

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

**April 22, 2010**

**Title: Joel Salatin & Judy Rebick on Building New Food Systems**

**Producer/Host: Jon Steinman  
Transcript: Paula Bailly**

*Jon Steinman:* Welcome to Deconstructing Dinner produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman and you're tuned in to the 173<sup>rd</sup> episode of this show that has been on the air since 2006. Deconstructing Dinner is listener-supported and a big thanks to all of you who continue to support the show with your monthly or one-time donations.

Today is another exciting broadcast featuring two well-known names in the world of food, farming and social justice. In the first half of the show we'll listen to a one-on-one interview with Virginia farmer Joel Salatin. Joel has become one of the most well known names in the world of alternative farming after his notable presence in Michael Pollan's "The Omnivore's Dilemma" and more recently, his appearance as part of the popular documentary "Food Inc."

In February 2010, Joel was interviewed by Lauren Berlekamp of the Erie Wire in Erie County, Ohio. Joel spoke to Lauren about his unique and seemingly common-sense approach to farming, but more specifically, they spoke of the nutritional comparisons of his grass-finished beef vs. the more common grain-finished beef, they spoke of the politics and regulations surrounding the livestock sector in the United States and their impacts on smaller-scale producers. And they spoke of *how* Salatin's model of success including his new relationship with a large American fast-food chain is a replicable and financially rewarding model for farmers who seek to produce more responsible food. So that's the first half of the show and in the second half, we'll listen to a great talk delivered by Toronto's Judy Rebick. Rebick is the Canadian Auto Workers - Sam Gindin Chair in Social Justice and Democracy at Ryerson University and helped launch "rabble.ca" – an independent multi-media portal for Canadian and global perspectives. In November 2008, Rebick spoke at the annual convention of Canada's National Farmers Union and encouraged farmers there to take advantage of what she referred to as the perfect storm underway today whereby the dominant top-down social and economic models are collapsing – clearing the way as *she* believes for the bottom-up and community-centered approach to begin better serving our needs.

**increase music and fade out**

Joel Salatin is a farmer from the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Known as Polyface Farm, his operation has become renowned for his simple yet unique rotational pasture-based system of raising livestock. The farm produces what is called Salad Bar Beef, Pigaerator Pork, Pastured Poultry (Eggs, Broilers, Turkeys) and Forage-Based Rabbits. As Salatin says, Polyface is in the “redemption business: healing the land, healing the food, healing the economy, and healing the culture.” Beyond his farming, Joel has become an established author and public speaker and in February 2010, Salatin spoke at the annual conference of the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association. The conference was held in Granville, Ohio and sitting down with Joel was Lauren Berlekamp of the Erie Wire – an on-line media source for residents of Erie County, Ohio. Lauren first spoke with Joel about the nutritional comparisons of his pasture-raised beef on his farm versus the more commonly found beef whereby the animals spend their last months heavily feeding on grain.

### **soundbite**

*Lauren Berlekamp:* I’m Lauren Berlekamp for the Erie Wire, and you’re listening to a February 2010 podcast of our candid interview with Joel Salatin of Polyface Inc. When asked what he does for a living, he sometimes cleverly answers: “Mob-stocking herbivorous solar conversion lignified carbon sequestration fertilization.” But today, he humbly replied to this question:

*Joel Salatin: (chuckling)* “Well I actually farm for a living, and I’m still home, oh two-thirds of the time, probably, maybe it’s approaching half now, but I’m home a lot of the time.”

*LB:* When he isn’t public speaking, he’s at his Polyface Farm, located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, only 150 miles from our nation’s capital. It is a three-generation family owned and operated full-time enterprise. The farm services more than 15,000 families; ten retail outlets and thirty restaurants do on-farm sales and metropolitan buying clubs. He raises ecologically symbiotic grass-fed beef, pastured poultry, eggs, pork, forage-raised rabbits, and pastured turkey. He arguably represents his property as America’s premier non-industrial food-production oasis. I asked him about the differences in the nutritional profiles of grain-fed animals vs. grass-fed, or foraging animals.

*Joel Salatin:* Oh boy, there are a lot of those. If we look at beef, probably the single biggest difference in the beef nutritionally, if it’s empirically measurable, would be the conjugated linoleic acid, which is the number one anti-carcinogen, which is why it bothered scientists for a long time, why is it that in the U.S, where the per capita beef consumption is half of what it is in Argentina, do we have double the colon cancer rate? And the answer is, because in Argentina, the beef is grass-finished, and so it has this conjugated linoleic acid in it, which only takes 14 days of grain feeding to chase that out of the body. And so that’s a big

difference in beef. Of course across the spectrum of beef, pork, poultry, everything in the meat, there's a *huge* difference in the poly-unsaturated, saturated and unsaturated fat profile. And what you see is a much higher level of poly-unsaturated fats, which are generally considered the better fats. In eggs, the other big nutritional difference in eggs for example, is the relationship of Omega 3 to Omega 6. In the industry the Omega 6 is dominant over the Omega 3, and, in all wild animals and range fed, all this, the Omega 3 dominates the Omega 6, and that has a lot to do with our (*incidence of*) ADD and ADHD and nerve kind of things. So that's a big difference. Another big difference is just the vitamin profile. Like, one of the big ones is Riboflavin, the B vitamins, which are the nerve vitamins, and that's what gives you calmness or Ahhhh! -- you're bouncing off the wall. So the fact that we have so much road rage to ADD to whatever, is indicative of a lack of B vitamins, Riboflavin in grass-finished beef is often 300% higher than it is in grain-finished beef. So there are really, really *amazing* profile differences.

