

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

**February 25, 2010**

**Title: The Seaweed Lady / Deconstructing Dinner in our Schools V**

**Producer/Host: Jon Steinman**  
**Transcript: Carol Elliott**

*Jon Steinman:* Welcome to Deconstructing Dinner produced in Nelson, British Columbia at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY. I'm Jon Steinman, and on today's episode we'll explore a number of topics over the next hour, including a fascinating look into the culinary and edible world of seaweed along the British Columbia coast.

In mid-February, Deconstructing Dinner visited Southern Vancouver Island and, in particular, the community of Sooke, which is home to an active and well-connected food community. One of those *foodies* is Diane Bernard, who is more commonly known as "The Seaweed Lady." Diane is the founder of Outer Coast Seaweeds, a producer of seaweed-based skin care products. But Diane is also active in using and supplying seaweeds for culinary use, and we'll learn more about that today.

In the second half of the show - Part 5 of our ongoing Deconstructing Dinner in Our Schools series - we'll first visit with two more conscientious cooks (also in Sooke) who lend their skills to a unique Culinary Arts program offered at Edward Milne Community School, the area's local high school. While the culinary program itself is unique among Canadian high schools, also exciting is the program's very own vegetable and herb garden and fruit trees that the students are also engaged with throughout their classes.

And through the work of Asaf Rashid, a journalist from CKDU in Halifax, Nova Scotia, we'll also learn of a demonstration staged at Dalhousie University by a group known as Campus Action on Food. In December 2009, the group held an event to raise awareness of the exclusive foodservice contracts at the School's Student Union Building, which, similar to many institutions, restrict students to purchasing from *only* one or two foodservice companies.

increase music and fade out

*Jon Steinman:* As promised on a recent episode, there are a few updates to some topics we've covered over the past year that are worth sharing before we hit the West Coast of Canada and taste some seaweeds.

And the first is some good news for anyone who has been concerned over the possible elimination of the University of Guelph's Organic Agriculture major. Back in April 2009,

we aired a feature on the precarious position that that program had entered into when, shortly before in March, the University had announced it would cut the organic major, among other programs, due to low enrollment and budgetary challenges. The decision sparked a notable amount of protest among students, faculty and the general public, who questioned the motives behind eliminating the only organic agriculture major of its kind in Canada despite the organic food sector being the fastest growing within the food system.

After a close vote by the University's Senate, a decision was made to allow the program to continue for an extra twelve months in order to redesign itself and seek more financial support. With almost twelve months having now passed, on January 29<sup>th</sup> of this year, the Ontario Agriculture College located at the University announced that it had withdrawn its initial proposal to axe the organic agriculture major and that the college-level committee supported that decision. That decision was then handed to the higher-level University bodies and, on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, the University's Senate voted to *not* axe the program after all, thereby permitting the organic major to continue and to exist at the University of Guelph. If you missed our episode that *first* began exploring this controversial decision, you can find it archived on our website at [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca) and posted under the April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009 broadcast.

soundbite

*Jon Steinman:* In other agricultural education news, Fleming College in Lindsay, Ontario has chosen to postpone the launch of their one-year Sustainable Agriculture program that was set to commence in January. We featured that program here on the show back in October. The College has decided to instead launch the program in January 2011.

soundbite

*Jon Steinman:* And some more exciting news out of Vancouver, where Martin Gunst had launched his pedal-powered farm-fresh grocery delivery business in 2009. We heard from Martin here on the show as part of our October 1<sup>st</sup> broadcast, and that show directed some very positive attention towards Martin's GrocerGunst business. Not long after that episode aired, we received an email from Martin that read as follows: "I've got to say that having me on the show has done great things for GrocerGunst. The publicity from such a well-respected show has brought unprecedented levels of interest. My plans for the business for next year now involve expanding to cover most of the city of Vancouver, through a partnership with the organization known as BEST (which stands for Better Environmentally Sound Transportation), who will subsidize and provide some capital for hiring other cyclists to work with me."

So that's some great news from Martin, and it's always great to hear how the show can help raise awareness of and support innovative start-ups like Martin's business. And you can be sure that Deconstructing Dinner will continue to follow *how* Martin's business grows to serve more Vancouver residents with pedal-powered groceries!

soundbite

*Jon Steinman:* In February 2010, Deconstructing Dinner made its way out of the Interior of British Columbia and onto Southern Vancouver Island. On February 14<sup>th</sup> Deconstructing Dinner spoke to a sold-out audience in the community of North Saanich, where many notable foodies were in attendance, including the leader of the Green Party of Canada, Elizabeth May.

From there I headed to the BC capital of Victoria and then along the Southwestern tip of the Island to the community of Sooke. Over the course of today's and upcoming episodes, we'll listen to a number of interviews recorded there with people like Sinclair Philip, the co-owner of the well-known hotel/restaurant the Sooke Harbour House, and who also has extensive experience with Slow Food Canada. We'll hear from Bob Liptrot of Tugwell Farm, a honey and mead producer (mead being honey wine), and many other interesting residents in the area who are somehow involved in what is a very active local food community.

But today we'll meet Diane Bernard, who over the past twelve years has been quite literally immersed in seaweed. Her passion for seaweeds has landed her with the title of "Seaweed Lady," and as you'll soon come to appreciate, the title is no doubt fitting. Diane operates Outer Coast Seaweeds and, most particularly, the Seaflora brand of seaweed-based skin care products. But beyond that focus of her business, Diane is also an avid *culinary* user of seaweeds and also supplies chefs throughout the province with freshly harvested varieties. Diane has a commercial license to harvest seaweeds along the Southwestern coast of Vancouver Island between the communities of Sooke and Port Renfrew.

