

**Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
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Title: Final Attempt to Save Prison Farms (The Future of Prison Farms III)

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Jon Steinman: And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner produced in Nelson, British Columbia at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY and heard on radio stations around the world including CILU Thunder Bay, Ontario. I'm Jon Steinman and today marks part three in on our ongoing coverage on the future of Canada's rehabilitative prison farm program. Since July 2009, Deconstructing Dinner has been paying close attention to the six prison farms that were, up until recently operating across Canada. In February of last year it was discovered that the farm program was scheduled to be phased out, and indeed that process has been underway since then. But just as we've covered here on the show, the farm program is *not* going down without a fight as farmers, prison workers, inmates, academics, and advocates of local food systems have all been noticeably rallying to not only halt the closures but to encourage the program to be further *enhanced*.

On today's part three of our coverage we travel to Ottawa where on March 25th and 30th, this issue was brought to Parliament and more specifically, Canada's Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security where some Members of Parliament *challenged* the government's decision and heard testimony from both supporters and opponents of the closures.

increase music and fade out

JS: For anyone who has *not* yet had a chance to listen to previous episodes of this prison farms series those shows are archived on-line and linked to from the main page of the Deconstructing Dinner web site at deconstructingdinner.ca. You can simply look for the Future of Prison Farms graphic located on the right-hand side of the main page.

And to bring any of you who *are* new to this series up to speed... we think it's best to answer the question... why... has Deconstructing Dinner focused so much attention on this issue? And what we've *discovered*, is that the decision to close Canada's over one-hundred year-old prison farm program has, not only woken many of us up to its very existence, but it's highlighted some of the many fundamental food system concerns that this show is designed to address. For one, when the then-Minister of Public Safety Peter Van Loan announced that the closures were in part due to quote: "labour-intensive farming being no longer relevant", it was clear that Canada's Conservative government was *deeply* out of touch with the direction in which a growing segment of the food system is heading. And this issue has also introduced some of the more intangible benefits of working with plants and animals that we often speak of here on the show, and

regardless of whether or not it's a hardened criminal working on a farm or a young child planting their first seed, there is indisputably a benefit to society by maintaining access to farm and gardening programs for multiple reasons.

Up until last year the Correctional Service of Canada operated 6 prison farms across the country in New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. The farms have been part of CORCAN – a division of the Correctional Service that operates rehabilitative and employment skills training programs to help reintegrate inmates back into the public. CORCAN's operations produce manufactured goods, textiles, furniture and up until recently, food. Operations like those in Kingston Ontario produce meat, dairy, poultry and eggs, with much of that dairy and egg production being circulated *back* into other Ontario and Quebec prisons thereby also making the program a great example of how institutions can feed themselves, reduce costs, and promote the practice of local integrated food systems.

And so the now in-process closure of the farms has sparked an ongoing campaign to *stop* the closures and with the program being part of a public institution owned by the people of Canada, many Members of Parliament have joined the fight. When we last visited this issue here on the show we heard from Liberal Agriculture critic Wayne Easter who requested that members of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food visit the farms to see for themselves how the program functions. Conservative members voted *against* that motion.

But, there is *another* committee into which this debate has since entered, the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security who on March 25th and 30th chose to study the closure of the farms in light of the many questionable reasons behind the decision.

On the first of the two days *management* from the Correctional Service of Canada were invited to *defend* their decision and speaking *first* was their Regional Deputy Commissioner of Ontario - Ross Toller. Toller has been with the Correctional Service since 1978 and in his opening statements he suggested that one of the main reasons for shutting the farm program down was because less than 1% of inmates enrolled in CORCAN programs ultimately found work *in* agriculture.

Mr. Ross Toller: The Correctional Service of Canada will be closing six federal CORCAN farms by March 31st, 2011, as a result of the Government of Canada's strategic review. This review requires all existing government programs to be reviewed on a four-year cycle to ensure that programs are effective and efficient.

In 2008, the Correctional Service of Canada assessed its programs and services to ensure that funding is focused in the areas where they are most needed and to identify better ways that we can deliver services and programs. This process has given the Correctional Service of Canada the opportunity to further align its budget, programs, and priorities with the new vision for federal corrections in Canada. The service is committed to both providing correctional programs to offenders and assisting them to develop employability skills that will facilitate their obtaining and keeping a job in the community.

In order for us to be successful in this aspect, our employability skills development opportunities for offenders must reflect labour market demands of today and the future. This is something CSC does not take lightly. With the help of local business and government departments, we are working towards the development of alternative employment training that will help offenders with the successful reintegration into society.

The experience and skills obtained from working in the farms has been valuable; however, the decision to close the remaining farms was based on the fact that offenders were not gaining the maximum employability skills through agriculture. This becomes evident as over the last five years less than 1% of all offenders released into the community found work in the agricultural sector.

While offenders participating in the farming program did gain employability skills such as responsibility, team work, accountability, punctuality, and farming skills, relatively few offenders found work in agriculture once released into society. Therefore, CSC is looking at developing alternative training that will help meet the needs and realities of today's labour market and improve opportunities afforded to the inmates in the six minimum security penitentiaries across the country.

JS: The Correctional Service of Canada's Ross Toller. Now Toller's comments did not sit well with Liberal Member of Parliament Mark Holland who took exception to Toller's 1% statistic. Holland represents the Ontario riding of Ajax-Pickering and is the Liberal's critic on Public Safety and National Security. Holland views the statistic as being irrelevant and in light of the many skills offered as part of the farm program he believes a more *appropriate* statistic is to track how many offenders who come out of the program find employment, period, not necessarily just in agriculture. Holland also questioned Toller on the absence of any studies that gauged the rehabilitative impacts of the program.