One of the biggest things that we see with our chickens is the broth, when you cook a chicken and the broth separates, and you put it in a beaker or whatever, a measuring cup, and you stick it in the fridge, and you know how the fat rises to the top and it gets like paraffin, it gets real hard. Our fat never gets hard, it stays like vegetable oil, it stays real, real soft. And of course that's indicative of what's happening in your body. So yeah, the differences are huge, they're empirical, they're huge.

*LB:* Billion dollar fast-food chain Chipotle purchases Joel's pork for their barbacoa menu item in their Charlottesville and Harrisonburg locations. With roughly 900 locations nationwide, Chipotle served more than 60 million pounds of naturally-raised meats last year alone, and according to the press release we received from OEFFA (*Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association*), their chicken and pork are 100% antibiotic and growth-hormone free. The company (*Chipotle*) sponsored Joel's appearance at the Conference. So I asked him about his experience with the company so far.

*Joel Salatin:* That started about three years ago. And it took about a year to ramp up to be able to produce enough for one restaurant. You know, that has been such an education for us, because the average person doesn't have a clue just how big the food system is. I mean, when you consider every single day of the year, five tractor-trailer loads of French fries go into Washington, D.C. Every single day! Just French fries! Five tractor-trailer loads! So the Chipotle experience for me, here you have over 900 restaurants, and the one in Charlottesville, just one, uses the shoulders and the hams from eight hogs, every single week. And that's one of 900 restaurants! I mean, the numbers are staggering, they're just staggering. It makes you appreciate how small our segment of the food system still is. I mean, we're still barely on the radar, even though we have this wonderful OEFFA conference, and lots of people here, we are still just not even 2% of the food system.

*LB:* When small producers make that kind of jump in production for a large corporation, they usually have to sacrifice the integrity of their product. But Salatin defends Chipotle, and discusses the dilemma.

*Joel Salatin:* You know, the sad part of the story is that they haven't been able to duplicate us anywhere else in the country. And they're desperate to, they want to. But Chipotle's problem is the same as so many other institutional food operations. Their heart's in the right place, they want to do more, the problem is they need producers. So I'm going to make a pitch now for producers, we need producers that are really honest businessmen or businesswomen, that they're actually doing more than just the backyard (*farmstead*). And I'm all about backyards, don't misunderstand me about backyards, but after the news about our relationship with Chipotle broke, the mid-Atlantic director, his phone started ringing from people saying, oh I hear you're buying local pork, you know, and so he says "Well, how many do you have?" "Oh I'll have 2 in 6 months," "I'll have one next year." and Phil said, "As much as I'd like to work with them, I can't do that. I can't deal with 1, 2, 3."

And so I mean, it was a stretch for us, and we were doing a couple hundred hogs per year. But we had to double or triple our production just to do *one* restaurant, and that's a real issue. And so, I want people to quit fooling around, let's make some full-time farms! You know, pull the plug on your outside employment and if you want to do this, do it!

### **soundbite**

*LB:* Joel's direct marketing approach in buying clubs cut out the need for a middle man when selling his pasture-raised meats. The farm delivers its product up to four hours from where it is nestled in the Shenandoah Valley, which includes the greater D.C. area. I asked him if any policy-makers are clients of his.

*Joel Salatin:* Well one of the restaurants that we supply is co-owned by Senator Mark Warner and his wife, they're pretty foodie, and so you know we have a few ins there. Ron Paul's Chief of Staff is one of our customers. And we may have others that I don't know about, I mean, we do service about 3,000 families in the greater D.C. area, so there may be things that are going on that I don't know about.

*LB:* Since the introduction of the industrial agriculture paradigm, its goal has been to mechanize food processing to save on labour costs. Serving the bottom line of production and removing naturally-occurring elements from our food system, public health is now at serious risk. In the first part of the interview, Joel made a call for people to quit their day jobs if they really wanted to pursue a career in sustainable agriculture. With his ecologically symbiotic system, the returns are about \$3,000 per acre. As our nation's leaders are trying to stop the economy

from shutting (*down*) jobs, encouraging these kinds of regional food systems opens a door for the next generation of farmers.

*Joel Salatin:* We haven't even scratched the surface on how many jobs could be done there. I've made a list, a long, long list of all the jobs, the things that could be done on the farm. We haven't even scratched the surface yet. One of the things that our kind of farming does though, is that it puts the people and the paycheques into the *rural* economy, instead of the rural economy being essentially used like a feudal serf, to prop up the lords of the castles in the urban centres. And I think that this decentralization of the economy and moving some of that power and nobility of the urban sector, to spread it out around the countryside, I think it would be a healthy thing in the economy.

*LB:* Joel's key-note speech, "Everything I Want to Do is Illegal," is the title of a book he wrote, about ordinances and policies that are biased towards the demands of industrial food giants, and hinder the practical solutions of smaller, sustainable farming systems. The biggest example of this would be the push for tracing livestock with expensive microchips through the National Animal Identification System, or NAIS. Joel comments on how this system has failed in other countries.