I spent time with Diane, both indoors and out, learning about the exciting and relatively unexplored world of seaweed. Diane spoke about the history of collecting and using seaweeds along the British Columbia coast.

*Diane Bernard: (sound of waves)* This is a Pterygophora, and it grows fabulously big under the big giant kelps. It's the end of the winter. We are about to embrace some spring. So these kinds of seaweeds are just tossed up into the corners here and they sit.

First Nations used seaweeds but not in the way we that tend to think - more for medicinal purposes and useful purposes. For example, the big bull kelp, they would use that cord - dry it, tie together, use it to form rope. They would use it for medicinal purpose - burns, that kind of thing - because seaweeds have a very slick, gelatinous material to them. It's quite healthy and soothing. So they were using that.

First Nations of British Columbia had fantastic food sources here. Just look at the salmon and the whales, and their lifestyle on the ocean as well as in the forest. So seaweeds were not really a food source for them. They did dry them - they still do dry them. Historically, they would use them for layering their bentwood boxes with seaweeds and then putting their salmon in that, so there was a smoking kind of in the flavour of it.

Up the Coast now, in Ocean Falls I believe still, and up in the Queen Charlottes (Haida Gwaii) they will dry them. They are drying pyrifera. On the Coast, on the mainland Coast, up around Prince Rupert and that, they dry them on their rooves. They still do that. They will use them in soups and stews. The women will harvest and dry that way.

*Jon Steinman:* Diane Bernard of Outer Coast Seaweeds, speaking to me at the Sooke Harbour House, a well-known inn and restaurant that we'll learn more about on an upcoming episode of the show. The Sooke Harbour House is, as some might say, the epicenter of the area's food culture. And no matter who I met in the area involved in the local food system, they maintained at least some connection to the inn's restaurant, which in most cases was because their products were featured on the restaurant's local-centric menu. The Sooke Harbour House has long-used seaweeds in their restaurant's kitchen and Diane has played a role in helping supply their chefs.

*Diane Bernard:* Sooke Harbour House is the lead here on anything adventuresome, I think, in the Pacific Northwest, if not in North America. They have been very supportive of local wild women (laughs), and local businesses as well. They have been working with seaweeds as long as I've known them, which is the day they opened their doors.

The chefs here are very comfortable with seaweeds. They had a chef, Edward Tuson. They now have Sam Benedetto. They have done amazing things with my seaweeds, and so I harvest for them.

We have done great meals. We have done meals up and down the Coast. I have worked with the chefs at Kingfisher; Tojo's in Japan - sorry, in Vancouver; C Restaurant - Rob Clark; Michael Stadlander in Ontario. I have a very nice group of chefs that I work with.

*Jon Steinman:* As can be expected from *any* wild food, the nutritional composition of seaweeds makes them quite attractive, and Diane explains.

*Diane Bernard:* It's true. Seaweeds are some of the healthiest plants on the planet. They have huge amounts of vitamins A, E, C. They have significant amounts of vitamin D, which we know as Canadians, the further north you go the more vitamin D you need. They have all the Bs, including vitamin B12, which for vegans and vegetarians is very nice - significant sources of it.

They have vitamin K. Sixty trace mineral elements. They have excellent properties for anti-inflammatory, anti-viral. They are fabulously healthy. Healthy oceans and you've got healthy seaweed.

*Jon Steinman:* Now, while seaweeds are high in nutrients and minerals, they are, just like any seafood, also capable of absorbing toxins that might be polluting the waters in which they grow. Diane is well aware of such risks and describes how she mitigates that risk to ensure that her seaweeds are safe.

*Diane Bernard:* Seaweeds take in fabulous nutrients, I always say, but they don't separate the good from the bad. And if your seaweeds are exposed to pollution, like in harbours and in basins – run off, nasty stuff - they will take in excess levels of mercury, lead and arsenic.

So you want to know the sources of your seaweed. My seaweeds are certified organic USDA - all of them. I went through five years of testing around waters in this area.

One thing else about seaweeds, as to what we are here for: they are the healthiest, but why are the healthiest, and is it strictly because of our oceans?  
And, yes.

But structurally (I am hauling out some interesting seaweeds for you) seaweeds are really, really different from land plants. I use the analogy on my tours that seaweeds are like a garden: they're wild; they're exotic; they grow; they fruit; they reproduce; and they slough off.

Seaweeds when they grow, they are fresh; they are colourful; they are bright; they are crispy; they taste fabulous. And I am just pulling out of the bucket here a few.

But where they differ is that seaweeds don't have a root system. I am holding up one here for you. The light shining through it makes it kind of nice. The texture is more like fabric than they are like plants. This one is a nice, soft brown colour – a nice big ribbon.

This is a holdfast, and this holdfast does not anchor into a soil, right? It does not take nutrients out of the soil. So, what they do is they cling. They cling to rocks, generally, most of the time, and they cling to each other. They'll cling to logs - a little bit like this. And they sprout and grow. And that's what I was bringing here.

And the pterygophora here, that is a holdfast. You can see the shape. This was hanging onto a rock, and that's what it does. So they don't take their nutrients from soil.

So when I went to the USDA to say, "Hey, I want certification," their thing was, "Well, you have no soil to test; therefore you can't be organic." And I was like, "Okay, let's back up here."

So we did years of testing on our water and we went back and argued. And they went, "Okay. You're in."

*Jon Steinman:* Diane added that she also gets both her seaweeds and the surrounding waters tested annually by independent bodies.

