

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

January 21, 2010

Title: Speerville Flour Mill

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

Jon Steinman: And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner – a syndicated weekly radio show and Podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. This show is heard on radio stations around the world including CHSR 97.9FM Fredericton, New Brunswick. I'm Jon Steinman.

On today's episode we listen in on some great interviews and tours with the operators of Speerville Flour Mill – a locally-owned and operated business in New Brunswick that has for over 25 years been supplying the Maritime Provinces of Canada with local organically grown grain and foods while supporting over 30 farmers in the area. We'll also meet Nova Scotia farmer Andrew Kernohan who is one of those farmers supplying Speerville with organically grown grains. Deconstructing Dinner visited with Speerville and Andrew in September 2009 while we toured throughout the two provinces.

Similar to the efforts that we've documented on our Local Grain Revolution series, developing and maintaining local organic grain economies is no easy task in light of the vast majority of grains consumed in North America coming from areas where grain growing has for over the past 100 years become as centralized as it has. But while the Speerville Flour Mill has not operated without enduring many challenges, they are a great example of the role of food processors in supporting regional farmers and economies and the power with which demand from the eating public for local organic products can generate some necessary muscle to get those products onto the shelves of national grocery retailers. We'll also learn from farmer Andrew Kernohan that growing organic grains in the Maritime Provinces is quite the noble challenge.

increase music and fade out

Before we visit with Speerville Flour Mill, a quick update on the National Democratic Dialogue on Canada's Prison Farms that will now be taking place on February 1st. We introduced this live webcast event on last week's episode and if you haven't already viewed our updates on the Deconstructing Dinner website or our Facebook page, there have been some changes since we first announced the event. As it happens, Prime Minister Stephen Harper made a Cabinet shuffle

shortly after that announcement, replacing Canada's now-previous Minister of Public Safety Peter Van Loan with Vic Toews. Because Minister Toews represents a political riding in Manitoba, the location and date of the event has changed. So again, the panel will be hosted now in Steinbach, Manitoba at the Mennonite Heritage Village on February 1st. The event will be broadcast live over the internet and as a media partner of the event, Deconstructing Dinner is coordinating setting up a way for any one tuning in to pose questions to the panelists. Again the panel has been set-up to discuss the in-process closures of Canada's prison farms – a decision that has upset many farmers, eaters, prisoners and prison-workers alike. We featured a one-hour episode on the issue back in July 2009 and the efforts to stop the closures have not stopped. As part of the efforts to raise awareness of the issues, event organizers have chosen to host the event in the riding of the recently-appointed Minister of Public Safety Vic Toews. Invited and confirmed now to sit on the panel will be the NDP's Rural and Community Development Critic Niki Ashton, Liberal Agriculture Critic Wayne Easter, Liberal Public Safety Critic Mark Holland, and Green Party of Canada candidate Kate Storey. Minister Toews himself did receive an invite but despite the event being hosted just down the road from his office, he will not be attending. In his response to the invite, his communications advisor repeated the very same comments that have already infuriated people across the country, that is that "The prison farms are based on an agricultural model from an earlier era. Agriculture has changed. As in many other sources of the economy, capital has replaced labour." Of course such a perspective is seen by many to be inaccurate and dangerously ignores the realities of capital-intensive farming and the growing interest in labour-reliant models.

Again, the live event will take place on Monday, February 1st between 1:30-3:30pm CST, that's 4:00-6:00pm Newfoundland Standard Time, 3:30-5:30pm Atlantic Standard Time, 2:30-3:30pm Eastern Standard Time, 12:30-2:30pm Mountain Standard Time, 11:30-1:30pm Pacific Standard Time. Stay posted to deconstructingdinner.ca or our Facebook page for more info and updates.

music fades in and out

It was back in September 2009, when after spending an overnight in the New Brunswick capital of Fredericton, I travelled west on the Trans-Canada Highway. I then made my way down a beautiful country road and arrived in the small hamlet of Speerville – a community that if it was not your destination, it would likely never be noticed. With only a small number of families living there it's amazingly supported by multiple food and agricultural businesses. There is a small meat processing operation serving the needs of local hunters and farmers. There's Speerville Farm operated by Stu Fleischaker and Nancy Cantafio. The farm is a small, heavily diversified farm, with products ranging from eggs and meat to vegetables and homemade mustard. They offer home delivery to the Woodstock and Fredericton areas. Stu happens to also be one of the founders of the Speerville Flour Mill which is located right beside his vegetable garden. And

that brings us to one of the features of today's episode, another business in the community, the Mill itself.

Started in 1982, Speerville Flour Mill is one of only a small number of small-scale organic flour mills operating in the country and certainly one-of-a-kind in Canada's Atlantic Provinces. Despite the demise of so many small-scale food processors, Speerville has maintained its roots and has further become a well-known name throughout the provinces. Wherever I travelled in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia there wasn't anywhere I went where the Speerville name was not synonymous with good food.

As I arrived in the community, Speerville President Todd Grant and his brother Tony were heating up a portable wood-fired oven that was resting on a flatbed trailer attached to a pick-up truck. The oven was about to embark on a journey to Prince Edward Island where it would later be used to bake breads made with Speerville's organic flours. Todd Grant shared the history of the mill and how he got involved in this unique local food business.

