

**Show Transcript  
Deconstructing Dinner  
Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY  
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**Title: "Eggs"**

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Transcript – Asae Dean**

*Jon Steinman:* And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner produced in the studios of Kootenay Co-op Radio (CJLY) in Nelson, British Columbia, I'm your host Jon Steinman.

Here on Deconstructing Dinner, we dissect our daily food choices and discuss the impacts that these choices have on ourselves, communities, and the planet. With such a significant level of disconnect that exists between the consumer and farmer/producer that we as North Americans are increasingly experiencing... it is, of the utmost importance, that we make attempts to understand the complicated nature of our food options, and realize that given the importance of food, our food options should be as transparent and as simple as anything.

This transparency that can allow us as British Columbians to understand our food choices does not exist in far too many respects. To illustrate this curtain that has been placed in front of our eyes, we will discuss the topic of EGGS on tonight's program. The egg industry in this province is a perfect illustration of the ways in which a food that has been a staple of the human diet for thousands of years, has been turned into such a commodity where many of us here in this province have now become unaware of what has happened to the innocent looking egg.

**Increase Music and Fade Out**

*Jon Steinman:* Before we get rolling here I want to remind you that if there is anything mentioned on the show this evening of which you would like to find out more information, you can visit the show's web site at [www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner) where all necessary information will be uploaded shortly after the broadcast.

It is important to note the complicated topic of eggs here in British Columbia, we could easily spend an hour discussing the politics alone of this industry, but instead the goal behind tonight's show is to discuss the various methods in which eggs are produced in this province, and to lend their voice to the show tonight, we will have Bruce Passmore of the Vancouver Humane Society who will expose the practices that govern the production of 98% of our eggs here in this province and in the country. Also joining us will be Fred Reid of Olera Farm in Abbotsford, Karl Hann of Biota Farm in Abbotsford, Maria Castro of Quennell Lake Poultry in Cedar on Vancouver Island, and Peter Whitlock of the BC Egg Producers which is also known as The BC Egg Marketing Board also located in Abbotsford.

But before we get to my guests this evening, I've compiled a list of quick egg facts and statistics that will get your minds into an egg state of mind.

There are 131 Registered producers in BC raising 2.3 million layers (as these hens are referred to), which in turn produce 54 million dozen eggs.

The Egg industry adds \$75 million to the provincial economy.

If there was an egg producer here in Nelson, they would have to send their eggs first to Vernon which is over 5 hours away which is where the closest provincial egg grading station is located. This would have to be done in order for that farmer to *commercially* sell their eggs legally in a grocery store or restaurant here in town.

By law, producers must place a symbol located on an egg carton that indicates the Grade that the eggs have been granted. Grade A is the only one you'll find in a grocery store. Whereas both grade b and c eggs make their way into commercial baking operations and breaking plants. Breaking plants are facilities where eggs are broken using machinery and equipment that use tremendous amounts of energy. The yolks and whites are then processed into egg products and make their way into a countless number of items we can find on our grocery store shelves or even drug store shelves.

As the hen ages, the size of her eggs increases in size. In 1945, the average hen laid 151 eggs per year. Today the average hen lays approximately 300 eggs per year-that's one egg every 1½ days. And the last statistic I have here is: the average leghorn chicken has a wingspan of 26 inches and on average is only provided with 6 inches of space in egg factories

As this last statistic sparks interest, I caught up with Bruce Passmore to further explain the conditions in which 98% of the eggs available to British Columbians are produced. Bruce is the Farm Animal Welfare Coordinator for the Vancouver Humane Society; Bruce is also the coordinator of the Chicken Out Campaign, a joint effort between the Humane Society and the Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals. Here's Bruce Passmore explaining the conditions in which 98% of our eggs are produced.