If you are just tuning in, this is Deconstructing Dinner, where we're listening to my visit with Diane Bernard of Outer Coast Seaweeds, based in the community of Sooke on British Columbia's Vancouver Island.

I sat down with Diane at the Sooke Harbour House, one of the many restaurants that she has supplied with seaweeds for culinary use. As I waited for her in the lobby, she had walked in with a bucket of freshly harvested seaweeds from which she, one by one, began pulling them out and laying them on the floor.

*Jon Steinman:* All these ones you are pulling out here, are these all edible?

*Diane Bernard:* Yes, they are. They're fun. They're funky. They tend to have bizarre shapes to them.

They are evolutionary-wise super ancient. They pre-date anything growing on the land – on the terrestrial part of the planet. They are, I figure, about 800 million years old, in the Ordovician period. I'm trying to track it down.

I'm fascinated by their growth. They look like plants but they don't act like land plants. So that's part of my fascination with them.

And when the sharks were here - and we know that they are estimated in the four hundred million mark – these guys were already here. Seaweeds were already well established, on their way, and set.

So, back to that thing about not having a root system - that means their cell structure is different, because they don't transport nutrients up from the soil. They don't break nutrients down from the sun, and from the soil, to make this frond. (*Jon Steinman:* It's all from the water). It's all from the water.

Here in the Pacific Northwest they are not linked to the warmth of the water. We tend to expect it to. Land plants grow as we get warmer, brighter. They are linked directly to the tilt of the earth towards the sun. So December 21<sup>st</sup>, here in Canada, here Nelson, everybody's happy, celebratory that the longest night of the year is over, right? In fact, seaweeds start to grow around that time - all seaweeds do - in the Northern Hemisphere (reversed in the Southern Hemisphere).

Today is a beautiful sunny day but our ocean temperatures here don't change. It's damn cold all year around, and it's cold whether it's July 1<sup>st</sup> or January 1<sup>st</sup>. So, never be impressed with the polar bear swim on January 1<sup>st</sup> - because the water temperature is just as cold in July. It's the air temperature. But the seaweeds grow relative to that tilt of the earth towards the sun.

*Jon Steinman:* How quickly are some of these ones that we have here growing? How long, for example, would this one here take to grow to where it's at now?

*Diane Bernard:* We're looking at some of the fastest growing plants on the planet. We have a seaweed here – the nereocystis. It's a fabulous, big, bull kelp. The bull kelp starts off December 21<sup>st</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup> as a millimeter high. The spores have landed so they reproduce. They've started to attach and they've started to grow.

I harvest nereocystis - the bull kelp - in August and it will be an impressive thirty to thirty-five meters in length. That's monster growth, and that's ten months of growth.

This is alaria. Beautiful seaweed. So when we harvest alaria – and that is spelled A L A R I A - we harvest up in this area so that it continues to grow and it protects the reproductive portions of the seaweed.

It has a beautiful stipe down the centre of it, you can see. So no stem, right? So it's got the stipe. These are the fronds and that's what's edible. The whole thing is edible actually. The fronds will get quite a bit wider. Locally the kids like to call this the "lasagna seaweed" because I take it and trim off the frond. You can see it. It will be much wider, and there is a little bit of the gelatinous material. I will treat it just like a piece of pasta, and layer tomatoes, mussels, clams and alaria in the pan and bake it. It's fantastic.

*Jon Steinman:* So would you boil that first, or you would bake it?

*Diane Bernard:* I'm a real fan of raw food so I keep it as light as possible. You may want to rinse it a little bit. I rinse mine in the ocean water, because the oceans are clean here, and do it that way.

Let me just go and try this. Actually you can take it and you can roll it up, like this, and just slice it - al dente. It will be like a pasta - fabulous with wild salmon.

Seaweeds are more vegetable-like in their taste than they are fish-like. People tend to think of them as being maybe semi-fishy or strong in their flavour. They're not.

And again, if you pick up the seaweed and you try that and you get that kind of overpowering odor, or overpowering taste to it, you have got a seaweed product that's been harvested in the compost pile on the shore. Never, never go there. You want to try a piece? Very crunchy. (*Jon Steinman:* Thank you.) It's my favourite piece of seaweed. I can eat this all year round - never tired of it. Very light, vegetable-type. Great in salads. Great just to chew on. Really good for children. Here, try that.

Seaweed has fabulous fibre in it. We're all moving in the same direction in terms of age and fibre is good for you. I believe that a lot of the trace mineral elements of seaweed are locked up in the fibre.

So I get really ticked when I see international companies around the world stripping the seaweed for their gelatinous properties, which seaweeds are known for, stripping out the fibre, all the vitamins and minerals. The single largest use of seaweed in the industry in North America is to strip it, bleach it, get every ounce, get every vitamin out of it, every mineral out of it so that North Americans can have their chocolate milk without separating. That I find is a crime. France, Denmark, Scotland – they're all up there in that.

I just came back from a conference in P.E.I. in 2008. I met some very good seaweed people from Ireland and the East Coast of the U.S. We would refer to them as the “pudding boys” because that is what they want to do with seaweed.

*Jon Steinman:* This is Deconstructing Dinner. We’re listening to Diane Bernard of Sooke, British Columbia sharing her widespread knowledge of everything seaweed. As she continued her show-and-tell, she introduced a few photos of some other seaweeds that she wasn’t able to harvest the evening before we met. And then she introduced a well-known seaweed that she did come across - sea lettuce.

*Diane Bernard:* A nice photo there of rockweed and fucus, and a little bit here of the bright green, which is sea lettuce. I have some here. Unfortunately, like I said, the year, the timing....