*Joel Salatin:* Some of the most stubborn policies don't make sense. Well first of all would be the push right now toward the National Animal Identification System, known as NAIS, where we're gonna put a radio-frequency microchip in every animal, and eventually in every tomato and cucumber and whatever for 100% tracking. A, it's too difficult to work, B, it's extremely small-scale prejudicial because the infrastructure, the machinery and all the paperwork is so arduous that all of those kinds of things become very discriminatory against small producers. And the other thing is that just logistically, it doesn't work. Australia, which tried to implement it only for beef cattle and only for *export* beef cattle in the very first year had almost a 50% discrepancy rate between what was in the data base and what was actually in the field. You know, data bases are made to preserve information, not delete information. So, when you eat the cow, it's easy to register the cow, but when you eat the cow, what happens to the data, y'know, it's not purged. And Canada which has a system in place, it's a joke as well. I mean, you go to the slaughterhouse and there's a rack there, and you just get it and put the tag in the cow's ear before it goes in the kill gate, and logistically . . . Look, if we can't keep up with however many million illegal foreigners are in (the United States), I don't want to get into a big debate about illegal foreigners, but all I'm saying is if we can't even track them, what makes us think we're going to track, ten times that many chickens. Los Angeles county alone has 50,000 backyard chicken flocks! In Los Angeles county alone! Many of those are involved in illegal cock-fighting rings. I'm sure all of those people are going to come in and sign up for micro-chipping of their illegal cock-fighting. So what are you going to do, send the National Guard in to canvas the area and confiscate all that, you know, give me a break. It's just ridiculous.

If I have a Tyson chicken house, I only need one micro-chip which costs say \$3.50, I need one micro-chip for a house of 15,000 birds, because it's an all-in, all-out. In *my* farm, because things are staggered, and they're not all-in, all-out flocks, I need one for every single chicken. So that shows the prejudicial aspect of this kind of regulation.

*LB:* Earl Butz served as the Secretary of Agriculture under Presidents Nixon and Ford, and enacted policies that encouraged the rise of corn production, large commercial farms and the abundance of corn in American diets. His mantra to farmers was, "Get big, or get out." And he urged them to plant huge monocultures of commodity crops. These policy shifts coincided with the rise of major agri-business corporations and the declining financial stability of the small family farm. If NAIS was to be implemented by our current administration, there are rules within it that would reinforce this outdated thinking, and would continue to crush the livelihood of smaller farmers.

*Joel Salatin:* You know, fortunately we have a little bit of credibility now to where we can actually go in and pull a little bit of clout, but it's still miniscule compared to the big-picture stuff. You know what really concerns me right now on a regulatory level, are these new, the food modernization act kind of things that are coming out, for example, allowing the FDA to have more or less search power on any farm in America, to determine if any models are being done that aren't science-based. Well, when they say science-based, what they mean is cloning, genetic engineering, irradiation, water-based sewage, all right, and the fact is on our farm you know with composting toilets and compost and free-range chickens and non-medicated animals, I mean, there is nothing we do on our farm that's considered science-based, mainline science-based. Now, I think it's *true* science, but science is very subjective based on what paradigm you're coming from.

And so that kind of thing really concerns me. I was just in Maine, and they passed a new regulation they said is in almost half of the States now. I wasn't really aware of it, it's coming down the pike, where the only way that you can sell in a supermarket is to have your production protocol pass what's called the "GAP," the Good Agricultural Practice protocol. Well, GAP protocol, for example manure handling is slurry systems, not composting systems. Even (*with*) organic certification, you can't be organic certified unless you can prove that your compost got (*sic*) over 140 degrees. Well I don't want compost 140 degrees, I want it to be around 120 degrees. That makes the good compost and preserves all the bugs. So we've got just a whole cultural prejudice against the entire paradigm, with which we come to the table. The paradigm that says, you know, the cultural paradigm right now is "a bureaucrat is more trustworthy than a farmer." (*chuckling*) It says "bugs are bad," even though each of us has three trillion bugs in our insides. You know, it says that people can't be trusted to choose their food because they're too ignorant and stupid. It assumes that we can manipulate individuals, without touching their greater community. Well you

can't. I mean, everyone of us has oxygen and elemental stuff around us and microbes in us, microbes under us, over us, you know, you can't touch the individual without (*touching*) the terrain. And so we're just on such different paradigms.

What we're seeing right now is the meeting, if you will, between Native Americans and Europeans, the Conquistadores and the Aztecs. That's what we're seeing here. And the question is, can we Natives get our numbers up fast enough and our logic up fast enough to be able to withstand this onslaught from the industrial food sector that essentially disagrees with every single one of our paradigms.

### **soundbite**

*Jon Steinman:* This is Deconstructing Dinner. You've been listening to farmer Joel Salatin from the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Joel spoke with Lauren Berlekamp of the Erie Wire in February 2010 in Granville Ohio. Joel was speaking at the annual conference of the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association.

In this last clip from their conversation Joel speaks about what next steps we can *all* take to enter into or *further* embrace the paradigm that he's operating his farm in. Joel suggests that any shift begins in reclaiming our kitchens, a room in our homes that *seems* to have become increasingly *unoccupied*.