Mr. Mark Holland: My first question is with respect to the mandate of the prison farm program. What was and is the mandate of the prison farm program?

Mr. Ross Toller: Well, it's the mandate of the Correctional Services of Canada and it includes all programs, which is to manage and administer the sentences that are imposed by the courts and to aid inmates in their reintegration and rehabilitative process.

Mr. Mark Holland: Okay. On that point, if one of the principal objectives of any program in Corrections Canada is rehabilitation, what I didn't hear you talk to is the efficacy of the prison farm program from a perspective of rehabilitation. What we know is that there are a variety of international studies that say that animal husbandry, working with animals, is on the leading edge of rehabilitation. It's one of the most successful things you can do to rehabilitate somebody. We also know, from talking with Correctional Service's Officers who've worked in some cases more than 30 years in prison farms that they tell us they don't know a better program at rehabilitating inmates.

With all that evidence on the one side, can you give me any evidence that you have on the other side that these programs aren't effective in rehabilitating inmates?

Mr. Ross Toller: As I said in my opening comments, there is no question that working on a farm does contribute to valuable skills: reliability, punctuality, and teamwork—elements associated with working in any sort of level of environment. However, the difficulty is very clear, that for those people who leave our facilities to seek employment, the agricultural sector is not a viable, realistic market right now. I mention some statistics here that were presented to this panel before, in which only 99 cases out of 25,000 were jobs actually obtained in the agricultural market. What we do know is evidenced by some of the Canadian council boards, that there is a strong demand and a continued need for labour in the vocational trades skill area.

Mr. Mark Holland: One of the things I've heard time and time again with this program is the fact that, because it's a voluntary program, because these inmates are going in at 4:30, 5 o'clock in the morning and working a full day, one of the skills they learn and I ask you that is it not critical to employability is the value of a good day's work, understanding the motivation of getting up in the morning and doing a good job, the pride that comes with doing a good job. Are those skills not critical skills in whatever job you're going to pursue afterwards?

I have a general arts degree. I took political science and history. I can apply almost none of it directly to what I do in my everyday job. But the point is about giving base skills. Don't you find those skills critical to somebody's employability once they get out of prison?

Secondly, when you said at the beginning that the mandate is rehabilitation, I don't recall you saying that the principal mandate is job skills. I admit it's important, absolutely, but why all the emphasis on job skills when we know they do get this base and we know it's so effective at rehabilitation?

Mr. Ross Toller: There's no question that skills learned in any position relative to punctuality, teamwork, the things that I mentioned there, are important in an inmate's progress towards rehabilitation. There's no question of that. However, to me, our perspective is that learning those skills in a job that is more likely to give you employment at the end would be quite reasonable.

On the second part of your question is that, a very high number of inmates, almost 70%, come to us with unstable work histories; 60% of the inmates who come to us have no skill, no trade, or no vocational experience. There's lots of information that notes that inmates in vocational trades have a 33% less likelihood to recidivate. So, to me, the essence of training in skill development with an employability aspect to obtain a job that's real in the market and needed is the best recipe for rehabilitative public safety results.

JS: This is Deconstructing Dinner. That's the Correctional Service of Canada's Ross Toller on March 25th *defending* the department's decision to dismantle Canada's Prison Farm Program. Toller spoke in front of Canada's Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. Liberal MP Mark Holland took exception to many of Toller's remarks as it appeared that the Correctional Service had based their decision to close the program almost *entirely* on the low rate at which inmates who go through employment programs get jobs in the agricultural sector. Mark Holland questioned the very narrow reasoning and he requested if any evidence existed on which programs were most effective in preventing inmates who leave the institutions from

reoffending, recidivism, and he further probed into why no analysis existed as far as how many inmates who go through the individual prison farm program ultimately get employment. As is heard hear, Ross Toller had difficulty understanding the latter question.

Mr. Mark Holland: You just mentioned recidivism statistics for vocational training; do you have recidivism statistics for the prison farm program? A.

B, if you don't have that, do you have the success of employment when they come afterward? I ask because employers I've talked to who've hired them have said they are some of the hardest-working people they've ever met.

And three, what are you replacing it with? We're a week and a half away, and I've yet to get an answer on the incredible, amazing thing that is so much better than prison farms that you're replacing it with. What are you replacing it with?

Mr. Ross Toller: We don't have the statistics that break it down relative to the employment aspect that you asked about in terms of specifics on where the jobs went. There are a number of areas that we are looking at to replace in different levels of programs. If you just give me half a minute here--

Mr. Mark Holland: Well, let me ask you this: how can you make a decision that something doesn't provide strong employment skills if you don't have the statistics of whether people are getting jobs when they come out? I mean, what evidence are you basing that on?

Mr. Ross Toller: Well, I just mentioned evidence that only a very small portion--

Mr. Mark Holland: You just said agriculture, though.

Mr. Ross Toller: Yes. Very few of our inmates who are released from prisons get any jobs in the agricultural sector-

Mr. Mark Holland: Well, what about construction? I've talked to all kinds of those involved in construction who say the people who come out of this program have an incredible work ethic and understand the value of a job and understand the motivation needed to get a job. So I'm asking the question for all types of jobs, not just agriculture. It's about broad skills. What percentage of people when they are leaving are getting jobs?

I'm hearing there is tremendous demand, so I'm just wondering. You made the decision to cut this and you're saying people aren't getting employment. What are you basing it on? What are your statistics for employment for people coming out of this program?