This is blown apart. It’s left over from last year. This is a wonderful seaweed to eat, and it looks just like lettuce, so it’s called sea lettuce. Bright green, lovely tissue colour. At this time of year it acts, looks, tastes like wax paper. So it’s not good to eat. And it’s been blown apart.

So usually it’s a piece, fairly big. And great for soups, stews. Great for wrapping halibut, putting it around. Steaming. Good for salmon. Seaweeds dovetail beautifully with seafood and fish.

You’ll find sea lettuce pretty much here right through the Pacific Northwest in the lower tidal area, and easy to get at. For your own use, yes, you can do that. Harvesting it commercially, of course, you have to have licenses and all of that. And again, I keep cautioning people, just be aware of your upland uses and what are the uses of the waters around you.

This is the infamous seaweed kombu. Highly prized in Japan. Chefs here - Caucasian-trained chefs - they look at this and sort of go, “Oh, God, Diane, what have you got?” But, if you want to feel that, it’s like leather, and highly prized for its vitamins and minerals. And they’ll dry it and they’ll use it and put it in their soups and their stews. They dry it and keep it.

This is a prized seaweed – ceremonial in Japan. It’s been in my bucket because I harvested this last night. There we go. That’s the stuff that science now is having a great time with. (*Jon Steinman:* laughs) It’s a gel, and the closest thing I can use it ... it’s called a marine, aloe vera-type gel. High, high in vitamins and Bs. High in minerals. High in vitamins A, E and C. And when the chefs get nervous when I hall this out, I just tell them to put in on their face because it will make them beautiful (*Jon Steinman:* laughs) and to just chill out.

*Jon Steinman:* Do flavours differ noticeably between seaweeds, or do they tend to all carry a similar taste?

*Diane Bernard:* No, they do. They vary quite a bit. The alaria – the chefs I’ve had out, they comment on it having like a rhubarb-type smell to it and taste. And also at times a zucchini, sweat pea-kind of thing - a greeny kind of taste. The sea lettuce, of course - just a very nice, fresh, green flavour to it.

The rockweed here – which I am just going to show you - a funky seaweed that hangs off the rocks. What it’s highly prized for are the puffs on the end. When you talking to people here from the Coast, they all go, “Yeh, yeh, you work with the puffs.” The puffs actually, too, have this gelatinous gel inside them. The science behind it now is that it is excellent for burn victims; excellent for scar tissue healing; excellent as an antiviral; and it has antibacterial properties. I am not talking about the beauty industry science: I am talking about agriculture science, and I am talking about the medical science.

So the puffs can be harvested and cut and dried, and they make great chips. Really nice to chew on. They have earthy flavour to them. I think if Sinclair were here he would be describing them like you would mushrooms - sort of a rich, earthy kind of flavour to this one.

*Jon Steinman:* After the indoor seaweed show-and-tell, I followed Diane Bernard down to the shore of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, along which she harvests her seaweeds. We spoke of the beneficial uses of seaweeds for *gardeners* and she spoke of the harvesting practices that she uses to ensure her actions are sustainable.

*Diane Bernard:* Seaweeds are fantastic as a compost fertilizer: extra, bigger roots; stronger stems; and bigger and fleshier fruits. The science behind that has been around for thirty years.

My tours tend to start over there, and people will come down. I use the analogy of a garden. Then we’ll walk along here, and we head out a good several hundred meters past those rocks there.

This area saves about seven hundred species of seaweed. We knock the socks off of France and the Mediterranean.

Across the way are the Olympics. So you have the great Juan de Fuca Strait here. Mad, fast, fast moving water. That contributes to a lot of movement and keeps it very cold all year.

So you have got a National Park over there - the Olympic Park. So very little action going on here. We have our own coastal park system here on my side. So we don’t have a lot of activity here in the straits in terms of active pollutants and that.

*Jon Steinman:* So, on a day when we would see at the low tide the seaweed that’s out here, is there an approach that you would take to ensure that there is a more sustainable practice? Are there such concerns with seaweed?

*Diane Bernard:* Absolutely, absolutely. We're pretty hard on our resources here in North America - Canada and the U.S. combined. We have done devastating things to our seaweed resources, particularly down the California coastline and in the seventies – huge, over-harvesting problems, inappropriate harvesting techniques.

Here in Canada - here on the British Columbia coastline - we are required to harvest by hand. That really keeps things in check. We don't have oil exploration on this coastline yet. So that really, really helps us as well, and keeps the coastline pretty clean.

We harvest so that we do not interfere with the growing of the seaweed. We never yank them off the rocks. We have to have sharp instruments to cut and we harvest from boats as well as going into the low tide from the shore. So, we'll have boots, and sharp instruments – a knife, scissors - and we cut.

We do not devastate an area, like go out and just harvest one kind of seaweed. That's where I treat it like a garden. We do things like, "Well, this time of the year - this week - alaria is growing fabulous. The chefs get alaria." Another time it will be sea lettuce: that's what they are going to get.

We harvest a variety so we are not doing any big damage to one seaweed and not interfering. We don't want to get into monoculture, like what's happening on the East Coast, where it's only dulce now or the *Chondrus crispus* that's growing.

So, when I work with chefs, they sometimes get like, "I only want this kind." And we're like, "Well no, we don't work that way, and you'll get the seaweeds that we all harvest." And that's gotten me into a little bit of trouble. But once they understand the rationale behind it, then they're full in there and like that.

*Jon Steinman:* Right. One of the other thoughts: just backtracking to what we are talking about earlier with the insects - they attract insects. Are seaweeds also of interest to any wildlife, either in the ocean or from land?