*Bruce Passmore:* 98% of Canada's 26 million egg laying hens are kept in what is called battery cages. Now these are small metal wire cages with sloping floors. And each cage has approximately five to seven hens in it. Now the amount of space per hen is around four hundred centimeters squared. Which for most of us that is hard to visualize. But it is about the size of a sheet of paper. So if you can think about it each hen has the size of a sheet of paper. And in that space they are crammed in there so tightly that they can barely move let alone perform any other natural functions such as flapping their wings, dust-bathing, scratching at the earth, or any of those types of things that are natural behaviors for hens. Hens in battery cages are extremely frustrated. Some of the ways they exhibit that frustration is through what is called feather-pecking and because of that they are actually what is called debeaked or some might call it beak-trimming. That gives the impression that the beak is like a toe-nail but actually beak is full of nerve endings. It is probably actually closer to our nose in the sense of how many nerve endings and how much you can feel through it so it is an extremely painful procedure. And what it does

is it supposedly stops the birds from wanting to peck at other birds because it causes them pain. The feed is completely automatic. The feeding systems are completely automatic, it is all machine done, there is not for the most part humans involved, apart from loading the machines. The feed itself can vary in quality and vary in what is actually contained in the feed. There are often grains, often minerals, and proteins, and all sort of things but within that there are often byproducts from other industries. And these byproducts can be anything between blood from other bits of animals to even as far as a feces believe it or not.

*Jon Steinman:* In such conditions, where the hens' bodies become as depleted and injured as Bruce indicates, he explains to us where the hens go when they can't lay eggs anymore.

*Bruce Passmore:* After approximately two years and it could be anywhere from between one to two years depending on the hens and the farm particularly. These hens after so many years of so much time, producing just so many eggs, barely moving, their bodies are so depleted of energy, so depleted of calcium, that they are considered economically worthless. And basically they either end up as compost because it costs too much to transport them anywhere or they will be used for what is called secondary chicken products in products that you cannot see their bodies: that would be something like a soup product or flavoring. Because their bodies are so depleted and bruised and battered that they cannot be used in something where you would actually physically see the bird.

*Jon Steinman:* As hens leave the production facilities, fresh and young hens are of course brought in to take their place. As is common knowledge though, I would hope eggs are only laid by female hens. When an egg-laying hen is being bred for the specific use of laying eggs, I inquired into where the male hens fit in to this factory-style system. Bruce explains.

*Bruce Passmore:* Within the egg production system the only economically useful animal are the female birds. The males are basically what is called macerated which is basically a grinding machine. As soon as they are born and able to be sexed the males are dropped into a macerator and the females are then passed on to be raised as egg-laying hens.

*Jon Steinman:* As Bruce continued to explain this process of maceration, of throwing baby chicks into a grinding machine, is standard in the industry. There is nothing being hidden, so much so that the following is directly extracted from Agriculture Canada's Recommended Code of Practice for the handling of poultry from hatchery to processing plant. Section 1.5.3 of the Code of Practice reads:

"High-speed maceration of chicks is a practical and humane method of euthanasia. When properly designed macerators are used, death occurs almost instantaneously. In addition the method is safe for workers." It continues "Chicks must be delivered to the macerator in a way that prevents a backlog of chicks at the point of entry into the macerator and without causing injury or avoidable distress to the chicks before maceration. All macerators must be designed and operated to ensure immediate and complete destruction of every chick."

And if you are asking yourself the same question that I first asked myself after reading this, to give you an answer, yes, this *is*, happening on the same planet that you live on!

You can find this information at Agriculture Canada and Agri-Food Canada's web site – [www.agr.gc.ca](http://www.agr.gc.ca), and type into the search field "CHICK DESTRUCTION" to find the document. There will also be a link to this document from the show's web site.

## Music

*Jon Steinman:* For those of you just tuning in, this is Deconstructing Dinner, where on tonight's show we are discussing the egg industry here in the province of British Columbia. We're presently listening to Bruce Passmore of the Vancouver Humane Society and discovering the state of affairs in which 98% of the province's eggs are produced.

With such mind-blowing practices that are taking place right underneath our nose such as those just touched on, and with these practices being supported by the vast majority of retailers in this province, I asked Bruce how these regulations were in fact formed. He *informed* me, that most of what controls the industry are *recommendations*! The BC Egg Marketing Board indicates that Humane Societies were involved in compiling the Code of Practice that lists these recommendations. As I recently read, we know what is within this code. But with Humane Societies being involved in the process of creating this code, it raises the question, how could the conditions be as appalling as they are? Bruce Passmore explains.