Todd Grant: I guess the mill started back in the late 70's, early 80's. It was a community business that basically was built so that farmers could bring their grain to the mill to be cleaned and given back to the farmer himself. That didn't really fly I guess, so, a few years later one of the gentlemen that actually helped build the building itself decided that he would start a mill and, so he bought his first load of grain from a local farmer and he milled it into flour and sold it to a local bake shop and perseverance, a desire to have quality food from local farms and the rest, I guess is just history. It kept growing from there.

I was the first full time employee back in '90. I come fresh out of high school looking for a place to work. At that time was a modern, average everyday kid eating food from the grocery store, had no realization, no thoughts of quality and where it come from and things like that. But, as my time at the mill involved, I got very interested. We grew up on a small farm here, myself and my brothers, raised our own meats and milks and things like that. So I guess it wasn't long sinking into me, the importance of local food. So back in '91, '92, I expressed an interest in buying into the mill to potentially, hopefully own it some day, to do with it what I thought needed to be done, and you know, I guess the rest is history.

Jon Steinman: With the Speerville Flour Mill being the only organic mill of its kind in the Maritime Provinces, I asked Todd if the mill was integral to the many farmers throughout the provinces who cultivate organic grains.

Todd Grant: I do believe so, yah. Having an alternative marketplace for your product was what was needed to get people into growing food quality grains, with the hope of organic grains, with the hope of being able to have a successful farm.

Jon Steinman: So how has that evolved, how many farmers right now are supplying here - where are they coming from?

Todd Grant: All over Atlantic Canada. We've probably got thirty five to forty farms, upwards of a couple of thousand acres in Atlantic Canada being farmed organically and producing human foods.

Jon Steinman: So this is all throughout New Brunswick, PEI, Nova Scotia?

Todd Grant: Yup. All over, I guess.

Jon Steinman: And what are they growing? What's coming into the mill?

Todd Grant: We're buying organic spelt, organic oats, organic wheat, organic wheat - the variety red fife, rye, some soft winter wheats. We as well had a farmer last year experiment with corn.

Tony Grant: Tested flax.

Todd Grant: Coming in, yah, the test with flax haven't really proved out yet, but we are doing some trials, I guess. Those would be the bulk grains that, basically, we've built our business around.

Jon Steinman: So, and would you say the mill has been growing, you know, since you got involved?

Todd Grant: Yup, I dare say that, you know, every year we're growing probably ten percent. People are starting to get a little concerned about their food and the 100 mile diet, there's lots of little things that have encouraged them to look deeper into the food system out there and so, I believe we're gaining a little support every day.

Jon Steinman: The Speerville Flour Mill currently employs 12 people in production, warehousing, office-work, such as marketing and distribution. The backbone of their business are the many health food stores, buying clubs and bakeries who they sell to including national retailers like Sobey's, Atlantic Superstore (which is a Loblaw chain of stores) and Co-op Atlantic – a chain of co-operative grocery stores throughout the Atlantic Provinces. Speerville products are only sold in Atlantic stores.

President Todd Grant works side-by-side with his brother Tony who I also spoke with and who will shortly take us on a tour of the mill and warehouse, and Tony is equally passionate about operating a business that provides the most natural and freshest foods possible.

Tony Grant: I'm Tony Grant, Todd's older brother. I'm the middle of three. I guess I came to the mill six years ago. Electronic technologist by trade, but when my wife and I decided we wanted to start a family, I thought that I should be working closer to home and Todd had an opportunity at the mill with some - needed some help with management and setting up the business for growth and, so he asked me to come and be part of the team. I've been very happy to be there, been intrigued by everything that I've seen from the time I walked through the door. Wasn't as aware as I should have been about our food and some of the things that are in our - the food that we're eating and some of the easy cures that we have, the easy fixes that we have. And I've really been pleased to have had the opportunity to work at Speerville and work towards a cause that is much bigger than myself.

Our family was incredibly lucky to have been raised or had the opportunity to be raised on a small farm in rural New Brunswick. We had our own beef, our own pork, our own eggs, our own chicken, grew a huge garden and did a lot of canning, so not a lot of our food was from the grocery store. As we grew up and moved off on our own we succumbed to the modern conveniences and that was where I did a fair bit of my grocery shopping as well.

I did have a medical challenge as well. My wife and I want to have children, and I wanted to be closer to home, but I developed the disease acid reflux disease, which of course, I'm sure you're aware, is not a disease at all, it's a diet problem. I was on the road a lot and ate out of restaurants and a lot of processed meats and potato chips and pop and the things most of modern society eats. I guess after two weeks on the Nexium, because I had gone through a number of different products over a couple of years trying to control my acid reflux disease, and I had a really bad reaction, blacked out, cold sweats, seeing black splotches, went to the hospital immediately. They did a bunch of blood work and tried to diagnose the problem and came back three hours later when I was feeling fine - it effected me for about an hour - three hours later when they come back to tell me that I had a flu, nothing more than a flu, I showed him again the Nexium package, I had eight of the ten symptoms that it warned about on the back of the package. The doctor assured me it was just a touch of the flu and just go home and take it easy for the week, wrote me - gave me a doctor's note.