*Diane Bernard:* Yeh. Seaweeds have their own types of insects. They have brown bugs on the brown seaweeds; they have green bugs on the green seaweeds.

You can see here – the seaweeds behind us – they have flies and that and bugs on them now, but that's because it's spring and it's warm. But these are land, terrestrial-type insects on those ones. But in the ocean they'll have their own bugs.

The seaweeds like to be eaten by urchins - they're like little lawnmowers. You know, those beautiful purple things. They cruise over the seaweed when they are starting to grow. They can keep a bed down if there's lots of them. We had over-harvesting here during the eighties and we don't have a lot of sea urchins and so we have very big, big beds of kelp here.

The other thing is is that seaweeds are eaten by sea otters. Not river otters but sea otters. And of course, their populations were devastated a couple of hundred years ago. They are starting to come back down the coastline. So, they're out there.

There has been evidence of seaweeds out on the Oregon Coast. They have a marine research area there. It's been there for about twenty-five years, thirty years - big, big stuff. There's no hunting, no fishing, no spearing, no diving, no nothing in that area. They have videos of whales – grey whales and, I believe, orcas. But anyway, evidence of the greys going along and they stash their young in the big, giant bull kelps. Then they go off hunting, fishing, gathering food and then they come back.

I kind of think of it like playpens - the ultimate playpen. You stick them there and they can't get out. They just hang there. Then the females go off, get the food, come back. Then they show them opening them up, and the immatures, youngsters come out.

*Jon Steinman:* Diane Bernard of Outer Coast Seaweeds. As I wrapped up my visit with Diane along the shores of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, I asked her if she believes that wild seaweed harvesting for food use can become a more notable part of West Coast food culture.

*Jon Steinman:* Maybe as a last question, how much room do you think there is for more of, I guess, a seaweed culture here on the Island, from a food perspective? Is there a lot of room for sustainable use of more seaweeds in our diet, at least here on Vancouver Island - on the Coast?

*Diane Bernard:* Seaweeds are fantastic as food. I think there's lots of opportunities here.

What seaweeds have been used for in the past is sort of commodity-wise, and that is where they are stripped and used as thickeners for products that don't allow separation. That I think is a crime – to take a fabulous resource like this and render it down to something that keeps our chocolate milk from separating. That is very offensive to me.

*Jon Steinman:* And that was Diane Bernard of Outer Coast Seaweeds, located in Sooke, British Columbia. I spoke to Diane in February 2010. More information on Diane's work is posted at [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca) and posted under the February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010 episode.

soundbite

*Jon Steinman:* You're tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated listener supported radio show and podcast produced in Nelson, British Columbia at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY. I'm Jon Steinman.

If you're a regular listener of this show we'd certainly appreciate your financial support to keep this show on the air. Information on how to donate is posted on our website - [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca). And you can also call 250-352-9600 and inquire into how you can send a cheque or money-order.

In the second half of today's show is Part 5 of our ongoing series, Deconstructing Dinner in Our Schools - a collection of episodes that examine how the subjects covered here on the show make their way into public schools, private schools, colleges and universities. This Part 5 is split into *two* segments: the second one will take us to Halifax, Nova Scotia where University students there held an event to raise awareness of the food service contracts that their Student Union enters into, which in doing so restricts the types of food available to students.

But first we can remain in the community of Sooke on Vancouver Island where, not far from where I spoke with Diane Bernard, is the local high school serving the community and surrounding area. The Edward Milne Community School is also home to a unique and successful Culinary Arts program, the likes of which are rare to find in most Canadian high schools.

Even better is that the program also interacts with their very own vegetable and herb garden and fruit trees growing right on the school property. Certainly it's these types of programs and gardens geared towards young students that are absolutely critical to ensure a healthy level of gardening and food production knowledge within our communities.

The Culinary Arts program will accommodate upwards to fifty-five students per day and is made up of students between grades ten and twelve. Leading the program are instructors Pia Carroll, who's been at the school for fourteen years, and Marion French, who acts as the program's chef.

I made a short visit to the school while in Sooke to learn more about this great public school program.

*Pia Carroll:* My name is Pia Carroll. I am Culinary Arts teacher and chef. I have been at the school for fourteen years.

And, yes, it's just establishing... getting kids who are pretty green coming in, but if they have got enthusiasm and passion and they want to learn, then this is the place for them. And getting them ready for college - to Camosun on the Island here, or Malaspina. Some have springboarded off as far as Stratford. We have a student going there. So wherever they want to go we help them along their way.

But they have got a lot of groundwork with getting familiar with what they are making - the kinds of food they are making - and we infuse along the way. We have got really good culinary standards, and we help them by understanding where their food comes from. It's a slow process, but we get there eventually because we are very stubborn.

*Marion French:* My name is Marion French and I have been here for two years. I'm a chef and I have been in this industry for twenty-five years. Before I was here I worked at the Harbour House for ten years. So what I do here is I help kids learn to cook.

*Jon Steinman:* After touring through the well-stocked kitchen used by students, Pia and Marion led me outside as we walked towards the program's very own garden and miniature fruit tree orchard. The garden is located on the other side of the high school's soccer field and, sure enough, as you'll hear in this next clip as Pia describes the culinary program in more detail, she gets dragged into the soccer game taking place on the field.

*Pia Carroll:* Well, as far as the framework of the school, when they come on Friday - when they start out in Grade ten - they learn all the basics: sanitation; and how a kitchen works; and they take Food Safe. They have got to have that backbone to knowing what goes on (to a student: hey, good stop there) in the kitchen.