*Bruce Passmore:* So the care of birds and the standards that are used are what is called the Recommend Codes of Practice for The Care and Handling of Pullets, Layers, and Spent Fowl. These codes are absolutely basic minimal standards and they're voluntary. There are no legal ramifications in the majority of provinces in Canada for not following these codes. These codes, again, are basic. For example the space allocation is 450 centimeters squared per bird which is an extremely small amount of space and again they are voluntary. Now they are put together by a variety of groups, most of which are industry. Out of approximately ten groups two supposedly represent the humane community: one of which is the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association and the other is the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies. Now with, animal veterinarians, you must remember, it is in their best interest to work with farmers and to work with the industry because for lack of a better term that is whose buttering their bread. As far as the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies is concerned it is primarily a cat and dog group and when you look at basically one voice out of ten is standing up for animals then that is a pretty one sided debate and argument that you are going to have in that room.

*Jon Steinman:* While Canada is typically known as a leader in environmental awareness and social issues, it's hard to imagine that with conditions like this, what could possibly be happening in *other* countries and *their* egg industries. Bruce explains that the state of egg production in this country is more unique than we think.

*Bruce Passmore:* While there has been quite a bit of movement internationally to ban the use of battery cages, the entire European Union will have a ban on battery cages by 2012, as well as a number of other countries have also created these bans to come into place even sooner, also some stores in North America, typically what are considered health food stores or alternative food stores have made commitments to not purchase eggs from caged hens. The two major ones

that actually have stores in Canada are Whole Foods and Capers Community Market. Capers is owned by what's called Wild Oats Company. They are both American Companies. What is really encouraging too is we are starting to see not only whole stores going cage free but we are also starting to see more and more cage free options appearing in just everyday stores like Safeway or Save-On Foods or any of the LobLaw Corporation Companies across the country. So we are starting to see more and more appear and even within university campuses around the United States, we are starting to see whole campuses go cage free. So it is a really encouraging time that more and more places, stores and such, are starting to see that battery cages are inhumane. And it's been scientifically proven that battery cages are inhumane and it's generally accepted within the scientific community that battery cages are not the most humane option we have. The summer of 2005 The Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals and The Chicken Out Project were given absolutely shocking footage of the inside of a Canadian battery barn. Now the conditions, the hens had extreme feather loss, they were covered in feces, there were escaped birds that were languishing on manure piles that were over two feet deep, it was an absolutely horrendous sight. And our first thought was, oh this, must be, this couldn't be standard, this is worse than our own nightmares, but then we found out that the farm was actually owned by a veterinarian, who was actually on an animal welfare committee at the University of Guelph. So then we had to ask the question, well are there any laws being broken? And in the media the veterinarian specifically said no laws are being broken, I'm following the standards, there's nothing wrong here. So that left us with the understanding that this is standard industry practice so what we decided was we wanted to make sure that consumers understood where the eggs that they were purchasing were coming from. If this farm was standard practice and LobLaw is Canada's largest grocery retailer, we went to LobLaw and asked them to use clear in store labeling to label their eggs so that consumers know what they're purchasing, so that consumers do not have to purchase battery cage eggs. There are a few different methods we're using. We've used letter writing projects directed at the LobLaw Company president and vice president. And we just have a brand new project underway which is a postcard project that will have basically consumers just put their name and address, sign it, stick a stamp on it, and mail it to the president. The Vice President in a interview stated that he would be interested in using in-store labeling if there was enough consumer interest. We want to show him that there is enough consumer interest, we have heard there is enough consumer interest, we want to demonstrate to him that there is also enough interest.

*Jon Steinman:* And that was Bruce Passmore of the Vancouver Humane Society, and coordinator of their Chicken-Out campaign. You can find more info about the campaign at [www.chickenout.ca](http://www.chickenout.ca) or [www.humanefood.ca](http://www.humanefood.ca)

## **Music**

*Jon Steinman:* As factory farming and production methods dominate 98% of egg production in this province, the question becomes, what are the alternatives to these methods? To share this information, I spoke with Fred Reid of Olera Farm in Abbotsford. Fred is a member of the Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia, and you probably recognize the name as a key opponent in the heated debates that took place in this province only a few years ago between organic egg producers and the BC Egg Marketing Board. Fred explains some of the key

differences between organic egg production and non-organic egg production. This is Deconstructing Dinner.