I felt it was horrible that that doctor wasn't going to attribute any of my reaction, which I had never had any reaction like this before in my life, to the Nexium, so I went to see my family doctor who had described the Nexium to me. He as well refused to make a report on it, he said that symptoms like this have never been reported on a drug like this, if you were going to have any symptoms it would be within the first twenty four hours. And, I guess, I'm saying, well maybe it was because doctors like you wouldn't make a report. You know, here I am reporting it, and it did happen, and you are not making this report.

So I guess all of these things came together with the right timing, Todd asking me to be part of the organization as well, came together with the right timing for me and start working at the mill and start to realize that I need to take my diet back into my own hands and that I don't have a disease called acid reflux disease, what I had was an eating problem, and I very easily fixed that eating problem by changing the way I eat and starting to eat real food, much like the food that I was raised on when I was growing up.

(Sound of people walking on stairs.)

Tony Grant: These are the original stairs of the first co-op. Just wait there a minute I'll be.

Jon Steinman: Sure.

Tony Grant: Lights here. So this is where we would receive grains. The incoming grain would go into one of these three tanks and if it needed dried it would go into our dryer, a six ton batch dryer right here. Any grain when it lands here, there's an incoming grain report done, samples taken, and the audit trail process starts right there when the grain arrives.

From there it would go into our seed plant and in our seed plant we have four bins upstairs, two 15 ton, two 12 ton, and they will hold the grain until we're ready to bring it down into our seed plant into the various equipment.

Jon Steinman: This equipment looks pretty old.

Tony Grant: Most of our equipment is old. This is a Frano 500, it's probably 60 or 70 years old. To see it in operation some people might not believe that it could do any kind of a job, it rattles and shakes and bangs. But that's what its doing cleaning grain, it needs to rattle and shake and bang. And we do have to do some maintenance to it every year, there's no question about that, but this old gear is solid. You patch it up and it will work forever almost.

And then from there we hit our gravity table. Gravity table is a really neat piece of machinery with the heavy grains going to the top and the lighter gains coming to the bottom, as you can see.

Jon Steinman: And why are you segregating those?

Tony Grant: Well, I guess for a number of reasons. You can see there's some vetch and some small seeds in here, but there is also a lot of these kernels are fusarium damaged kernels on this small side, on this light side. But you can see that 99 percent of the table is covered with good grain and the fusarium damage is just down here in this lightest section of the table.

Jon Steinman: This is Deconstructing Dinner and you're listening to Tony Grant of Speerville Flour Mill – a unique business based in the community of Speerville, New Brunswick. The business processes organic grains grown throughout the Maritime Provinces into dozens of products and Deconstructing Dinner visited the business in September 2009. Photos of the mill are posted on our website at deconstructingdinner.ca and listed under the January 21st 2010 episode.

So, from here where does the grain then go?

Tony Grant: From here, I guess once it's cleaned, into these wagons. It would go into the tanks out back, the finish tanks, you probably saw those on your way by. Not much to see, I guess, just a bunch of grain bins. Yeah, so it'd come out into one of these tanks out here. From there it would come back into the mill which, I guess, we can go back upstairs. If you just get inside that door you'll be in the light.

Jon Steinman: So what are we looking at here?

Tony Grant: This is a scouring machine, these are both scouring machines.

Jon Steinman: Scouring is...?

Tony Grant: Just a final - I guess it's smutting and scouring - just a final clean before it goes to the mill, to knock any of the grain dust off or any small particles out, especially with the oats. You can see on this one that - can't tell you when it was made, but it was patented in the UK in 1838 - very old machines, still work very well though. July 23rd 1872 is the oldest patent date that's printed on it.

Jon Steinman: So, they have certainly been used since the beginning of the mill.

Tony Grant: Yes, actually, these - I think both of these machines, or this one, at least - came out of a mill that was in operation in the early 1900's.

Jon Steinman: Around here?

Tony Grant: Yah, about 10 miles from here - Slater Mill - and it was in operation until probably, I don't know, likely the '20's or '30's, thereabouts. But this old equipment was still in it. These two elevators that you see right here came out of that mill as well. These elevators are over 100 years old, believe it or not. It's just a bucket elevator, pretty simple technology - a belt on a pulley with buckets. Yah, so a lot of this equipment was actually used 100 years ago.

So this is where the grain would come in from the tanks outside, all labeled very well and, as well, a part of the organic process. Any time that any grain is drawn from any of these tanks it is recorded in our organic audit trail; how much was

used, what it was used for, what pack size it went in to, and the date that it was milled.

This is what we call the mill warehouse. Our offices are upstairs and when the members of the co-op - the First Co-op - where building this building they didn't have much to work with - very, very little money to work with, basically time and effort was all they had. So you can see they've tried to cover the stack wall a number of times with stucco to get some measure of insulation from the winter winds. This area that we're standing in right now, small section was their original warehouse, this was the first edition to the mill.