*Joel Salatin:* You know, you can stay up late at night worrying about everything. And there is certainly plenty of stuff out there to worry about. I tend to not do that. What I want farmers to do is to just run like the bull's after you. (*laughter*) We need to ramp up our production. We need to get more customers, and I would say this: you know, we tend to come to a conference like this and think about just farmers, but we have to understand that the most empowering thing that a person can do right now in our culture is not just the farming, but is primarily discovering and using your own *kitchen*. You know, you don't have to get processed food. You don't have to buy potato chips. You don't have to buy tobacco. You don't have to buy M&M's and Snickers bars. You don't have to buy microwaveable French fries and pre-popped popcorn. Okay? We are a culture that has never spent more money on kitchen remodeling and gadgetry, and been more lost as to where it is. And the fact is, that every kitchen and every community has its landscape food treasures and we need to unplug the TV and go searching for this local treasure resource that's in our own homes, in our own kitchens, in our own backyards and communities. We have 35 million acres of lawn in this country! You know how much food could be grown on 35 million acres of lawn? Instead, we buy petroleum to fertilize it to make it grow, we use scarce water to water it to make it grow, and then use petroleum to cut it and blow it away and throw it away and send a bunch of it to the landfill! How *crazy* is that?

*Lauren Berlekamp:* As the upcoming generation reconnects with the source of their food, by choice or by necessity, Joel speaks sense to those who will take advantage of producing and consuming less processed foods.

*Joel Salatin:* We've got tons of food production capacity. We're not even scratching the surface on food production. Even the food we *are* growing, we're denutritionalizing it, if that's such a word, you know, white flour and all this, and so one of the things that we need to do is to just begin eating unprocessed. That's the thing! Ninety percent of what's in the supermarket wasn't there in 1900. All the unprocessed stuff's all around the edges. When people start talking about the price of our food, potatoes, even *organic* potatoes are way, way cheaper than Frito Lay's conventional potato chips. But people are buying way more potato chips than organic potatoes. My point is that there's enough money in the system. There's enough money in the system, it's a matter of allocation. If you took (*out*) all the fluff . . . I have a new book coming out this summer. The title is "The Sheer Ecstasy of Being a Lunatic Farmer." and I've got in there a list of all of the food type things that people buy that *aren't* food. You know, from Starbuck's latte, to tobacco, to liquor -- I mean, the ABC stores in Virginia last year, just the ABC Stores, now this isn't the wine and beer and Stop'n'Shop and you know Save'n'Go and whatever, this is just the ABC Stores, took in \$665,000,000 just in the ABC Stores. Less than half of that, if it were given to the school lunch program would double their per-plate amount and let every single student eat local artisanal royalty food. So don't tell me there's not enough money! There *is* money. It's just that the culture has not embraced this yet.

*LB:* As we finished our more serious questions, we asked Joel if he would demonstrate his famous "herd-call" for us.

*Joel Salatin:* (*laughing*) Ahh, me. Well it's just a call, and we used to go out in the field and go "cow-cow-cow-whoooooeeee!" (*laughter*)

*LB:* And I inquired about the frugal nature of his family's legacy.

*Joel Salatin:* You know, it's interesting, the older you get, the smarter your parents get. (*laughing*) My dad was quite a visionary. He was an accountant by profession. But boy I'll tell you what, he was tight and I learned frugal is good! Frugal is good! Always thinking about multiple-use, you never think about single-use. So early on when pickup trucks first began coming out, he didn't buy a pickup truck. What we bought was a 1957 Plymouth, he took all the seats out of it, took all the doors off of it, and that was our pickup truck. You know, if you take a four seater sedan like that, and take all of the trunk and the seats and the doors off, it's a pretty big compartment! You can take calves and chickens and pigs, all sorts of stuff! And so here he was, he would go see these accounting clients with his bow tie, and his coat and tie, sitting on a *bucket*, for you see this was before mandatory seat-belt laws, sitting on a bucket driving downtown with this car with

no doors and no seats in it, and it was crazy! Of course you know as kids, we were embarrassed to death! Now today, I think it's the coolest thing since grits! *(laughter)* You know, that he was that uncaring and independent of peer-pressure and what other people said. That's a true innovator!

### **soundbite**

*LB:* Thanks for listening to this edition of "On the Wire." The music that I spoke over was performed by Jim Jenny and the Pinetops and you can read more about these subjects and join our podcasts by visiting [eriewire.org](http://eriewire.org).

*Jon Steinman:* That was Lauren Berlekamp of The Erie Wire interviewing farmer Joel Salatin in February 2010. You can learn more about Joel's Polyface farm on-line at [polyfacefarms.com](http://polyfacefarms.com).

And a thanks to the Erie Wire for sharing their work with us here on Deconstructing Dinner. Both Lauren Berlekamp and Joshua Pribanic of The Erie Wire are long-time fans and promoters of Deconstructing Dinner and it's nice to *now* be able to share *their* work here on the show.

Stay tuned, coming up a great talk by Toronto's Judy Rebick.

### **soundbite**

*Jon Steinman:* This is Deconstructing Dinner produced in Nelson, British Columbia at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY. I'm Jon Steinman and today's episode is archived on our website at [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca) and posted under the April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010 broadcast.