And then they start the textbooks. We open the textbooks. There's a lot to learn, especially if they want to go on to Camosun to the culinary college. The Grade twelve here - we mesh it together so they can get dual credits towards college by being in our program for three blocks.

We give them lots of hands-on experience with cutting and the techniques. We do lots of different catering, which is fun. Yeh. We've got one coming up for Seedy Saturday soon in Sooke, so they'll be part of that. It's a seed swap. It's the first one that's going to happen.

And then there is a private catering coming up in March. We have got the Harbour House fundraising dinner in April. In May we support our athletic department and they don't get a lot of money, as far as fundraising goes. We ask for donations and the kids make this sort of very basic dinner but it's supporting the athletic banquet. It's great because the money goes right to them and we're giving up our time and everything for that.

And then there's another catering ... we'll do a district dinner, a sit down dinner - oh, no, it's a buffet (*Marion French:* Yeh, that's another 120 people) - in May.

Culturally, we try and do fieldtrips so the kids get to see other parts of the Island, like we go to Salt Spring. We visit the cheese makers, and the bread maker, and people like that. We're going up to the Duncan area and we'll go to Cowichan Bay Farm, True Grain Bakery and Hilary's Cheese. So we are exposing them to how artisans are making a living with the really good food. Otherwise, they have no idea of what's going on.

*Marion French:* One thing, though, we probably didn't mention is that our philosophy is that we try to get the kids to really think about local foods. Support local foods. Think about where the food comes from. Think about where the chicken lived. That sort of thing. It's important. Most kids especially don't think about that. They just buy it at the store.

*Jon Steinman:* Marion French and Pia Carroll outlining the Culinary Arts program at Edward Milne Community School in Sooke, British Columbia. As mentioned, the unique and successful high school program is also home to its very own vegetable and herb garden and small fruit orchard located directly on school property.

While the garden is only used *by* the culinary students, other fields of study offered at the school have also lent their hand to the garden, such as that from the construction class, who built the garden shed. So often here on the program we discuss the ways in which food systems require so many other *non*-food related skills. And while this might seem obvious, it's a lesson rarely offered in public schools. This cross-collaboration among classes, such as the example here with the construction class lending their support, is a great example of the critical role in which school gardens and food programs can provide as far as offering this important lesson about the multi-faceted social and economic benefits of food production.

*Pia Carroll:* When Mara and Jasmine Philip came along and said one summer, six years ago, "We have got some money for you. This to build a garden here," it was like we were ecstatic, because that's what we were working towards.

So we found a corner - just over here by the water works, as it's called - and it's cordoned off. We had to put the money into putting up a fence. We had a shed built by the construction class. But, yeh, this is where it all started.

So we have twenty-two fruit trees now. I know Marion's got more raspberry canes at home. (*Marion French:* Mm hm. I planted some last year.) We want to grow kiwi and a few more vines like that.

And we are going to have a greenhouse. So this corner is fifteen by twenty-five, the greenhouse would be. We are in negotiations. We have been for quite a while with the district (*Marion French:* six months) - longer (laughs) - about getting the greenhouse built.

And right now - Marion came out last Thursday, and you can see she went through the beds. We brought back a bucket of carrots.

*Marion French:* Yeh, I brought eight students with me. We weeded some beds, and we planted a few leeks, and we weeded the garlic. As you can see, there's lots of garlic there. Took out some kale. We are going to make kale chips in our dehydrator. So the kids are excited about that. (laughs)

*Jon Steinman:* So these kids are coming in without any previous experience? Maybe a little bit of experience?

*Marion French:* From home they have some experience. (*Pia Carroll:* Yeh, they do) But it was great. They were so into it. We were eating kale and we were picking some mustard greens. I showed them the edible weeds. Of course, I learned all that from the Harbour House - all the different weeds that you can eat. So it was great.

*Pia Carroll:* What I see when the students leave - the ones that have really attached themselves - it's not something that they've learnt from a book but by feel and touch and

taste. They take that with them, and that is empowerment that you don't find from a book. You can take it in, but to actually work with the resources here, and then we can go cook with them as well, it's unbelievable what they take away.

I don't stop to think about this until you ask, but you know that there are kids in the world that are going to make it different and for the better, because they are understanding better where their food comes from and how it can be grown.

*Jon Steinman:* Also worth noting as far as the school's garden is the widespread community support that made the vision of that garden a reality back in 2004 when it was first constructed. Support came from organizations like FarmFolk/CityFolk, Lifecycles, Slow Food Vancouver Island and the Sooke Harbour House, among others.

And, in closing out my brief visit to the Edward Milne Community School, I asked Pia if similar high school culinary programs exist in the area, and she also shares some of the exciting upcoming plans for the culinary students, some of whom will be soon travelling to Stratford, Ontario, where another unique public school food and garden program is located.

*Pia Carroll:* We are lucky. We have got another school in Esquimalt, another school in Victoria, one in Saanich and one on Salt Spring Island. They are all high schools and they do these programs as well. They are all really talented chefs – *chefs* - that work in this field. Because there is a bit of a difference: when you are a chef, you really know what it's like to be working in the kitchen, and you bring a lot of years experience with that.

We are going on an exchange student trip to Stratford, Ontario this April. We go there with a group of twelve students, and then the students return and come here. And so it's wonderful to be able to showcase the local food.

We are going to have a seaweed demonstration and a lunch when the Stratford group come here. We are also having a First Nations dinner. That First Nations dinner is a collaboration with the T'Sou-ke Nation across the road from us, who will make the bannock and the barbequed salmon, and we bring all the vegetables and dessert and things. But it is an incredible feast to have together.