So if we want to step in here, this is the original mill, still where 90 percent of the processing takes place now. There are a number of machines in here, most of the machines that are here, we have done a lot of work to them, some of them almost been completely rebuilt. We pride ourselves in rebuilding old equipment. I guess it's our opinion rather than spending 25,000 on new, if I can buy a shell for 2,000 dollars and put 5,000 dollars into labour to fix it back up, I'm much better off, I've got that guy working for me and there's going to be some slack time and why not have him working for me rather than - rather than going home with short hours some weeks.

Jon Steinman: As Tony Grant concluded his tour of the mill operation of the Speerville Flour Mill, we made our way a few hundred meters down the road where the business maintains their warehouse space. Upon walking into the warehouse, it became quite clear that the Speerville Flour Mill has grown into becoming a notable distributor of many foods and grocery products.

Tony Grant: Most of the product that is in area, I guess out in the 30 by 30 we have some bulk grains, incoming and outgoing stuff that would be coming in, and in this area this is where we would build most of our health food stores and grocery store orders. You can see it's mostly all cased product. I guess you can see here salts, and as well we have a pasta line out of Quebec. We have considered a number of times putting in our own pasta line, but haven't gone that far yet, it's a totally other business so set aside from our milling.

So, in here we have a number of products. This section would be for our bakeries and our food group customers who are going to be buying chick peas and basmati rice and sesame seeds and red lentils, green lentils, buckwheat flour, all the stuff that they'd be buying in a 25 pound bag or a 55 pound bag. We also have back in here our organic and fair traded coffees and teas, cocoa, hot chocolate, we have peanut butter - crunchy and smooth - an almond butter, cashew butter, toothpaste line, we carry both Tom's of Maine and Green Beaver. We have our maple syrup, maple butter and maple sugar.

Jon Steinman: Now the diversity of products that Speerville Flour Mill distributes might for some seem to be straying from their focus – organically grown local

grains, but according to Tony Grant, diversifying their product line and distributing more than just the local grains they process provides greater convenience to their customers. As a result, Speerville has placed itself into a position of maintaining greater distribution and bargaining power.

Tony Grant: We try to be the kind of place that a family could source 90 percent of their groceries from - dried goods, at least. You can see here we have a line of environmentally friendly and phosphate free cleaning supplies; liquid dish, liquid laundry, and all purpose cleaners. I guess we just try to make it easy for our customers to place an order with us. And if customer demand says we should carry Green Beaver Company out of Markham, Ontario because Tom's of Maine just got purchased by Colgate-Palmolive, and is no longer a family owned and operated company, we had to bring on Green Beaver Company to compete with Tom's of Maine products.

In here, this is heated storage as well, or cold storage in the summer. We carry our blueberry juice and organic apple cider vinegar in there from Annapolis Valley. These two products are both from Nova Scotia. Blueberry juice isn't certified organic, but it is a wild blueberry juice made in Caledonia, Nova Scotia. And Boates Apple Cider Vinegar, wonderful product, there is no other like it in my opinion, and beautiful, beautiful product, I drink it straight with water - it is delicious - we brought this production on for our health food stores, but we did eventually get this product into Sobey's as well. Superstore hasn't been interested in taking it as of yet, but we still hope that they will someday and support another great family farm in Atlantic Canada.

Jon Steinman: So you had a role in doing that? In getting it into another store because, I guess, of your purchasing power here and your distribution power?

Tony Grant: Yah, absolutely. For Boates to be dealing with Sobey's or Superstore just would not happen. They are starting to come back to it a little bit, but as a rule they don't deal with single product suppliers, I guess.

Jon Steinman: Perhaps the greatest example of the importance of this business and really any small independent local food processor and distributor is found in Speerville's ability to determine how their product arrives at the major grocery retailers set up in the Maritime Provinces. With only three major retailers controlling virtually all of the grocery sales throughout the provinces, getting products produced on a small-scale onto their shelves is a difficult task. Even those businesses who are able to are required by some of these retailers to ship to a distribution centre first before the product then arrives at the individual stores. This never sat well with Speerville as it's important to them to ensure that anyone purchasing their product receives it as fresh as possible.

Tony Grant: We only deliver direct to the store to help control the product rotation rather than ask the grocery retailers to warehouse our product and rotate

it properly, if we're shipping direct to the store we can somewhat control how fresh that product is going into that store. Well, not somewhat, we can control it.

Jon Steinman: And so, they're okay with that, these stores, that you do do that?

Tony Grant: No, no I wouldn't say they're okay with it, but that's the only way that we would do business with them. We don't want to - the worst case scenario would be if they warehoused our product, didn't rotate it properly and put it out on the shelf for sale at, you know, ten months old or a year old and, as you know, an organic food with no additives, no preservatives should be consumed fresh. So I guess that was - when we went into Superstore and Sobey's that was criteria that we had is we are going to ship directly to your stores or else we don't ship at all.

That stuff right there is kinda bad. They don't really - they don't really like that part of the scenario. That, you know, that we have that control. They don't like that a bit. That's the great advantage that we have had in negotiating with the grocery retailers is that our product is in consumer demand - consumers will demand our product. If they're looking for Speerville Flour Mill Oatmeal, they won't go buy one of the competitor's brands. They'll go to another store in their city and see if they have it - or another store - or another store. Once they've tried our oatmeal and they understand what they're supporting they won't buy anybody else's oatmeal. So, that gives us tremendous bargaining power when it comes to working with these folks because they know that the consumer wants our product - tremendous power.