On today's show we're hearing perspectives on rebuilding food systems – a pretty common theme here on the show and one we never shy away from focusing on because of the many ever-changing and constantly evolving perspectives that can be found on the subject.

The *next* perspective we'll hear is from someone who is more familiar with *social* and *political* movements than she is about food and farming but she had some inspiring and thoughtful remarks on the subject in November 2008 when she spoke to the annual convention of Canada's National Farmers Union in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Between 1990 and 1993 Judy Rebick was the president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. She later became the co-host of CBC Newsworld's prime time show "Face Off" and then worked on the show "Straight from the Hip." She became a regular contributor to CBC TV's Sunday Report and CBC Radio and in 2001 helped launch [rabble.ca](http://rabble.ca) – an independent multi-media news and discussion site. Today, Judy is an author and Canadian Auto Workers

– Sam Gindin Chair in Social Justice and Democracy at Ryerson University in Toronto.

Here is Judy Rebick, speaking on Rebuilding the Food System for the Future.

*Judy Rebick: (applause)* Thank you. I was a little nervous when I was invited to speak. Not cause of the NFU (National Farmers Union), I've worked with the NFU for many years, especially fighting Free Trade and I'm really proud as a Canadian to have an organization like the National Farmers Union here, I think that you are a model of a grassroots organization that has stood up for the interest of your members for decades and decades, and it's one of the reasons why we're actually in relatively good shape in Canada compared to the rest of the world, on a whole series of levels. And so, I was proud of that, but I thought, gee, you know, I'm not a farmer, I've never been a farmer, I mean, the last farmers in my family were back in Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. So when I heard this thing "eaters," I thought oh great! You know I'm an avid eater! So I can be part of this, I really like that "eaters" line.

Okay. So what I want to talk about, the title says that rebuilding the food system for the future, that I'm gonna talk about that. In a way, I'm going to talk about that, but really what I'm gonna talk about is rebuilding our *world* for the future, and how the food system is really in the forefront of how that's going to happen. You know, I come from, like many of you in this room, I'm assuming, at least the ones I know, from a generation where the differences in the world were divided between left and right. And where we were very sure of our views and our positions, they came from ideologies, political ideologies, that were developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, whether right, left or centre, whether liberalism, conservatism, social democracy, Marxism, all of them are centuries-old ideas developed by European men. And you know they've still got some very good ideas there, especially in terms, of Marxism, how to understand capitalism, but there's a problem, which is it's a way of looking at the world from the top down. It's sort of like Google maps, you know? You go to Google Earth. And when you first Google Earth you see the whole world, and then you start zoning down. And it's not really till you get quite close to the ground that you really see what's happening. And that was a problem with these ideologies, is that they started from, I don't know, about a satellite level. But they started from a level much higher than where most people live. And if reality didn't fit into those frameworks, then you just ignored the reality, and shaped the reality to fit the framework that you had.

And I was part of that, right up until I'd say about ten years ago. I started to question it. And the reason I started to question it was because I started to see during the Charlottetown Accord, remember in 1992, there was a moment of democracy in this country. There's been a few, you know, remember, (*do*) people here remember the People's Food Commission? Do people here remember that? Yeah. The People's Food Commission was an amazing thing in the 70's, of

ordinary people who got together and held hearings about what kind of food system we needed. And it was an amazing moment of democracy, and there's been a few others. But one of them oddly enough was around (*the time of*) the Charlottetown Accord, that thing on the Constitution. Mulroney was desperate, Brian Mulroney, remember, every time I say his name my stomach knots up (chuckling). Although I think this guy we've got now is worse.

He (*Mulroney*) was so desperate to have Quebec sign the Constitution that he turned over the process of how to make this happen to a guy named Arthur Kroeger, who was a beurocrat in Ottawa, quite a brilliant and lovely man. And Arthur Kroeger came up with this idea of having a series of conferences across the country, to discuss the amendments to the Constitution. And the media all dismissed it and said, "Oh nobody cares about the Constitution, it's boring, blah, blah, blah," their eyes glassed over, etc.

I was president of NAC (*National Action Committee on the Status of Women*) then, and we had views about the Constitution, we had views about everything, and we decided to organize four of these conferences. And it turned out that these conferences were *really* democratic. That is, that nobody had more access to information than anybody else, that there were politicians there, there were business people there, but the business people were at the same level as the advocacy groups. That is, they had to convince people of their views, they couldn't just go in some backroom somewhere and get what they wanted. They had to actually *argue* for what they wanted. And sometimes the Chairs weren't that friendly to them. One of my greatest moments was when Tom d'Aquino, the head at that time of the Business Council of National Issues, got up to the mike and *challenged* the Chair. (*laughing*) That was one of my favourite moments in my political career.