*Fred Reid:* The main differences, the big four that you have between a strictly conventional farm and a fully certified organic farm are the fact that the birds get outside on an organic farm and they don't on a conventional farm. And if you go to eggs, they are enclosed in cages, which is an even bigger difference if you're talking eggs than if you're talking meat birds. The difference is the birds get outside is number one. Number two is that they are fed totally organic grains and this is where your biggest cost difference comes in is on the organic grains because they are double the cost of conventional grains and so you are feeding your birds grains that have not had pesticides sprayed on them, haven't had commercial fertilizers used to grow the grain and things like that. Then there is no GMO in the food because the GM crops that are most manipulated by genetic engineering are corn, soy, and canola. Those are highly used crops in producing poultry feeds. And like I think since the mid-nineties us producers of organic feeds have not used canola at all because it was the first one to be manipulated by Monsanto for genetic engineering. So we avoid canola all together. When we source out soy meal and we have to go all the way to china for this now, it is all pretested to make sure it's not a genetically manipulated variety of soy. And corn we avoid as well. And if we were to use corn we would have to use it genetically or DNA tested before we could use it. And then no animal byproduct in the feed and this is more critical with the meat bird than it is with the layer bird now and this is where your cost really starts to go up with the meat bird. The fact that you cannot feed animal byproducts like ground up guts and dead birds and beef type product from the slaughter of other animals, that protein if it's fed to chickens converts more quickly to a chicken protein, so their feed conversion is a lot more efficient, so the fact that we don't use animal byproducts really increases our costs. You just have to feed them a lot more vegetable protein to get the same amount of protein for birds. And I guess it's the big five because the last one of those things is no small antibiotics and that also increases your cost, especially with the growth hormone thing. The growth hormone used in meat birds, which is not allowed in Canada by the way, but is allowed in third world countries really improves your efficiency of feeding the birds.

*Jon Steinman:* Making their way onto grocery store shelves, there is an increasing number of eggs indicating such terms as free range and free run. Fred Reid sheds some light on these alternatives to battery cage production.

*Fred Reid:* Free range birds are supposed to be allowed outside so they have access to outside. But there is no specific standard to how much specific space they can have outside and whether they have to have green pasture or its just a run. And because there is no standard for that if you buy a free run, a free range egg even, you have no assurance that it is allowed outside in a meaningful way where it can scratch and dust-bath and have access to greens. But technically it's supposed to be allowed outside. Free run means and this is a real misnomer, well free run is important when it comes to egg production, because now you're moving from being totally enclosed in a cage where a bird has less than a square foot to operate in, like they can hardly move in those cages, to be at least allowed to move freely within a barn, so with a table egg if it's free run that is far better than if it's cage-layer egg. But if they say free run in terms of a meat bird, well meat birds are raised free run in a barn anyway and without a designation of how much

space the bird can have in a free run barn, you may be getting no better than a conventional bird anyway.

*Jon Steinman:* If you're just tuning in, we're hearing from Fred Reid of Olera Farm, as we discuss egg production here in this province. It's no question that one of the key deterrents to purchasing *any* organic product let alone organic eggs, is the increased cost of these purchases. Fred compares the cost of Organic eggs to Conventionally produced ones.

*Fred Reid:* The bottom line with a organic farmer has been way less than with conventionally factory farmers, there system is so efficient they could charge half the price they charge for their eggs and still make more money than we do. But they have the quota systems that protects their price so they're allowed to be able to charge an inflated price for their egg. So if there is any egg that has an inflated price it's the conventional egg.

*Jon Steinman:* With all the ethical and environmental concerns that surround the various methods to egg production, it's of course important to understand why 98% of our eggs are produced from caged birds.

*Fred Reid:* Caged systems are very efficient they get 95% production for months on end because the bird is so confined they can't move around. All their energy that they have goes into producing the egg. So because they can't do anything else. You know what I mean? The other thing is with the construction of the cages, they can't move, the chickens can't play in essence, they're not going to be throwing feed out of the feed line, scratching dirt into the feed line and things like that. No it is very efficient. The bird is there and all it can do is expend it's energy on eating feed, drinking water, and laying eggs. Because like you watch the birds outside if you're an organic producer and you have a bird that's making great sounds and you see them scratch and play and do all that but while they're doing that they're laying less eggs and that's another thing that comes back to the cost side. If you let the birds outside in a consistent fashion you can expect at least a 15% drop in production.

*Jon Steinman:* As is the vision of this program, Deconstructing Dinner, educating the public is the key tool in ensuring our food choices are fully transparent for all to see. Fred Reid explains who he thinks is responsible for providing this information.