Jon Steinman: That's Tony Grant of Speerville Flour Mill located in Speerville, New Brunswick. Deconstructing Dinner visited Speerville in September 2009. Now we'll return to Speerville later on today's episode, but first let's meet another important component of this organic grain economy operating throughout Canada's Maritime Provinces - the farmers. Speerville has played an integral role for dozens of farmers throughout New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. It was there in Nova Scotia en route to Speerville where I first met farmer Andrew Kernohan. Andrew farms in the community of Parrsboro not too far from the New Brunswick border. There was quite a lot to learn from Andrew, whether it was the incredible challenges of growing grain in a Maritime climate, or his perspectives on the local food movement in the area. But first, Andrew shared the history of Parrsboro and the role of agriculture around the community. Both the story of Parrsboro and Andrew's farm are similar ones to many rural areas throughout North America.

Andrew Kernohan: The background to Parrsboro is it exists here because it was once a ferry connexion across to Wolfville and Windsor on the other side. So Parrsboro was on the most direct route between Halifax and Fredericton - or, you know, New Brunswick. And, so instead of going around via Truro, if you drove, people would make their way via horse and carriage to Wolfville, get on a boat, come across to Parrsboro, and then go on from Parrsboro. That's why Parrsboro

exists in the place it exists. So, in fact, for a lot of its lifetime, this part of Parrsboro was not part of the Cumberland County, which is the County we're in on this side, but part of King's County, which is the County on the other side around Wolfville. Parsborro has always - it was quite a wealth town one time, there was a lot of good wood for making ships.

And back in the 19th century when Nova Scotia had the world's 4th largest merchant marine it was built with wood from along the Parsborro shore. And if you were in Parsborro you'd have seen a lot of lovely old houses that date from that time from really quite wealthy people - Parsborro had a opera house, a hotel, shows came here before, you know, on their way to New York. But things have been downhill since the demise of wooden chips.

So, there was agricultural land to feed Parsborro, growing probably oats and I believe buckwheat, possibly some wheat, and, of course, hay and dairy cattle, butter, and probably self sufficient, would have been a lot more land cleared then than now. And all this land, it's not good land around here. It's mostly class 4 land - barely useable for grain - grain growing. But it turned out to be really good for berries.

So, an awful lot of this old, cleared farm land that would otherwise have gone back into scrub has gone into blueberry land - low bush blueberries, wild - so-called wild blueberries, which - they created a problem for me, farming organically because I have to maintain these huge buffer zones between my land and the - how much spray that is put on these blueberries. But they have been extremely - up until this year - the market seems to have fallen drastically - but they have been very, very profitable for people who own blueberry land. All this old scrub land that they inherited from people who had left the land in the 50's and has been turned into land worth - it's as valuable agricultural land as there is anywhere in Canada, I would think, sells between 3, 5 thousand dollars an acre this land, like, sort of, prime Ontario corn land - that's worked fairly well.

There's a couple people like myself who've been keeping cattle and still do and growing a bit of grain. But that's dying out - there's less and less of that. Some of the older folks are retiring and I don't think there's going to be any farming done there.

Jon Steinman: While the Parrsboro area is not ideal for farming, Andrew Kernohan's father was nevertheless one of many small-scale farmers in the area. Andrew shared the history of the farm from the days when small-scale farming was a viable business up until today, where Andrew has now become a supplier to the Speerville Flour Mill.

Andrew Kernohan: We're on a back road, I guess, behind Parrsboro, I sometimes call it the Parrsboro bypass because it goes between the Truro Road and the Amherst Road, up the old Route 2, which used to be the Trans Canada

once upon a time. At that time, of course, Parrsboro was right on the route of everybody going across the country but no longer. They built a big highway through the mountains behind us here.

My father came here from Ireland in the early '50s just before I was born, and he is actually a doctor, and that was how he really made a living, but he grew up on a farm and wanted to farm again. His father was a farmer, there was a time when farmers sent their sons off to be doctors, if there wasn't enough land to divide it between the sons, then some of them were sent off to college, and the lucky or unlucky ones got to stay behind. And so my father bought a farm and then he decided he'd get into it in a bigger way and he had an opportunity to buy some farms in the early '50s. And this area was filled with small dairy farms. They were people who would have about six or eight cows and they would put the cream out by the road for the dairy truck to pick up, which was taken somewhere and turned into butter. I think they mostly kept the skimmed milk and raised pigs on it or raised calves on it or something. So, a person could make a living at the time with half a dozen dairy cows and maybe twenty or thirty acres of land.

And this piece that you're sitting in which goes for about 2 miles on this road, it was four different farms once upon a time, and each of them probably smaller than what's here now because my father bought these farms as people - people were leaving the land in the early '50s, because six dairy cows was no longer a viable existence and I think people wanted to go to the city and buy a pickup truck or something, and so they were leaving the land.