Mr. Ross Toller: I can refer you to what we have in terms of offender job placements. These are placements for people who go through the CORCAN employment group. Over this, I'll use figures from 08-09. Of 2,560 areas where job placements took place, 476 offenders got jobs in construction trades, 367 in general labour types of trades, and in agricultural and horticultural areas were 14.

Mr. Mark Holland: Right, but so maybe you are not understanding my question. People come through the prison farm program and come out the other side. What are the statistics for them, in terms of how many people are engaged in meaningful employment once they come out, relative to the other programs you are putting on? That's a much more important statistic.

Mr. Ross Toller: I really am not sure if I understand your question. Sorry.

Mr. Mark Holland: The point is that for some reason you think that if you get these skills, you can only work in agriculture. What I am hearing from construction and many other industries is they are valuing this program because of the work ethic it teaches and that they desire people coming out of these programs for things like construction and other programs. So a real comparison would be the statistics of those coming out of other programs versus those coming out of the prison farm program in terms of employment, period, and not just in agriculture, but in employment period.

Mr. Ross Toller: As I mentioned, we don't have that broken down, but again I go back--

Mr. Mark Holland: How can you make the point that...? You don't know whether it's not effective, but you're saying it's not effective. You're telling me that it doesn't give good job skills, and yet you're telling me that you don't have comparative job statistics for people who are coming out of these programs.

Mr. Ross Toller: What I am telling you is that the labour market demands for agricultural work is very low--

Mr. Mark Holland: That's for agricultural work. I'm talking about--

Mr. Ross Toller: Construction trades and general labour are very clear here, and I think that's evident in the statistics we have there.

JS: Now even we here at Deconstructing Dinner were quite taken aback at the seemingly straight forward question posed by Mark Holland and the inability by the Correctional Service of Canada's Ross Toller to understand it. No doubt it seems irrelevant to base the decision to close Canada's prison farm program because only 14 out of 2560 job placements were in the agricultural sector. Certainly many of those who have gone through the prison farm program have ended up in construction or as general labourers, yet the Correctional Service has no data to suggest if that is or is not the case. And so Deconstructing Dinner followed up with Liberal MP Mark Holland to see if he could possibly shed light on this glaring absence of data and Toller's inability to understand Holland's very straight-forward question. Holland suggests the reason for both is that the Correctional Service of Canada does not want Canadians to know the answer.

Holland spoke to us from his office in Pickering, Ontario.

Mr. Mark Holland: Well, you know, the first question you have got to ask is how successful a program is in doing two main things. One is rehabilitating the individual the inmate and two,

how is it preparing them to get employment and lead a productive life on the other side. So, on the second count the obvious question in my opinion is how does this program compare to other programs in terms of getting people employment and what they were fixated on was whether or not they got employment in agriculture. That's the only program in Corrections that we have that standard. I mean, who cares if somebody comes out of the agriculture program, out of the prison farm program, and gets a job in construction or gets a job doing some other job as long as they are employed and they are contributing positively. So, it's a pretty straight forward question. Which is, you know, compare program to program, and what are the employment statistics. I was a little confused by the corrections officials inability to understand the question because I think it is a pretty straight forward question and its one you would've hoped they had put some time to think about. But two, you know I think it does say they don't want an answer because I think the answer would demonstrate just how effective this program is. What all anecdotal evidence tells us is that the people who come out of these programs are more successful than any of the other programs because the programs are extremely intense, they really engender a strong work ethic, and they give some really important base skills that employers on the other side know are important to work. So, you know, I think it really says to me that this decision is based on anything other than facts and information and that's one of the things I think that's so frustrating about it.

JS: Now what became clear from the March 25th and 30th meetings of Canada's Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security is that Liberal, NDP and Bloc Quebecois members do *not* support the decision to close the prison farms, while *Conservative* members who represent the government are in *support* of the decision. Throughout both days Conservative members continually reinforced this reasoning, that because the agricultural program does not produce many agricultural workers, then it should be scrapped. And so Deconstructing Dinner embarked on a little exercise to check out the *backgrounds* of Conservative members of the committee, because if as Conservative members believe so strongly that a person can *only* get a job and be effective in that job if they receive training *in* that field, then on that assumption the six Conservative members on the committee *must* have attended schools where they studied on how to be a politician or at the very least, were *working* in politics *before* becoming Members of Parliament. So, let's take a look and see if that's the case.

Of the six Conservative members on the committee we arrive Dave Mackenzie. It appears prior to Mackenzie being elected into office, he had no previous experience in politics and instead spent 30 years on the Woodstock police force, he then became the General Manager of a snowmobile part manufacturer, and yet now he's a politician! And then there's Shelly Glover. Glover studied Justice and Law Enforcement at University, she spent 19 years on the Winnipeg police force yet despite no training or experience as a politician she's now a Member of Parliament! Next we come to Conservative MP Phil McColeman – also on the committee. McColeman attended Kent State University on a hockey scholarship and later owned and operated property development and *construction* companies, and now he's a politician. Conservative MP Rick Norlock, similar story, served on the Ontario Provincial Police force; now a politician. Brent Rathgeber, a former Lawyer, now a politician. And the last of the six Conservative MPs on the committee is the *Chair* of the committee - Garry Breitkreuz who earned a Bachelor of *Education* and taught in schools for 24 years and perhaps *most* interesting, Breitkreuz was raised on a farm and farmed for 7 of those 24 years while teaching and now he's

a politician. So *despite* Conservative Members on the committee believing that the prison farm program should be scrapped because so few inmates ultimately get jobs in agriculture, the backgrounds of *all* six of them demonstrate the complete opposite, that yes, it is *indeed* possible to learn from one trade and enter into another.

