry, let me just clarify, not this year. This year we're going with our SA model with businesses. But all the businesses are pretty much coming in, they're kind of sticking their foot in the water right now. They're coming in in a tentative way. But they're coming in fully excited and keen to hopefully get in in a larger way, but right now they're raising issues.

Keith Huscroft: I think that's a good idea. If that helps them out to guarantee it, but also we've got to cover ourselves a little bit too. I mean if we had this carryover, I'd be a lot less nervous about guaranteeing grain delivery.

Matt Lowe: So it's either that or the other thing one of them said was that, well, in a good year the shareholders get, they share in the bounty right and so she said, well, in a good year do we get more grain. And I said, certainly, it's something we could talk about but maybe instead of that, maybe a better alternative is for, like you say, in a good year, you guys store the additional grain, and then that carries over next year in case you have any problems.

Keith Huscroft: Yeah, well I mean if it's a contract, it's a contract. They get a certain amount and they're guaranteed that certain amount, right. Being a CSA, we're talking between two models, if they're willing to ride the CSA and get a little bit more, and a little bit less, and nobody's under contract, then that's fine. I mean, we'll have to figure something out for that. But there are two different models you're talking about, right.

Matt Lowe: Yeah, exactly, and that's what I think we do at some point, like this year we have chosen the RSA, the Retail Supported Agriculture, like you said, mostly because

businesses are getting on board in a small way. But next year, if all goes well this year, and they're happy with their grain and so on, like Kootenay Baker, they were talking about ten shares. Their baker said, we use a lot more than that. So they probably use a thousand times that throughout the year. So if next year they want to get in in a bigger way, then I think it's something for you guys to think about in terms of what's going to be the model that serves you and them best.

male voice: One thing that pops in my head was, why do we want commercial shares, in a way, why shouldn't we keep it simple...we've got lots of people that want to do it and once we go commercial, it seems to me like we open a whole can of worms. And then it's affecting the personal people who are buying them as well. I feel part of it is the first year of the CSA, people were good-hearted, and purchased by the acre. They didn't receive all the grain they should have. This year we've changed it that they'll get their 100 lbs. But in a way, we didn't go, say, if it's a bounty this year, we'll give them 120. We said okay, it's 100 lbs. And I feel a little bit like, okay, if we've decided now to go with you pay for 100 lbs., we will give you 100 lbs, do everything we can, we'll grow a little extra so you'll have 100 lbs. To me, that's a nice system. If we start to say now let's do commercial shares, and then we're going to change prices, how we're doing it, the commitment then I'm thinking to myself, that almost seems like that should be a whole other entity of the thing. Not combining the two together.

Jon Steinman: This is Deconstructing Dinner. If you've missed any of the show today it has been archived on our website at deconstructingdinner.ca and posted under the September 3, 2009 broadcast.

We're listening to recordings from the April 2009 meeting of the Kootenay Grain CSA – Canada's first community supported agriculture project for grain – now into it's second year in operation.

As the farmers and steering committee members discussed the pros and cons of inviting businesses to become involved in the project, Jenny Truscott weighed in on the debate. Jenny operates a small commercial milling operation in Creston where she serves small businesses and individual CSA members. As a processor herself, Jenny of course has the experience dealing with the needs of small businesses, and her experience proved valuable as part of the discussion.

Jenny Truscott: As a processor just selling to another business, I have found that they are more work, you don't get as much of the margin, they're what I would call, they're kind of going to the spoiled category, because you treat them a little more tenderly and more special because they bought all these shares. And like Drew says, every other individual is taking a risk that they don't want to take a risk.

Jon Steinman: Jenny Truscott. Now Jenny's comments do effectively introduce an important lesson that the CSA seems to have demonstrated thus far, that in creating new models of accessing food more equitably and sustainably, that doing so with individual eaters seems to have its advantages than dealing with businesses. Businesses after all

seem to have many more administrative and infrastructural changes that would need to take place to accommodate any new models of doing business. An individual, on the other hand, can be much more nimble in making lifestyle changes with less resistance. Now, there was one business that did commit to 20 shares in the first year of the project, and they happen to be a pretty small operation with only a handful of employees. But that business has successfully demonstrated that it is possible for a business to be a member of the CSA model and in doing so commit to investing in the shares at the beginning of the season. Jenny Truscott spoke about this bakery as an example of how the model can indeed be used by businesses.

Jenny Truscott: He was willing to take the risk. And in the end he got an awesome deal because all the grains were priced at a dollar a pound approximately. It ended up costing \$1.25 a pound, which is a really, really good deal when he got spelt and kamut. And last year, the price of wheat tripled, so he actually got a really good deal. At 75 cents a pound, it was a great deal. And my milling. But when I hear other business people not having that acceptance and going along with the whole process of CSA, it just makes more work for us all, and it also loses the whole idea behind the grain CSA.

Jon Steinman: Yeah, that was my train of thought too, that here we have a business that 's already proven to be okay with it and the idea of bringing him on in the first place was to use him as an example too. And he could be used as the example in front of other businesses. Like here's a guy who's done this, he did get a lower rate that everyone agreed to and that everyone was okay with and in the end he's got a positive testimonial to share.