It was also at the time when, I suppose, when horses were being replaced by tractors and farmers could do more. So it was no longer necessary to, you know, have one guy with a sizer and a horse. So dad bought these farms some time in the '50s and cleared quite a bit more of the land, mostly, he thought mostly of cattle, so this is all pasture land here except grain land up there on the flat and then there's more grain land down there. That is oats and that's oats for the Speerville hullless oats for their porridge.

Jon Steinman: Farmer Andrew Kernohan was like many farmers the child of a farming family who chose to seek a career off the farm – which in Andrew's case, was in the field of philosophy. When that path didn't work out entirely as planned, Andrew returned to the farm and he later chose a path of organic production as his focus.

Andrew Kernohan: I came back to the farm in the '80s, 1983 I moved back. I hadn't previously done - I'd worked on the farm as a kid, in the summer, you know, lifting bails of hay and stuff and that, but I didn't usually want to be a farmer back then, I wanted to be a scientist. And I went away to college and did various things, got a PhD in Philosophy, and then decided I didn't really want to do what was necessary to be a philosophy professor. I was partly influenced by the back to the land movement because a lot of people did - where interested in going -

and I also - I didn't like the price you had to pay to be a philosophy professor at the time, which was going, working probably in the States, because there weren't a lot of jobs for the profession I'd chosen.

So, I thought this would be more interesting, which it has been really, except, not as lucrative as I would like, but it's certainly been more interesting. I still do philosophy in the winters, like I teach at the agriculture college, I write stuff, you know, I've written scholarly articles and a scholarly book, and that sort of stuff, but this has been the source of my meager living.

How I got into the organics was back in the '90s, I was asked to teach this course on environmental ethics at the agriculture college. And I taught it, to some extent, as, you know, as the ethical considerations between conventional and organic agriculture. And after I'd done it for a couple of years, I sort of convinced myself that perhaps I should take our farm in the organic direction. But it couldn't be done immediately because it was a beef farm and we had housing for beef cattle that wouldn't really work out with an organic situation, though. We were doing a lot of things, like we weren't using sprays, and we were doing a lot of things semi-organically. So in order to make it organic, I had to take the farm eventually out of beef cattle.

Jon Steinman: This is Deconstructing Dinner – a syndicate weekly radio show produced in Nelson, British Columbia at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY. I'm Jon Steinman. If you enjoy this show, our weekly content and the wealth of additional resources that we post to our website each week, we encourage you to help support this show by donating through our website at deconstructingdinner.ca

On today's episode we are learning of the regional organic grain movement that surprisingly is alive and well throughout the Maritime Provinces of Canada. As an important backbone to the movement, we have already now visited with the Speerville Flour Mill which since 1982 has and continues to be an important piece of the local food system. We've since travelled to Parrsboro, Nova Scotia where we're now hearing from farmer Andrew Kernohan – one of the dozens of farmers supplying Speerville with organically grown grains. While growing grains in the climate of the region is not without its challenges Andrew has successfully harvested a number of crops from his land. In this next clip he uses the term "rotation" which refers to the annual cycle of crops planted on a specific piece of land. A good rotation is critical to ensure that a healthy balance of nutrients are extracted and returned from the soil each year.

Andrew Kernohan: I've tried a lot of things. I don't have either really good land or really good climate, we're just not warm enough in this part - we're on the north shore of the Minas Basin and we get the wind coming up the Bay of Fundy. The south side, which is the kind of Annapolis Valley, which is quite famous for apples and it's got a great little microclimate there that's probably - starts warm two weeks warmer than here. Its growing degree days are much higher and

probably a slightly better fall, just because they're sheltered between the north and south mountains, and the weather system of the Bay of Fundy can't get at them. Probably if I was designing a farm, I probably wouldn't pick to do it here, there's other places in Nova Scotia which would be a little better.

But, I'm farming with what I've got, trying to make it but I'm having trouble actually, with rotation design. I'm finding that I - for organic farming you have to have a pretty reasonable rotation, and I would like to have - I grow red clover as my legume to power the rotation. And I can grow grains, I can't grow winter cereals. I can grow winter rye, which is the heartiest of them, but winter wheat doesn't live here. I'm having trouble finding a fourth; you really don't want to grow grain more than maybe twice in a rotation, and I can certainly grow red clover, I keep trying all these things, fava beans, I've got a field of those that aren't doing that well, I think I may have to give up on that. And I probably will have to grow maybe two grains and red clover, it's a little bit tight, the rotation, but, if I grow, say, wheat and oats, and the red clover - trying to learn to grow the red clover for seed, since I don't have cattle, it's normally fed to cattle, made hay - you make hay for cattle. So, I'm trying to learn to thrash the red clover.

We have good crops of red clover, we have lots of red clover flowers, humboldts I think they're called, these round flowers and we have lots of bumblebees who pollinate them and there's lots of seed in the field, but I'm just having a little difficulty learning how to thrash the seed out of the red clover.

Jon Steinman: Andrew Kernohan sharing some of the challenges of farming that those of us in cities might never hear about. Of the wheats Andrew grows, are spelt and red fife among others. Red Fife is a heritage variety that has been featured here on the show before.