soundbite

JS: This is Deconstructing Dinner and part 3 of our ongoing coverage on the future of Canada's prison farms. The farms which are located across the country are operated by CORCAN – a division of the Correctional Service of Canada that prepares inmates in minimum security prisons with job skills and rehabilitation *prior* to their release back into the public. With the vocal opposition *to* the now in process closures, on March 25th Canada's Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security invited those behind the decision to appear before the committee so members of parliament could learn more about how the decision was made. One of the MPs present was Wayne Easter, who, despite not *officially* sitting on the committee, has spent considerable effort trying to save the prison farm program. Easter is the Liberal critic on Agriculture and Agri-Food, he represents the Prince Edward Island riding of Malpeque, and he's a former Solicitor General of Canada. Easter is heard here posing questions to Ross Toller of the Correctional Service of Canada.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Having been Solicitor General and toured the prison farms, having toured them last February, and having spent considerable time talking to inmates, I personally think—and I think many of us who have toured the farms think—that this is one of the dumbest decisions I could ever see CSC making.

Look at the people in the back of the room. These are community people who are here supporting prison farms, not just for the value to the farm community, but especially for their value in terms of rehabilitation to inmates. I have to wonder, I find it surprising Mr. Chair, that neither the minister nor the people on this committee and I don't know about you folks, I don't know how much time Mr. Sargent spends talking to people who work in those dairy operations. I don't know how much time he's spent there. But this committee and the minister before a decision of this magnitude is made, should be spending time on those farms actually talking to the people. [Applause]

Hon. Wayne Easter: The people I've talked to on those farms they were people who had no life. They gave them a life by working with livestock and dairy cattle--the dairy herds in Kingston and the dairy herd Westmorland. I'm a dairy farmer, and others around here are farmers as well. When you walk into that barn, you see a herd and you see the pride of those inmates. I really think this is a bad decision.

But anyway, you mentioned a moment ago, Mr. Toller, in response to a question from Mr. Davies a moment ago, you do not have a program that is important to mental health. I submit to you, sir, that you're wrong. You do, and that's the prison farm system and working with livestock. Have you reviewed in terms of this decision any studies in terms of the rehabilitative impact of working with livestock and on these farms? And are you aware of the garden project in San Francisco?

Mr. Ross Toller: No. To answer your first question, we have not done a look in terms of work with mental health and livestock.

No, I'm not aware of the program that you referred to in San Francisco.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I would submit to you before you go ahead with this decision, you should have a look at it. The study in San Francisco, called the Green Project, which is operated by the San Francisco county jail, indicated that 29% of the inmates released were rearrested within the first six months, while those who took part in the prison farm programs had a recidivism rate of only 6%. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, same project said, and I'll quote what they said: "one of the most innovative and successful community-based crime prevention programs in the country is the Green Project in San Francisco".

Sir, you are making a decision here, that we can't, if these herds are going to be sold right away, we can't bring them back. Based on the evidence in the United States, this is a system that works. We're going to destroy the system and not get it back. What for?

JS: Liberal MP Wayne Easter. Also speaking during the March 25th meeting of Canada's Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security was Conservative MP Shelly Glover. Glover who appears to support the closure of the farms and who represents the Manitoba riding of Saint Boniface chose to reinforce the rather hollow statistic heard earlier, that in 2008-2009, only 14 job placements of a total of 2,560 inmates who went through CORCAN programs were in the agricultural sector. Glover used this stat to help introduce a rather perplexing mathematical equation of her own creation, an equation that, to be quite blunt really made absolutely no sense, but it did *further* emphasize what appears to be a complete absence of any sound reasoning for closing Canada's prison farm program. Glover is heard here questioning John Sargent, the Chief Executive Officer of CORCAN.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I would like to touch on some questions, again, about the finances of this. You did state earlier that during the fiscal year 2008-09 a total of 14 offenders found job placements in the agriculture sector, right?

Mr. Ross Toller: That's correct.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: That was out of about 2,560 that received offender job placements, right?

Mr. Ross Toller: That's correct.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: So how much does it actually cost to run the six prison farms?

Mr. John Sargent (Chief Executive Officer, CORCAN, Correctional Service Canada): In fiscal year 2007-2008, the last full fiscal year before the strategic review was completed the cost to run the six farming operations across Canada was \$4,113,000.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Okay. If we do the math, we have 14 offenders who successfully go into agriculture and it cost \$4 million to run the six farms. It cost approximately \$285,000 to train them to successfully integrate into a successful job, correct?

Voices: No. No. Rhetoric!

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Order.

JS: As heard there the visitors to the committee were also as we were here at Deconstructing Dinner dumbfounded by Glover's *liberty* with numbers. Similar to the Correctional Service of Canada's Ross Toller and his seeming inability to understand Mark Holland's question, Glover also fails to consider that not all inmates going through Canada's Prison Farm Program end up in the agricultural sector. Now despite *no* statistics having yet been presented by the Correctional Service of Canada, there is every reason to believe that *many* inmates who leave the farm program get jobs just not necessarily in agriculture. And so Glover's mathematical equation as to how much it costs per inmate to run the agricultural program is completely baseless and uninformed. Now CORCAN's John Sargent seemed to be quite aware of the errors in Shelly Glover's numbers, and yet *despite* his *diplomatic* response, Glover continued to perpetuate her grossly inaccurate understanding of this issue.