*Jon Steinman:* And that was Pia Carroll of the Culinary Arts program at Edward Milne Community School in Sooke, British Columbia. We also heard from Marion French, the chef involved in the program. Deconstructing Dinner visited the school in February 2010.

soundbite

*Jon Steinman:* Taking us to the end of today's broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner and Part 5 of our Deconstructing Dinner in our Schools series, we travel to the *other* side of the country and onto the campus of Dalhousie University, located in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Dalhousie's campus radio station CKDU is among the dozens of stations airing Deconstructing Dinner show each week, and so we're happy to air some interviews recorded by CKDU's Asaf Rashid in December 2009 at the Student Union Building (the SUB) located on campus. Asaf is one of many hosts of Operation Wake Up! and he interviewed students involved in the student-run group known as Campus Action On Food.

On December 1<sup>st</sup> the group held a free food event during which they distributed healthy and alternative options that are otherwise not offered in the Student Union Building. The event was held to raise awareness of the confidential nature of the exclusivity contracts that the Dalhousie Student Union (the DSU) signs with foodservice giants Sodexo and PepsiCo. This is a common circumstance among many institutions like universities, and, similar to the efforts at Dalhousie, many students are opposed to having only one foodservice distributor - or two for that matter - providing them with their daily sustenance in a building such as that of the Student Union Building.

At the time of this December interview, 1570 students had signed the petition calling on the Dalhousie Student Union to end such contracts with confidentiality clauses, so that students can thereby take part in a more transparent decision-making process as far as what foods might be available to them in the Student Union Building. Here's CKDU's Asaf Rashid.

*Asaf Rashid:* So, here's one of the folks who's around and helping get this thing set up. So, tell me, what's going on here?

*Student1:* Well, we are having a free food serving to make a statement in the SUB on CAF - Campus Action on Food. So what we are protesting is the exclusivity contracts that are happening here at Dal and how they completely restrict the food that is offered in the SUB and our options as students, and also exploit us as consumers.

*Asaf Rashid:* What are you hoping is accomplished out of this event today?

*Student1:* We are hoping to raise awareness and just get people to realize that that this isn't the way that things have to be, that there have been alternatives at other universities and that universities are for the students. The Student Union Building is for the students. We should have a say rather than be controlled by corporations.

*Asaf Rashid:* All right. So, talking to someone else who is at this food serving. Are you enjoying the food?

*Student2:* Yeh, absolutely. It's all really great: some actual healthy choices here in the SUB as opposed to Tim Hortons or Pizza Pizza. Something that probably we should have here on a regular basis.

*Asaf Rashid:* What do you think of Sodexo?

*Student2:* What do I think of Sodexo? Well, I mean the fact that they insist that all contracts signed must be under exclusivity rights - that doesn't sit well at all. When nobody else can come into a building and have other options. You can't even give away free food in a building just because that's what they necessitate. It seems pretty domineering, to say the least. Big corporations, not that healthy food, have a huge monopoly over many, many institutions.

*Asaf Rashid:* So, what do you hope is achieved through this action today?

*Student2:* Our main goal is to raise awareness of this. Yeh, we are giving away free food and that's awesome. But the goal is to raise awareness for people and to use that free food serving as a medium for getting that message across. You can definitely hold people's attention when you are giving away free food - well, giving away free anything. You can hold people's attention for at least a little while.

Hopefully, people are taking to heart what we are doing: wanting healthy choices on campus for food available in any of the buildings; wanting to have the ability to be able to give away free food in any building, if we want to do that; wanting to raise awareness about the secret contracts, especially with the motion going to vote tomorrow night likely, unless it gets pushed back; trying to encourage people to get in contact with their Councillors and tell them that they want more transparency through the DSU. That's a part of it, too.

*Jon Steinman:* Also interviewed at the event organized by Campus Action on Food was a student who had recently come from another Canadian University – Trent, located in Peterborough, Ontario. Trent, like many universities, does in fact offer other options that are *not* restricted to just large multinational foodservice companies.

*Asaf Rashid:* All right. So, I've got another person I am talking to here at the food serving. And you used to go to another university, right?

*Student3:* I went for two years to Trent University in Peterborough.

*Asaf Rashid:* What was the situation there with regards to exclusivity?

*Student3:* Well, there was a similar problem of exclusivity on campus in that the university had signed – I think it was a crazy amount of time, it was like a ninety year contract or something insane like that - with Aramark, rather than Sodexo. And they had another problem of exclusivity much like they do here on campus, and so there was a lot of student action about that in the form of potlucks.

Also, I remember the Native Studies Department used to have regular potlucks because they'd been told that they weren't allowed to, according to the terms of the contract.

*Asaf Rashid:* Were there any gains made at Peterborough with regard to providing any student-run services for food?

*Student3:* Yeh, there was actually an OPIRG Working Group that turned into a cooperatively-run café called the Seasoned Spoon. As far as I remember they now are able to. But they are only allowed to have lunches, or something like that and technically it's all by donation. They've found some route around the exclusivity contract.

But they're great. They do local food, and they do catering, and they employ all students, and they pay really decent wages. It's a fantastic alternative. I think there is one in Montreal, too - The People's Potato. So if we could get more of those across Canada that would be fantastic.

*Jon Steinman:* This is Deconstructing Dinner. CKDU's Asaf Rashid continued his December 1<sup>st</sup> interview at Dalhousie University's Student Union Building and inquired into the following day's Council meeting of the Dalhousie Student Union.

*Asaf Rashid:* We'd like to really focus in on the issue of that big vote tomorrow. Can you give us the context? What's going on tomorrow?