So anyway, we were pretty good at convincing, but what happened was, in the course 30% of the seats were held over for "ordinary citizens" who applied and got chosen by a lottery. So what happened was, instead of the usual dance of politics and policy, which is you know, the left vs. right, the movements vs. the government, we argue what we think, they argue what they think, and it's kind of a power struggle, (*where the*) winner takes all. Instead of that, we actually had to *persuade* these ordinary citizens of our points of view, we actually had to persuade them, we couldn't just demand. That's from our side, right? And so. . . what I realized in the course of those discussions was that even though I was a radical and a feminist, all the things that I believed about myself, that I was really an elitist, you know, I really thought I knew better than most people, what was right. And what I started to understand at those conferences was that these ordinary citizens, they didn't have an agenda, they cared about what was good for their community. That's what they were thinking about. When they listened to these proposals, they were thinking "What's good for *my* community?" And that's how they judged things, not by some ideological framework or some prior position. And so I saw things like one woman who *hated* Quebec, when she

came into that workshop she hated Quebec, she didn't want Quebec to have *anything*. But there were Quebecers in that workshop, and when she heard from them what they wanted, she thought "Ohhh, that's not so bad. Gee, could you have that and we could have what we want?" And we said, well yeah, here's a way you could do it, we're here for different powers for different provinces. And she said, "Oh, well, I could support that." And so it went.

And so from that time, I started to rethink my politics. In about 1995 in Ontario, we had a huge mobilization against Mike Harris. We shut down ten cities, in Toronto we had the largest demonstration I think in history, but certainly in my lifetime, 150,000 people, a one-day general strike, downtown Toronto was empty except for the protestors and the police. It was a glorious moment. It was a coalition of unions and popular groups, community groups – it was amazing! And Mike Harris completely ignored it. And so the unions pulled back from this way of organizing, and went you know the old way, which was to support the NDP, and the community groups got demoralized, and we all got demoralized, and I thought okay, there's got to be a better way and I started looking around the world.

And what I've seen around the world is what we saw in that video, what we heard described at the table, in the face of apparent catastrophe, which is what the family farm is facing. The kind of destruction we've seen that was described in that research report this morning, that description of how all the money goes up. Corporate globalization is a welfare system for the rich. Plain and simple! Nobody else benefits from it. Rich people and big corporations make more and more money at the price of working people, whether workers or farmers, poor people, at the price of the rest of us. That's what it is. And what's happening now, is that at a local level, because so many governments were captured by this false prophet of what we call neo-liberalism, the false prophet, the false idea that this is the way that prosperity will happen. But you know the only kind of prosperity that's happened is prosperity for the rich and now even they're getting hit. Because of the Wall Street crash, now they're getting hit by their own greed. They're getting hurt by it. 50% decline in stocks. 50%! You know what that feels like. That's not something new to you. We saw the prices for your beef, how they dropped. Right?

Well now the rich people are getting hit too, and so we have a perfect storm, because all around the world, and (*La*) Via Campesina is one of the most important movements in this, all around the world people have been building local alternatives. People have been building new ways of change. And the food system I think is the most advanced of these alternatives. All of the alternatives, your struggle to save the family farm, the organic food movement, the community garden, rooftop gardens, you know, food to table operations, in Toronto we have a thing called "FoodShare" and there's a few of them around. They didn't like the charity model of the food bank so they created new models of sharing, of delivering food directly from farmers into communities and setting up community

centres to distribute the food. Even the Slow Food movement, some of you might know about, which when you first look at it, you think “what is this?” You know, like the first line of their manifesto is “we believe in the right to pleasure.” That’s the first line, I’m going, okay, well all right, I didn’t think it was a right, but okay, I’m for pleasure. But, I guess we thought it was a right in our feminist movement in the 60’s. Yeah, I remember that, I remember that time. (*Audience laughter*)

But even the Slow Food movement, which has become this mass movement on a global level, completely, virally about the right to eat good food, and then coming from that to local food, and coming from that to fresh food and coming from that to be against agri-business and the kind of rotten, unsafe food that they feed us, all of these movements, not coordinated at all, they’re not coordinated. They’re all organized out of need, and out of identification at a local level of the problem, and then it spreads. Whether it spreads through groups like (*La*) Via Campesina that’s organizing it, or it spreads virally because we now have a way for that to happen on-line, on the internet. It’s spreading. And so what we have, you don’t have to build an alternative food system, we already have an alternative food production and distribution system, it just needs to spread and we have to get the policy-makers out of the way. Out of the way. So that they don’t *stop* it from spreading. Cause it’s what people want. Right? It’s what people want. And so what we need is to grow it, to have confidence in it, and to feel the power of it. And I guess that’s what I want to communicate to you, is that as much as you’ve struggled and suffered in the last 20 years, as much as you’ve fought to defend your family farm, *now* is your time. That’s what I believe. Now is our time. Because we have a perfect storm of a collapse of the neo-liberal system, of the system of the corporate globalization, and it is a collapse. And the powers that be, don’t know what to do about it.

*Jon Steinman:* This is Deconstructing Dinner. You’re listening to Judy Rebick speaking in November 2008 in Saskatoon at the annual convention of the National Farmers Union. Judy is the Chair in Social Justice and Democracy at Ryerson University in Toronto. She spoke to the convention about Rebuilding the Food System for the Future.