Mr. John Sargent: The total cost for running the farms, as I said, in that particular year was the \$4 million, and from the number of people we placed in jobs through our community employment coordinator system, 14 of them did get jobs in agriculture. I couldn't comment on where other people went.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: That's \$4 million for farms, and 14 people finished. That's \$285,000 per job placement for 14 people.

And when we look at the 2,560 and the amount you talked about, which was a little higher than what I had foreseen, it's more along the lines of about \$36,000 per job placement. Is that correct?

Mr. John Sargent: Well. As I said, the total operating cost for the year was \$5 million, and then we have the various job placements, as we, Mr. Toller introduced earlier. We placed 476 people in the construction trades. We placed 367 people as general installers/repairers--

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I don't want you to go through the list, only because I have about 30 seconds left.

But it's clear that if we look at value for these offenders to successfully gain tools to get a job, that is \$285,000 compared to, and you can do the math later, but I've done the math. It's about \$36,000, which is substantial.

JS: Shelly Glover successfully demonstrates that simply "*doing the math*" *doesn't* equate to the math being correct.

soundbite

JS: Also sitting on the committee is Liberal MP Andrew Kania who represents the Ontario riding of Brampton West. In light of there being a seeming *lack* of evidence to substantiate this now in-process closure of Canada's prison farms, Kania asked the Correctional Service of Canada's Ross Toller *where* all the information they based their decision on came from.

Mr. Andrew Kania: So you indicated that in terms of the decision to close these farms, you've relied on studies, empirical evidence. Is that accurate?

Mr. Ross Toller: The closure of the farms was as a result of a strategic review exercise that looked at effectiveness, efficiencies, in terms of--

Mr. Andrew Kania: What's the document called?

Mr. Ross Toller: The document, it's a strategic review document.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Can we have it? What is its name, and can we have it? I'd like you to highlight exactly where in that document and what you're relying on for the shutdown of the farms.

Mr. Ross Toller: Strategic review documents are not accessible to the public.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Okay, well, I am asking on behalf as a member of this committee for you to produce the document to the committee so that we can read it and then have you re-attend so we can question you on it.

Mr. Ross Toller: I don't have the authority to release that document.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Okay. That's something we'll deal with by way of a vote.

JS: Liberal MP Andrew Kania did indeed later move a motion and it was agreed that the committee would be provided with the strategic review document in question. In our follow-up discussion with Liberal MP Mark Holland, Mark suggested that the committee will also work to make public what they're able to, of that document.

soundbite

JS: This is Deconstructing Dinner produced in Nelson, British Columbia at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman. If you're listening to us on the radio and want to at times access our shows on-line, we do maintain a free weekly podcast that can be accessed and subscribed to through our web site at deconstructingdinner.ca. Today's episode is also archived there under the April 8, 2010 broadcast.

Today's broadcast marks part 3 in our ongoing coverage on the Future of Canada's Prison Farms. For over 100 years, Canada has maintained farm programs that while in some cases were

historically work camps; today those programs have evolved to become part of the Correctional Service of Canada's CORCAN program that seeks to prepare inmates in minimum security prisons for integration back into the public. CORCAN operates in 31 federal institutions across Canada and maintains four business lines including textiles, manufacturing, construction, and services. One of those programs has been agriculture and food production that has up until recently been operating at six of those institutions. Two of those farms as an example in the Kingston Ontario area maintain dairy herds and egg production facilities that *also supply* other prisons in Ontario and Quebec with food at well below the cost that would be otherwise found on the open market. In the past few years the farm and food production operations have been downsized and in February of 2009, it was discovered that the farms were actually on their way to being closed. This sparked an active campaign among farmers, community organizations, labour unions, and local food system supporters who oppose the closures some of whom we'll be hearing from in just a moment. On March 25th and 30th Canada's Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security invited witnesses to appear before committee members to make statements and answer questions. Of the twelve members on the committee, six are Conservative, three Liberal, two Bloc Quebecois and one from the NDP. One of the Liberal members is Mark Holland who represents the Ontario riding of Ajax-Pickering. Holland is the party's critic on Public Safety and National Security, and here he is again sharing his thoughts on the prison farm closures with the Correctional Service of Canada's Ross Toller. Holland comes back to the previous statistic used that only 14 inmates last year found jobs in agriculture.

Mr. Mark Holland: If I could, I'm going to make a bit of a statement here up front. Let's be straight. I've had an opportunity to visit almost every single federal facility across this country. I've had an opportunity to visit almost every program that the Correctional Services offer. Without question, the farm program is the best one that I've seen. But here is the thing that irks me. There's another standard applied to this program that isn't applied to any other program. When I walk in and I see inmates building birdhouses, no one asks, "How many of them go and get jobs building birdhouses?" When I go and watch inmates who are sweeping floors, nobody goes and says, "How many of them get jobs sweeping floors?" When I go and look at a literacy program, which, believe me, I support and it needs to be done, no one asks, "How many of them go and write books?" This is, to me, an absolutely ridiculous standard that's applied to no other program in corrections.

So my question is--or not even a question, I'll make it in the form of a statement and then move on to a question. When comparing programs, we need to compare program to program, employment to employment. What we've been told today is that we don't have those statistics. We can't say that for those who take this vocational program there is this rate of employment; for those who take the prison farm program there is this rate of employment. For those inmates who I saw sewing pockets, in a worthy job for the military they're sewing pockets onto things that are going to go to Afghanistan, what's their rate of employment when they come out of that program? Why this standard for this program? It makes no sense.