*Student4:* So, tomorrow the DSU Council is voting to send the decision to stop all secret contracts to be voted on at AGM or by membership.

So right now all these food contracts are signed in secret and students can't find out about them. There was a campaign and petition brought up in Council. They're basically voting to let the membership vote on whether future contracts will be secret.

We are doing an email campaign to try to put pressure on them. There is really no reason that they should vote for secrecy or that they should deprive the membership from voting on this. If Councillors feel that it is an important issue, even if they haven't made up their mind, they should let the membership vote on it. These contracts are things that affect the membership directly and the membership should vote on them.

*Asaf Rashid:* It's obvious what result you hope for tomorrow night. Do you have any predictions on how it might go?

*Student4:* A lot of Councillors are on the edge. It's a sad thing. I would say, if they vote against, it's a big opportunity to point out the lack of democracy, you know? If Councillors vote against sending this to an AGM, if they vote for secrecy, they are voting against democracy, against transparency. And that's a ridiculous thing.

I have hope that with enough emails – like what we are doing with the email campaign – we'll let Councillors know that this is something that students care about, with enough emails that Councillors will come around. But we'll just wait and see.

*Jon Steinman:* The following day the issue was indeed brought into the Council meeting of the Dalhousie Student Union and the Council voted to send the petition of 1570 names

to their Board of Operations to study the feasibility of discontinuing contracts with confidentiality clauses.

Over the course of the following two months, a number of delays pushed the Board's decision to February, when they issued a report that advised against the motion, thereby maintaining the status quo - that foodservice contracts within the Student Union Building will continue to remain confidential. According to the report, foodservice suppliers who they consulted with were fearful that competitors would have access to their "trade secrets" and are therefore not in their best interest.

More information and updates on the issue can be found at [studentsmobilize.com](http://studentsmobilize.com) and are also linked to on the Deconstructing Dinner website at [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca) and posted under the February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010 broadcast where today's show is also archived.

soundbites

Song – "Cafeteria Food," by Ken Sheldon, from the album Ice Cream Soup, Indy

Please don't make me eat  
That cafeteria food  
My stomach's feeling queasy  
It's not in the mood  
For cardboard pizza  
With tomato on top  
If I see another fish stick  
I am gonna drop

I said, please, please, please  
Don't make me eat that cafeteria food  
Please, please, please  
Don't make me eat that cafeteria food

The stuff they serve they call  
Macaroni and cheese  
Every time I see it  
It makes me want to sneeze  
I think that's a sausage  
But it's only a hunch  
If I find out it's a hotdog  
I'm going to lose my lunch

I said, please, please, please  
Don't make me eat that cafeteria food  
Please, please, please  
Don't make me eat that cafeteria food

Monday – Meatballs made of sawdust and paste  
Tuesday – A turkey that died of old age  
Wednesday - Spaghetti  
Thursday – Swiss Steak  
Friday – I don't know but it's crawlin' off the plate

Please, please, please  
Don't make me eat that cafeteria food  
Please, please, please  
Don't make me eat that cafeteria food

I've eaten hamburger  
'Til I'm startin' to moo  
And toasted cheese that tasted  
Like a rubber balloon  
Today we're having chili  
Or is it beef stew?  
Well, I can't tell the difference  
And neither can you

Oh, please, please, please  
Don't make me eat that cafeteria food  
Please, please, please  
Don't make me eat that cafeteria food

Refrain

*Sound of school bell ringing*

*Kids: yeah!*

Song – “Cafeteria Food,” by Bill Wellington, from the album Forbidden Folklore, BMI

I dreamt that all cafeteria food  
Was made by a man who was all tattooed  
From the top of his head to the tip of his toes  
Did I mention he had a big bone in his nose?

He started with a sticky paste  
That vaguely resembled industrial waste  
He mixed it in a humungous vat  
With lots of sugar and lots of fat

He put it through a big machine  
That turned it all fluorescent green  
He spread it on a cookie sheet

That measured one hundred by one hundred feet

I knew this cook was really brave  
'Cause he used a nuclear microwave  
That looked just like a laser gun  
In seventeen seconds it was done

He chopped it into rectangular blocks  
Packed it away, ten to a box  
And put it in a big deep freeze  
Minus two hundred and forty degrees  
And shipped it to our school and then  
Started the process all over again

The stuff at our school started to thaw  
But they still had to cut it with a saw  
They plopped it on cafeteria trays  
We ate the same stuff for sixty-two days  
'Til everyone in school turned green  
And everyone in school turned mean

The teachers and kids and principal, too  
Were all overcome by this terrible goo  
The stuff made sure it was all we could munch  
Because it made us forget to pack our lunch

We started to rave we started to hop  
And all education came to a stop  
About this time I became aware  
I was having a terrible nightmare

I opened my eyes I jumped out of bed  
I ran to the place where my daddy read  
The newspaper in the morning each day  
To see what the school lunch menu would say  
Imagine my relief when I saw  
It was choice of lasagna or cheese pizza

I started to shout I started to leap  
My dad told me to go back to sleep  
I did not mind to go back to my room  
Because I knew I was safe from that terrible doom

But to whatever it is  
That makes you dream when you sleep  
I would say no more nightmares like that, please

They make my skin creep

ending theme

*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.*

*Those last two songs heard on the show today were, in the order we played them, by New Hampshire's Ken Sheldon and the second by Virginia's Bill Wellington.*

*This radio show is provided free of charge to campus/community radio stations across the country, and relies on the financial support from you the listener. Support for the program can be donated through our website at [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca) or by dialing 250-352-9600.*