*Judy Rebick:* Whenever you’re a radical that’s always the moment you can make gains, is when the rulers don’t know what they’re doing. You know? And right now, that’s that moment. Plus we have a rise in the United States of a president who symbolizes much of this. Let me talk to you for a moment about Obama. Because Obama’s policies are no better than let’s say a right-wing social democrat in Canada, let’s say, you know, to be generous. It’s not his policies that’s important. Three things are important. One, he symbolizes a change in the world, he symbolizes in *who* he is a change, because he’s multi-racial, because his father comes from Africa, because he’s redefining what it is to be a man, as a leader, and he’s redefining what it is to be a leader. We talked prior to the election campaign in the primary campaign, they were changing the election campaign. He always spoke about “we.” If you read his speeches, he never says

“Elect me and I’m going to do this,” “Elect me and I’m going to do that.” You know, his calmness in reaction to attack, refusal to attack back in the same way, all of those things that he represents as a symbol (*are*) very important. But the other thing is that he said “Yes we can” “*We* can do it” “*You* can do it.” And that, you know, we’ve been facing a triple-crisis in our world, a crisis of inequality, which has now become an economic crisis, an environmental crisis, and a crisis of despair. That is that people don’t like the way things are, they’re suffering the way things are, but they believe that the powers are so great that there’s nothing they can do about it. This is what I run into most among young people. Every group I talk to of young people, they have a more sophisticated analysis of what’s wrong with this system than my generation ever had. They have better values, they have better *everything*, they’re smarter, they’re better-looking, everything! (*Audience laughter*) They’re more stylish, you know, everything. But they don’t believe they can *change* things, that’s the biggest barrier. And what Obama has done, what the Obama campaign has done, is convince people in the United States, which is very important because it has been up until now the only superpower in the world, convinced them that they can change the world, that they can change their society, that they can change their community. So then people say “Oh yeah, but everybody’s going to be disillusioned you know.” In my class even, I teach a class, and they say, “Well you know but he’s not going to be able to do it, I mean, it’s just too corrupt.” Well that’s right, but you know the movements in the United States have no question about that.

I don’t know if you heard last week. This group called the “Yes Men,” a fantastic culture jamming group -- they’re the group that set up an organization called “Billionaires for Bush” and got invited to the oil producers, whatever they’re called, I don’t know, the oil companies, they got invited to speak, “Billionaires for Bush,” you know, that’s what they do, they’re really great. They along with a number of anti-war and other social movements in the United States produced last week a phony copy of the New York Times, 1.6 million copies, the headline was “War in Iraq Over” and the whole issue, and it was a whole issue, including columnists and everything else, had “Maximum Wage Legislation Passed,” and “Universal Health Care Passed,” everything Obama said he would do was done July 4<sup>th</sup> 2009 in *this* copy of the New York Times, and what does that say? We’re watching and we’re organizing already. We had one week of celebration and now we’re organizing because they understand that it’s going to be a struggle now in the United States between the forces of the status quo, who are wounded by this crisis and the forces of change. And that the forces of change in the United States know that Obama needs them, if Obama’s going to do what he says, he needs them to push, he needs them to organize, he needs them to be the counter-weight to the other side, and more so. And that’s happening there, but it’s not just happening there, it’s happening all around the world. In Latin America, we have the rise in Bolivia of an indigenous government that is *phenomenal*. Like talk about the values that you’ve expressed in this conference, all of them they’re putting forward, and they’re governing the combination of indigenous values and the best ideas of the left, is how I would say it. And even

under attack from the right, and *violent* attack from the right, they will not use violence in response, they use the law in response and back them off.

It's an amazingly hopeful situation, in Bolivia, in Venezuela, even in places like Brazil, where maybe the president of Brazil isn't doing as much as we want but there are starting to be changes. And we have movements like *(La) Via Campesina* and the Landless (Workers) movement in Brazil, that are not only like the Landless movement in Brazil which is the largest and most powerful social movement in the world I believe, I think they organize something like three million people, not only do they protest agri-business, they just had, with *(La) Via Campesina*, a massive protest in Brazil against agri-business and against a big electricity project, not only do they take over land and demand that the government hand over, for landless people, land that isn't being used, but they create community on that land, they educate people, they build communities. When they decide to take a policy position, they discuss it through all their communities, not just in an executive or central committee, through all their communities. It's an amazing movement that's really a model for what can be done.

So what I see when I look around the world is that new movements are emerging, whether it's in the global south, in the global north, on the internet, because on the internet too there's movements. It took me a while to realize this, but the Open Source movement on the internet is an incredible movement that challenges capitalism, because one of the strengths of capitalism has always been the creativity. You know, the argument was *(that)* socialism is boring and dull and it represses people and their creativity. And capitalism, on the other hand, gives people motivation for how much money they can make and it creates creativity. While we could argue that you don't need to make a lot of money to be motivated, none of us are motivated by making a lot of money, or if we are, we're making a big mistake being here *(chuckling)*. We've always known that, but we haven't been able to prove it so much. Well Open Source proves it because theirs *(is)* a system where people share their knowledge, nobody owns the knowledge, they share it. They build new code and they're giving Microsoft a run for their money in terms of the quality of the product that they're producing. But there's also piracy. Now I want to talk a minute about piracy. I don't mean piracy like ships, I mean piracy like downloading music and videos for free, which probably everybody under thirty is doing, pretty well everybody. Well you know when you first look at this you think well it's stealing. It's stealing. But when you look at the systems of music, for example, or even film, you see exactly the same story that we saw in the research project this morning, which is, the producer of the film, the creative person, the producer of the music, gets next to nothing for that album that sold. Next to nothing! You know if you're a writer you get 10 cents for the book that gets sold, out of however many, 30 dollars, right? If you're a musician I think you get less than that for every album that's sold. So if you're a Hollywood star I guess you get a bigger portion than that. But other than Hollywood stars, the actual producer of the wealth, the person who's producing

the wealth, creating the wealth, gets the *least* amount of money. And it's the distributors who get the money, right? So the distributors get all the money. So what pirates are doing, what this piracy movement is doing is challenging this very system of distribution, this very economic system that means that the corporations up here are making all the money and the people down here who are either building the cars or farming the land or writing the song don't get it. And *pirates*, as much as they're quite radical in the way that they do it, and what they're doing is illegal, but they're so smart about it, you know.