The second point I will make, this is with respect to recidivism: The principal mandate of the Correctional Service of Canada is to ensure that when people come out they don't reoffend, that they get better, and what all the leading-edge research from across the world is telling us is that there is nothing better, that the process of working with another life--animal husbandry, farming--

-is demonstrated to breed empathy, to help in the rehabilitation process. We've been using this prison farm program at the end, right before inmates leave.

To hear the stories, you know, Mr. Easter tells a story of inmates who had a cow with foot rot, which would under normal circumstances be put down, but those inmates refused to let that animal be put down because they had developed such a bond for it. And to look into the eyes of the men who have gone through this program and see the change that they talk about in their lives, the difference it has made to them, sir, I have to submit to you that it breaks my heart to see this being done to this program. It absolutely breaks my heart. *[Applause]*

So can you do this, then, because this is a major decision, this is giving up on something that Canada has been involved in for the last 100 years; can we refer this matter?

If we can't have it as a committee, can Corrections refer this matter to an independent third party to look at its impact on employment, to take a look at its impact on recidivism, to take a look at its impact in terms of costing? Can you turn it over to an independent third party in whom we can all have trust on those questions?

And all we need to know is the end result. We don't need any other information. Can you do that for us? Before making a decision to shut this down, so we're making sure we are making a decision based on fact, not on whatever else this is being made on?

Mr. Ross Toller: Well, the decision has been made and the continuation towards the advancement of the decision will continue. The reality for us, as I said before, is what we know in terms of economic realities of jobs availability is where we're moving this organization in terms of our transformation agenda.

JS: The Correctional Service of Canada's Ross Toller answering to Liberal MP Mark Holland.

Now what Mark Holland raises once again has been the clear lack of analysis done to substantiate the closing of the farms. But yet another indication of a clear *lack* of planning is the absence of *any* plan for what will become of the *thousands* of acres of vacant land owned by the people of Canada. Now there was as mentioned on a previous episode of the show a suggestion by the previous Minister of Public Safety Peter Van Loan that the land *could* be made available to, "construct super prisons". Deconstructing Dinner followed up with Liberal MP Mark Holland and asked him about the soon to become vacant land now occupied by Canada's prison farms.

Mr. Mark Holland: Well we have a lot of conflicting messages in questions we put on the order paper and statements made by the previous minister. There was every indication that they wanted to use these lands to build super prisons. These are massive prison structures that you see, particularly in states like California, and frankly they are a harbinger of terrible disasters both in terms of cost and soaring rates of reoffending, soaring rates of recidivism, and so, you know, obviously we are very concerned that is the direction they are heading. Now they are trying to off-skate and pretend there are no plans and that everything is up in the air but that begs the question: What is the hurry? If there are no immediate plans for these lands, then why rush at a hundred miles an hour to shut down a highly effective program that has been around for a

hundred years that all leading research shows us from around the world that it is cutting edge rehabilitation. There is no logic to it unless they had some other plans for the land. So, I tend to believe a lot more the information that we had to dig out of questions in the order paper and statements. Errantly made, not errantly made, made sort of casually by the minister in passing. This land could be used for super prisons. So, I mean, it's the only way this decision makes any sense other than some ideological hatred of the idea of this program. It just doesn't make sense in any other light.

JS: Liberal MP, Mark Holland. On day *two* of the hearings, March 30th, in Canada's Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security *opponents* to the prison farm closures were *also* invited to speak to the committee and answer questions. One of those speaking to the committee was John Leeman. Leeman is an ex-convict who has been out of prison for nineteen years and spent his later years in the farm program. For Leeman, the farm program offered a place to apply the skills he had acquired from other vocational programs and he does not support the closure of the farm program.

Mr. John Leeman: I'm an offender who served a life sentence and I wanted to come here today to speak on behalf of the inmates.

When I was in higher-security facilities, we had a lot of trades in there. I was a person who was very motivated to do it, but as we all know, when you are in higher security, it's more about focusing on punishment.

I ended up picking up all four welding tickets while I was inside. I also got my auto body licence while I was in higher security.

I grew up on a foster home on a farm. But I milked by hand, so when I went to the dairy farm, the first thing I was doing was looking for a pail and a stool to milk, and I found out that wasn't going to happen. Even with the welding tickets that I brought in there from the machine shops, on the machines, breaking down, I was never able to utilize the trade I had; I found out while I was in there that a farm boss had to teach me how to re-weld some of the stuff, because welding two plates it gets you your ticket, but it doesn't give you the experience.

As I say in every talk I do, I take my hat off to the farmers; they've just taught me life skills. They taught a lot more than just farming; it was the work ethics. Being up at four o'clock in the morning is pretty shocking for anybody coming down through the system. I've been out for 19 years now [*applause*] and I utilize those tools today in my daily work ethics. I would like to see some people from Parliament to come down to see just how that whole operation runs. It's a phenomenal thing. It's not geared to just one specific inmate; it runs from a two-year sentence right on to the longest sentence you could ever get. We've seen guys who never got along together got taught by the shop bosses how to be team player and take animosity out of the institution.

I just can't emphasize enough that I feel, as a former inmate, that this is a bad mistake for inmates. It has more than just a trade and I want to say again, not everybody is going to come

out and become a farmer, but a farmer teaches a lot more than just farming. There are a lot of related trades in there that are being implemented in the community today.

JS: This is Deconstructing Dinner. Another individual speaking to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security on March 30th was Bill Flanagan. Flanagan was there as an individual but he is a Professor and Dean of Law at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. He became inspired by the local efforts there to save the prison farm program and opposes the decision by the Correctional Service to close the farms.