Andrew Kernohan: Yah, three years ago I grew a fair sized field for Speerville. Speerville's interested in promoting it because it gives them something that, you know, other mills don't have - Red Fife flour. And, so I grew 40 acres for them and it worked out alright. Then I grew 100 acres for them last year, and didn't do well, we had really bad fusarium - we had a really wet summer.

We've actually had grain grow and the climate's changed. I think it's an oscillation, not necessarily a climate change thing. But, we've had very, very wet summers for the last four years, before that we had quite dry summers. Grains, of course, grow better in dry summers then they do in wet ones and anyway, I had a bad attack of fusarium in the red fife last year. They were able to use some of it but this year I tried another 100 acres of the Red Fife. It grew a lot better, there was a lot less fusarium problems.

Jon Steinman: In closing out my conversation with farmer Andrew Kernohan, he did share the fears that he as a farmer has for the future viability of regional food systems, but as we'll hear in this last segment from my conversation with him, it's

a business like Speerville and the increasing interest among eaters to support local product that gives Andrew a glimmer of hope.

Andrew Kernohan: Speerville is extremely supportive of this idea, I mean they're not just, as far as I understand, a business. Hopefully, they're a business, too, and hopefully, they're doing well, but they're also committed to providing a way of getting grain grown in the Atlantic Provinces. That I know of, there are three grain mills that can produce wheat flour in the Atlantic Provinces. One's a huge Dover Mill factory in Halifax, which brings in bread wheat from Saskatchewan, turns them into flour and sends them around. There's that little grist mill, a little tiny one somewhere in the middle of Nova Scotia, Balmoral Mill, and there's Speerville, and Speerville is in New Brunswick, half way up New Brunswick and the interest in local food, is certainly making a difference for quite a few farmers and possibly indirectly for me, because shipping to Speerville and Speerville being as local as you can get in an, you know, an area like this, it's not within 100 miles, but it's also not from Saskatchewan, either, the products that they sell. And they are expanding. So, in that sense, for organic grain there is room for expansion but it depends on Speerville's ability to find markets for their grain.

Jon Steinman: That was Andrew Kernohan – an organic farmer in Parrsboro, Nova Scotia. Andrew is also the Board President of ACORN – the Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network.

soundbite

From Parrsboro Deconstructing Dinner made its way to Speerville New Brunswick where we were visiting just earlier on today's broadcast. In coming back to the Speerville Flour Mill where farmers like Andrew Kernohan sells to, we hear the thoughts from Speerville's Todd and Tony Grant. It was during our conversation that I asked the Grants their perspectives on what size farm is ideal for an organic grain farmer in the Maritime Provinces to make an adequate living growing grain. While the Speerville Flour Mill has proven to be a key piece to the answer, there are many more pieces involved.

Todd Grant: I don't know much about farming, I'm a miller not a farmer. I would probably believe that there is no size a farm that is viable. Our farming community is in desperate, desperate shape. I don't know that I'm the complete answer for a viable farm. I'm not sure that the market is ready for that yet. We're being subsidized with cheap, cheap food. For a long time, we've been taught that cheap food is what we want to eat for some reason I guess. In Atlantic Canada we've never had any huge amount of money here, so everybody's always trying to watch their dollars and pennies and cheap food is one of those areas that they can save a few cents. We're in desperate shape and I don't know what it's going to take to have a viable farm.

Tony Grant: If I could jump in there on that one. One of the reasons that they aren't concerned or appreciate the idea of cheap food is because they don't understand the true cost of that cheap food. They don't understand that we're building super highways to have a third of the trucks on the road carrying their food back and forth. They don't understand that we're subsidizing the businesses they're building the trucks and building the brake pads and building the tires and building the super highways and plowing the super highways and maintaining them. The whole food delivery system that we have right now is so subsidized, well, we can buy California carrots for \$1.99 and it's \$3 to buy the Atlantic Canadian grown and the farmer really can't survive selling them at that price because it is so subsidized. And people just don't realize the true cost when you send those dollars away from your community, your neighbours don't have the money to be able to afford to buy other things as well. So our biggest challenge is to educate the public and try to drive the public will to want to support a community and want to create, want to understand that they are supporting their neighbours and their community, and want to eat good food.

Jon Steinman: This is Deconstructing Dinner. Despite the somewhat grim outlook on the future viability of farmers in the Maritime Provinces, Todd and Tony Grant of Speerville Flour Mill remain optimistic and as we stood beside their portable wood-fired oven, it was clear that the Grants are still happy to celebrate food and the unique flavour of their products. As mentioned at the top of the hour, much of our conversation took place beside an oven which rested atop a flatbed trailer. The oven was being heated up just moments before Todd was to then travel to Prince Edward Island to participate in an organic food festival taking place there. The oven was a great reminder of what all the challenges and opportunities discussed on today's broadcast are really all about; enjoying fresh, healthy and tasty food grown close to home.

Tony Grant: This is a masonry - wood fired, masonry oven. It's a Le Panyol kit from France. The metal work, the copper dome, and the steel tray and the trailer were all built in Skowhegan, Maine, by Maine Wood Heat Company. We were intrigued by the oven as a promotional tool for us. When Maine Wood Heat brought their oven up to cook some pizzas with our flour, some local cheeses from the Annapolis Valley and vegetables from the Annapolis Valley as well, organically grown, a group there that was called - a cooperative that was trying to operate in the Annapolis Valley - they supplied the vegetables and the cheese, we brought the dough and the oven, and cooked pizza at Agrifest in Canning, Nova Scotia in 2005 I think it was.