There's a guy called "aXXo" who distributes, who downloads, this is the level of it, downloads Hollywood films, I'm telling you cause I know you've had a lot of work and so it'll be a little entertaining. aXXo, he puts on-line Hollywood movies before they're in the movies (theaters). I don't know how he does it, nobody knows how he does it, but he does it and he's a hero in the piracy movement. Well, he was such a threat to the movie studios that they started to download bad copies of their movies in his name. (*Audience laughter*) So he retired, because his name is his coin, even if it wasn't really his name, he didn't want his reputation to be ruined, so he retired. But now he's back, and everyone is celebrating. This is the kind of stuff that's going on on-line, and the reason I tell you about it is, know that you are part of the massive movement that's saying, let's take back control, we can do it. We can take back control!

And all of it has very similar qualities, which is it's from the bottom up, not from the top down. It's not about consultants telling you what to do, it's about *you* figuring out what to do. *You* know best how a sustainable agricultural system is going to work. You're the farmers - you know how to do it. You can't do it yourself, and you can't do it just by making demands on the government like we used to think. But you can do it by linking up with the environmentalists in your area, by linking up with the local food people. Like here, the food security movement, how did it happen? There were people who were looking, who were concerned about hunger. And they started organizing around hunger, and when they started organizing around hunger they realized the problem wasn't just that people didn't have money to buy food, the problem was the way the food was produced and distributed. So they had to get into that. And if they wanted to really produce a fair and sustainable food system, they had to look at how food was grown. They had to look at how food was sold. They had to look at how food was distributed. And then the environmentalists, the same thing. So what we have is two perfect storms coming together. The one perfect storm is the crisis of capitalism, which is the most profound crisis that I've seen in my lifetime, and possibly the most profound crisis in the history of capitalism. That's the one thing. And I'd be very gleeful about that if it wasn't for the fact that I know that the poorest people who'll get hit the worst with that.

Anyway, so we have this double storm, of the crisis in capitalism combined with the environmental crisis, but we have the other perfect storm of the coming together, the convergence of movements, and this is what's so *powerful*. Here

we have a convergence of the movement for sustainable and family farms, the environmental movement and the social justice movement through food security. In the United States right now the most powerful movement is the Green Jobs movement. Because what's happened is the coming together of black urban activists who've been using the idea of sustainable green jobs to hire kids from the ghetto. There's a wonderful project, I really, really encourage you to look it up, called the "Greening of the South Bronx." And this is where this came from. This woman's dog, her name is Majora Carter, she lives in the south Bronx, took her to a part of the Bronx River she'd never seen, and it was green! The Bronx River is like completely dead. And it was green. And she thought, "I wonder if we could create parks around the Bronx River." And she organized around this, she hired local kids, and they have greened the Bronx River. And now she has turned it into a sustainable South Bronx, organizing to recapture the land that was destroyed by freeways, okay, because that's what destroyed the land to begin with, reclaiming this freeway that no-one uses anymore, reclaiming it and building social housing that's also green housing on the place where the freeway used to be. Like how much stronger a metaphor can you have than that? Hiring local kids to do it.

And now Obama, who's looking for a new "New Deal," is bringing in a new Green Deal, based on the program that this movement created, just like you're creating an alternative food system, everyday creating it. That food system will grow and grow. And then when we do get to the point of having leadership that's interested in changing the food system, those ideas that have come from the bottom up, that have come from the people most involved who know how to solve the problem, those ideas will already be there, just like Obama can now take the Green Jobs ideas and apply them. And he has a complete program that came from the bottom up, that didn't come from the top down. And so I'll end on that.

So I want to congratulate you for all the work you've done over the last 39 years, which has been phenomenal for your persistence, for your commitment, for your strength, for your sense of community, and your commitment to what you want to do and who you want to be, which is so important, and to tell you that your time is coming. That we're coming into a new historic period, where people like *you* are going to show the way forward, and it's going to start to be recognized. You know we'll have to remember what that was like, those of us that are old enough to remember. What it was like, in the 60's and 70's when progressive people were leading the way. But this is going to be much more powerful, because it's *global*, because people from the global south are leading, because we have the connections like you have through La Via Campesina, connections to work together to build on each other's strength, and to go from strength to strength. Thank you very much. (*Audience applause*)

*Jon Steinman:* That was Judy Rebick speaking in November 2008 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan at the annual convention of the National Farmers Union. Judy is

the Canadian Auto Workers Sam Gindin Chair in Social Justice and Democracy at Ryerson University in Toronto. She's the co-founder of rabble.ca.

Today's episode of Deconstructing Dinner is archived on-line at [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca) and posted under the April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010 broadcast. You'll also find there the *unheard* question and answer period between NFU members and Judy.

### **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.

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