Jenny Truscott: And he's so thankful, and he's such a good representative. Can we not pick and choose who we want to sell to too because they fit into the CSA mentality.

Roy Lawrence: I would just like to say, for these businesses that buy shares...I think that they should have first opportunity to purchase the excess.

Brenda Bruns: Sure and that would be a win for you farmers too, wouldn't it. It would be a win-win for the business as well, because they want it.

Jon Steinman: Farmer Roy Lawrence and CSA co-founder Brenda Bruns.

As the debate continued as to whether or not to change the model of the CSA to accommodate new businesses, Matt Lowe proposed one idea that the CSA could adapt to the each individual business's needs. It was a proposal that I myself weighed in on.

Matt Lowe: I think we also have to appreciate different businesses, really different challenges that different businesses face. So what I was hearing from them is that the fine line in terms of loss in profit.

Jon Steinman: Yeah Matt, where you were describing with some businesses not necessarily being like Ramon, I think that raises the whole chicken/egg scenario...it's

like who has to make the first move, is it the CSA or the business. Does the business adapt to the CSA model, or does the CSA model adapt to the business. And likely it's a little in between. But at the same time, if the CSA has already proven itself to be able to work under this model with individuals and a business, what consolations do you make as a CSA for those other businesses. Or do you stand your ground as the CSA and say, well if you want to invest in this, you're going to have to meet on these terms, because we are trying to change the system, and right now you're still stuck in that same model of reducing your risk and trying to make it so that you have no risk. But really what the whole CSA model, like you were saying Jenny, it's about bringing in that risk to the consumer, in this case the business community. So it's not just the risk for the farmer. I think the CSA should be trying to maintain that as much as it possibly can.

Jon Steinman: Now one of the hybrid models suggested for incorporating businesses into the CSA was to allow businesses to purchase as many shares as they like using the CSA type model of paying up front and sharing in the risk, and as an additional option, the CSA would also offer businesses the opportunity to purchase any excess production. Just as Farmer Roy Lawrence proposed earlier, committee member Wayne Harris further added to the idea that committed businesses to the CSA be offered preferential treatment to any of the excess production based on the number of shares that the business had already committed to.

Wayne Harris: We really and truly are going to that model when there's a surplus and that's made available to commercial businesses. It should be pro-rated based on the number of shares that you bought. So if Ramon buys 25 shares and the baker buys 10, and there's 1000 lbs surplus, he's got a larger portion available to him if he wants to take it. So that makes it relatively fair for a business that wants to make a bigger commitment.

Jon Steinman: Wayne Harris. While it was agreed at the conclusion of that discussion that 150 shares under the similar model to the CSA be issued to businesses, it was also agreed that the model could be examined post-harvest at the end of the year, to determine whether or not any changes should be made. And here again is Matt Lowe concluding that discussion.

Matt Lowe: So we'll go with using the CSA/RSA model we'll have a mix of businesses and individual shareholders in the proportions that we were talking about 450 to 150, that's individual shareholders, which I think it's a pretty good split. And then maybe at the end of the season, after harvest, we could all have a meeting with the businesses and we could hear each other out a bit. I think that that would be really useful.

Jon Steinman: Matt Lowe. The 150 business shares were sold without the need to even advertise, and seven businesses are now members of the project. You can expect Deconstructing Dinner to continue to explore this interesting evolution of incorporating businesses into the project, and we'll certainly check in with the business owners themselves and hear from them their thoughts on how whether the model works for them or not, and how it might change to better suit their needs.

That last clip also wraps up today's segments recorded in April 2009 at the meeting of the Kootenay Grain CSA.

And one interesting discussion that we won't get a chance to listen in on today from that April meeting was in response to a growing interest among farmers to become part of the grain CSA. With so much attention being paid to the project and the financial rewards that the three farmers have received, word is, of course, getting out among the farming community that the Kootenay Grain CSA is a viable market for their product. Some of that interest has even come from farmers outside of the Creston Valley where the three current farmers are located. One of those farmers is a bean farmer in Grand Forks who has successfully been cultivating two types of beans that he would like to sell through the CSA. With quite the critical mass of people and businesses who are members, the project is proving itself to be a lucrative market for producers in the southern interior of the province.

Also to mention before we wrap up the show is the recent launch of the Kootenay Grain CSA's new website at kootenaygraincsa.ca.

The website is still being developed but will act as marketing tool for the project, and it will provide a discussion page where members can trade grain amongst each other (so for a member who doesn't want their oats, they can trade with another member who might not want their bag of spelt). Also on the site will be a recipe database, info on the farms and farmers, and much more. And again the website is kootenaygraincsa.ca.

And don't forget that this ongoing Local Grain Revolution series here on Deconstructing Dinner maintains an extensive archive of our past shows on this subject, as well as photographs, at deconstructingdinner.ca.

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 radio stations across the country and relies on the financial support from you, the listener. Support for Deconstructing Dinner can be donated online at deconstructingdinner.ca or by dialing 250-352-9600.