So we were intrigued by the oven and its - the possibilities that it would bring with it to be able to market products like we are selling, so we've purchased one of our own and, as well, I guess, in that endeavor, in purchasing one, and understanding what they are and where they're from, how perfect a baking device they are, we also decided it would be great if we could sell the kits to some folks here in Atlantic Canada and have them, as well, showcase our

products by baking in the best possible baking device that they could get. They definitely are a mark above anything else that I've worked with as far as baking goes, the flavour of anything we've baked in there is unbelievable, from breads and baguettes, and cakes and pies and even just flat breads and potato wedges, chicken, smoked ham, just anything that you would bake in an oven comes out of this oven tasting beautiful.

Jon Steinman: So this is going to be on the highway for quite a ways. Is the idea right now to get it hot before you arrive?

Tony Grant: Yup. To have the heat driven clear through the stones will make it much easier to fire tomorrow morning. They're baking in this on PEI tomorrow morning. Todd will probably fire it once he gets to PEI tonight again, just to have it good and warm overnight. And then when he starts his fire tomorrow, it'll just be a half hour fire and it'll be right up to baking temperature.

Jon Steinman: Tony Grant of New Brunswick's Speerville Flour Mill. A reminder that today's episode is archived on-line at deconstructingdinner.ca and posted under the January 21st 2010 broadcast. On the page you'll find more resources about today's topic including photos and unheard audio from our Speerville Flour Mill visit and of Andrew Kernohan. And another quick reminder to mark your calendars for the upcoming National Democratic Dialogue on the Future of Canada's Prison Farms. The live webcast from Steinbach Manitoba will be on February 1st at 1:30pm CST. Tune in to hear Members of Parliament discuss the controversial closures of the Prison Farm program that we first featured on the show back in July 2009. Deconstructing Dinner is a media partner in the upcoming February 1st event, and you can stay posted to our website and Facebook page for more information and updates.

In closing out today's show, here once again are Todd and Tony Grant speaking of the future of Speerville and the future of small-scale milling in Canada.

Tony Grant: I think that's another thing that people don't understand and that's one of the reasons why we still keep sowed bag - our closure on the bag is a stitch. I think it gives the consumer confidence that this product was looked over by a human being. This wasn't a machine, form fill sealed at chicka-bonk, chicka-bonk, chicka-bonk, chicka-, you know, a thousand bags an hour, that it's, you know, they dump product in from a bulk truck in the front end of it, and out the other end it's - it comes cased and palletized. When they see our produces, sewed with a stitcher, they know that there was a human that traced this number checked out this company to make sure that it was certified organic, followed the process through. When they were bagging my product they were inspecting it and looking it over, and then it was sewed by hand and put in this case, and, as well not only should that give you some food security, that it was looked over by a human being, but as well, it was a human being who now has money to be able to send their kid to college and to be able to buy food and to contribute in their

community. So it was a job, not a machine, it was a job that sewed that bag for you, a person in your community. So that's something that we really like about the way - the scale that we're on right now, so that we can control it that way.

Todd Grant: I see us growing somewhat, but I don't ever desire to have 30 or 50 employees. I believe there's room for many smaller mills like me out and around there, but we've lost all of the knowledge base, and farmer base, so it's going to be a long road to get something like Speerville, we've been in the business for 26 years, and they haven't been easy years. The food production system is the next best thing to farming.

Tony Grant: I guess as far as where Speerville is going, we have a number of times just to be prudent, and on behalf of our farmer base here as we've seen it grow, have been concerned they may outgrow our production needs. We have looked at other markets, like the New England market, we'll throw that one out there. We don't feel that it is really our place to be in the New England market, even though Atlantica, via region in Eastern Canada, would include New England, if we didn't have the border in between us. We should be able to supply food for New England, however with the FDA and customs border services, US Customs Border Services and all the things that they can - all the wrenches they can throw into the gears - we've decided that we probably should stay out of that market and try to grow our business here in Atlantic Canada by trying to find local support by taking an oven like this out on the road and trying to show people that yes, you can bake with whole grains and yes, it does taste better especially when it's fresh and local and there is going to be an economic benefit in your community because you are making these choices. So, we have decided to invest here in Atlantic Canada and to try to make our efforts of growth here in Atlantic Canada.

We're still less than one percent of the cereal grain products that are consumed in Atlantic Canada, we're still less than one percent of the market. We do have a nice, steady growth rate, and that's the way we like to keep it slow and controlled. We have been approached a number of times by a number of different groups about taking our model somewhere else, say to New England or in Ontario or other areas. However in the past, I guess we have felt that we should leave them to develop on their own, in their own way, and we've provided a little bit of advice to them but keep it at more than arm's length. There have been a number of them who have wanted us to franchise or satellite an operation in another area and we've decided that we want to keep our roots right here in Atlantic Canada at this point.

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.

This radio program 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 or by dialing 250-352-9600.