Mr. Bill Flanagan: I know that the government takes the position that these programs are not cost-effective because few inmates find work in the agricultural sector upon their release, but I am not persuaded by the government's rationale. To me, it is clear that the government policy is being driven primarily by ideology and has little to do with cost-effectiveness.

We know that for many years crime rates have been steadily declining in Canada; however, with the government's law and order agenda and a growing range of mandatory sentences, prison populations are projected to increase in Canada by over 10% in the next few years in Canada.

As reported in yesterday's news, notwithstanding huge federal deficits, the budget for Corrections Canada is projected to rise by 27% in the next two years, to over three billion dollars and a 25% increase in the number of employees, so I would submit that the government is not shutting down these farms to save money. On the contrary, the government is prepared to needlessly throw millions of dollars more into our prisons.

Why, then, in the face of such public opposition and clear evidence of the utility of these programs, is the government determined to close the prison farms? The only explanation that makes sense to me is that we have a government that is bent on punishment and increasingly indifferent to rehabilitation. We have a government that wants to get tough on crime and tough on prisoners because they think this will garner them votes. I can assure you that there are no votes for this in Kingston and the Islands. [*applause*]

JS: Bill Flanagan. Also speaking on March 30th to Canada's Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security was Larry McDermott. McDermott is the former rural chair of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. He's now a counselor with the Shabot Obaadjiwan First Nation located north of Kingston. McDermott addressed the disproportionately high number of aboriginal peoples who are incarcerated within Canada's prisons, and he believes the prison farm program offers a more culturally appropriate form of rehabilitation to aboriginal inmates. McDermott also speaks to what, based on what we heard earlier on the show appears to have been an overanalyzed breaking down of the system into very finite components to such a point where decision-makers have completely lost touch with the relationships that take place *between* those components.

Mr. Larry McDermott: If I may, I'm going to quote from a friend of mine, who offers that one aboriginal healing paradigm realizes that the real essence of creation lies in what is going on between things, not merely on individual incidents, because when society has focused their attention solely on incidents, like our present model of justice does, it reduces the wrongdoers'

humanity to the level of their wrongdoing and not on restoring relationships, where the focus should be. Prison farm livestock and agriculture teach wrongdoers they are mutually interdependent on each other. Both have value. Both have worth.

Let me now expand the circle to include all prisoners, regardless of background. My wife worked with prisoners in several federal penitentiaries, and her conclusion is emphatic: Prison farms teach prisoners important life skills that prepare them for life as contributors to society.

Statistics such as those associated with work in similar circumstances, such as community gardens. The U.S. has been referred to. In the city of Los Angeles, their recidivism rate was improved by 50% -- and this study is readily available—it was improved by 50% through the use of community gardens. In a hard-core place like Los Angeles, you hardly think of farming or even gardening, but it worked.

I want to conclude by offering my hope that Parliament will view this issue from what one elder says is our longest journey--from our heads to our hearts. I hope you'll look long and hard at this situation, because we know that the relationship on a farm with living things does something, that academic solutions, that some of the ideas we have for correction, some of the ideas we have for truly changing and preparing an individual to return to society, just simply don't stand up to the value that a prison farm does and the impact that a prison farm can have on its people. So I think that, yes, I want to stress that this is important from an aboriginal perspective, but it's also important for all prisoners.

JS: Larry McDermott. The last two voices we'll hear from of those who spoke on March 30th were certainly the most revealing because both Dave Perry and Ron Amey are *employees* of the Correctional Service of Canada and oppose the closures. Both have understandably been quite silent; until now. Here first is Dave Perry.

Mr. Dave Perry: I'm a sixth-generation farmer, president of the Frontenac Cattlemen's Association, a director of the National Farmers Union, and I am an agribusiness supervisor for these prison farms.

I've worked on both sites in Kingston. I supervised the dairy operation for a number of years. I currently supervise the abattoir. It's the only abattoir between Toronto and Montreal that wholesales meat into the community.

We also train inmates. We train 14 to 16 or sometimes 18 inmates in the abattoir and any of those inmates who complete that process and want a job in that field they are able to find a job. They might not all want to follow through or they may go to another area, but there are jobs out there for them. We have tracked them ourselves. We have just currently toured a large meat plant north of Toronto, Holly Park Meat Industries, and they're employing two of the inmates we trained. There are notices on meat shops and butcher shops in Kingston--I know of four--looking for meat cutters, so once these inmates complete this program, there is going to be jobs there for them if they want to pursue it.

We provide a service at the abattoir for about 350 area farmers. They can take their animals there. They can have them processed for themselves, or the operator will purchase that animal and distribute that meat into the community. There's quite a local food movement in the Kingston area. Without that abattoir, the local food movement is dead. There will be no local meat for the area. It can come from the United States or Western Canada or wherever, but it will not be local. There are 150 businesses that rely on that abattoir to provide them with meat.

I believe there are people who made this decision who do not understand agriculture. Maybe they're not interested in it, but they certainly do not understand it. We could help them with that. When the announcement was made, it was a great slap in the face for farmers that agriculture is no longer important in today's society. As I said, I'm a sixth-generation farmer, and there are others out there in the same area.

On the news two nights ago, we learned the Canadian government has just donated \$120 million to Afghanistan to build a dam for irrigation purposes, while they say they're coming up four million dollars short here. If that's the case, I would think they could come up with the four million dollars we need, if that's the correct number.

There are some members of this committee who are in favour of closing these farms. I think they actually know better and I would urge them to take the actions required to stand up and save these prison farms. Wherever I travel in Ontario, I run into an inmate I have trained over the years. That person will come up and greet me like a neighbour because he's so happy that we were able to work together while he was serving his sentence.

Unless you actually come there and tour and see what's going on, you have no understanding of the situation and how they work in agriculture, working with animals and even growing plants. Many of these inmates, if they so wish, they have their own garden plots. They can grow vegetables so that they do not have to use the cafeteria or purchase vegetables through the institutional stores, which is a saving and they actually donate surplus vegetables to the food banks.

I would also like to urge the current minister to tour these sites. In closing, I just urge the total committee to do the right thing and save these prison farms before it's too late. Thank you.

JS: Dave Perry. And the other longstanding employee of the Correctional Service of Canada who *opposes* the closure of the prison farms is Ron Amey.

Mr. Ron Amey: Good afternoon, members of the committee. My name is Ron Amey. I am acting production supervisor of Frontenac Institution. I am responsible for the day-to-day operations, the budgets, and new ventures.

I supervise over 10 staff members, who oversee up to 70 offenders involved in a full agriculture and food-processing operation.

I have seen many changes over the years. I started in 1981 as an instructor at Frontenac Institution. At that time it was a work camp and inmates had to work on the farm. We escorted them to the farm and they were under constant supervision.

Today the offenders have their own alarm clocks. They get up; they get their breakfast and report for work at 5:30 in the morning. They start their duties just as they would at any job. Many offenders attend school during the day and after class return to work, finishing at six o'clock at night and completing a twelve-hour day.

The atmosphere has changed dramatically. We have an employer-employee relationship. Production has increased to the point that we have one of the top herds in the area. Now offenders ask to come to the farm for the benefits offered: Fresh air, a sense of accomplishment, and the skills they can learn. Physical work is a stress reliever.

This is not a 1950s operation. Offenders are exposed to modern technology. We have computerized milkers and a TMR mixer. We have just implemented an acidified milk program through the University of Guelph; this is something that was developed in Sweden, and the inmates have come online with that and helped us out quite a bit with that.

They're exposed to many areas of job skills: Construction, mechanical maintenance, welding, fabricating, and clerical work. Farmers are kind of a cheap bunch; we use the talents that we have and we construct a lot of our own equipment. We work as a team, with interactions among others to perform our duties. A lot of these fellows don't usually work too good together, but once they are in a minimum security setting like this and they see what is going on, they interact a lot better.

It helps to de-institutionalize offenders with the human-animal bond, as we've heard here earlier. We had the story of one offender. He came to us with substance abuse and anger management issues and a violent past. With us, he formed a bond with the cattle, was able to function in a group environment, came up and gripped his problems, and eventually worked his way up to one of the top positions on the farm. This inmate is now on parole in downtown Ottawa.

The intention is not and never was to train inmates to be farmers. We strive to release a better citizen into the community. For over a hundred years, we have been supplying food to area prisons, and we have been paying our way through agriculture.

JS: And that was Ron Amey – the acting production supervisor at Frontenac Institution in Kingston, Ontario. Amey was among the many people we just heard who spoke to Canada's Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security on March 30th, 2010.

And so what now; can the prison farms which are currently being dismantled be saved? Following the statements we just heard, a motion was moved by Liberal MP Andrew Kania to *halt* the closures.

Mr. Andrew Kania: We ask: "That the Minister of Public Safety refrain from taking any steps to sell, dismantle, or reduce operations at any of Canada's prison farms in any way until

independent experts have had an opportunity to fully review the value of the farm program and duly report in writing to both the Minister of Public Safety and Public Safety and National Security Committee.”

I am moving that the motion be debated and dealt with at the next meeting.

The Chair: You're giving notice, in other words.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Correct. [applause]

JS: The committee did vote in *favour* of Kania's motion on April 1st, however, motions like Kania's approved by committees *do* require further steps, and in our follow-up conversation with Liberal MP Mark Holland, he shared *what* those next steps are.

Mr. Mark Holland: I wish that the motion we passed meant that this would be on hold. Unfortunately it doesn't mean that. The motion will go from the committee where it was passed to the full house and we will be looking for concurrent motion and that will express the will of the house. Unfortunately though, even if we get a majority vote in parliament; it will still require the government to intervene. Hopefully they will listen to the will of the house, but unfortunately they are not bound to it. I think it sends a very strong message that the house feels that this is an extremely important issue that the government needs to intervene and I think it asks something very reasonable.

This motion simply asks that a third party, an independent party, an individual, be appointed to review all the facts, and be able to report back on the efficacy of the program on three fundamental points. One: Rehabilitation; which is the core mandate of Corrections Canada. Two: On how it prepares inmates to reintegrate into society in terms of employment skills and readiness to positively contribute to society. Three: Is on a basis of cost. And what is staggering right now is that they have no information and nothing they will share with us on any of those three key areas and I think the reason they won't share the information is because they know if they did it would overwhelmingly say keep the prison farm system; it works.

JS: Liberal MP Mark Holland, speaking to Deconstructing Dinner from his office in Pickering, Ontario. Holland expects that a vote will take place in the House of Commons sometime in the next couple of weeks, at which point, and as he mentioned, if there is a majority vote in favour of the motion, an intervention to halt the prison farm closures will *still* be required on the part of the conservative government should they choose to listen to the will of the house.

You can stay tuned to Deconstructing Dinner for updates on the future of Canada's prison farms and in the meantime you can also visit our web page for today's broadcast where unheard audio on today's topic is also posted alongside previous episodes of our prison farm coverage, transcripts of committee meetings and additional resources.

theme music

JS: 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.

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