*Fred Reid:* I feel the onus has to be on the retailer to really assist and help the farmers who are doing something different so supporting them rigorously and this is what they do in Europe. It can be done. They do do it. They even have in Europe now a numbering system for organic because it has been so blurred and you get a higher rating if you're truly local, so how many miles you are from the store, the degree of the standard and in Europe they actually have a standard that measures square footage for free range and for free run. Then they rate all these different systems and give them a rating and have in the store literature that explains all these differences. There the retailer does a huge job in actually educating the consumer in an unbiased way. They just put the list up there, the consumer can come in and look at the product and make an assessment how much they want to pay to be how environmentally sound. And they sell a lot more organic, like organic in Europe is in some countries 20% of the food purchases is organic countrywide, where we don't come close to 5%.

*Jon Steinman:* As Fred indicates that the retailer holds a responsibility to educate the consumer, he also explains the efforts the BC Egg Producers which is also known as the BC Egg Marketing Board have made to educate the public about the methods by which eggs are produced.

*Fred Reid:* The egg marketing board and the egg producers association there thing is this organic is b.s. You don't need organic, what the consumer wants is a brown-shelled egg with an orange yolk. That was their perception of it. So their education, their answer to free range was to have caged layers in the same density rates, the same way as any other caged layer but a breed that lays a brown egg because a brown egg isn't because it's outside, the brown shell is because of the type of breed it is. You get a breed that lays a brown egg and you feed it artificial beta-carotene so the yolks go orange and you produce it the very same way, and you sell it to consumers and you charge them more for it. You know they go to the point they say a caged layer hen is happier than a hen who gets to scratch around outside because it lays more eggs. You know really the reality is it lays more eggs not because it's happy but because that's the only thing it can do that's natural in that environment, that's the only natural thing that bird can do is lay an egg. So of course it lays more eggs.

*Jon Steinman:* Just a reminder that you're listening to Deconstructing Dinner, where on tonight's show we are discussing the egg industry here in the province of British Columbia. Also want to remind you about the show's website at [www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner). On the site you can learn more about the topics discussed on the show and discover further sources to assist in becoming more aware of our food choices.

## **Music**

*Jon Steinman:* We just heard from Fred Reid of Olera Farm in Abbotsford, as he compared Organic egg production to conventional production methods. As organic food production is increasingly being accused of adopting similar methods to conventional production, there is yet another form of agriculture and production that lends itself to those principles of organics, and that is the method and philosophy known as BIODYNAMICS. Two of the key principles behind biodynamics, is that the farm is in itself a sustainable unit, an ecosystem so to speak, where all activities are connected to each other, and with the other principle being the facilitation of activities that enhance the compost that can then be applied to the farm.

I spoke with Karl Hann of Biota Farm in Abbotsford, who is a biodynamic farmer and egg producer. Karl was recently the federal Green Party candidate in the Abbotsford riding during the 2004 election. Karl was born and raised in Romania and has been living and farming in Canada for 20 years. Here's Karl explaining how biodynamics present an alternative to conventional egg production.

*Karl Hann:* Biodynamics started in the 1930s and that was about 6 years after Rudolf Steiner gave a lecture to some farmers in Northern Germany that wanted to find out why agriculture was facing so many problems. And I'm not going into any details now he was trying to show that people have strayed from the natural way of doing things and it is a little bit different from organic crop production. The main difference is that it tries to look at the farm as a unit,

encourages diverse production so it wants to see if possible livestock integrated with the vegetable or food production so again you are not a specialist, and you try to be sustainable in the true sense, within your possibilities, using the manure from your animals to fertilize your fields, using your fields to feed your animals, as much as possible, so it should be a holistic unit. I integrated first chickens on a larger scale into my farm on 1998 and I bumped from 200 chickens that I had before up to 1300 and this gave me then the possibility to have a considerable amount of on-farm produced compost and this compost I used then in my greenhouse production and in the fields. And also the outside runs were actually planted into raspberries and chickens had access to the raspberry field outside of the picking season and basically were actually doing weeding and fertilizing at the same time for me without any interference with the crop. Only later on when the crop got mature the chickens were pulled out for two or three months to let the plants rejuvenate and get them away from the berries and after that the chickens are allowed back in the raspberry fields to continue the job of weeding and fertilizing. So that is how it comes in and of course having vegetable production there is a lot of waste at times and this gets dumped into the chickens run and the chickens eat it up and recycle it in a very natural way. I sell my eggs to the Kootenay Co-Op, to Small Potatoes Urban Delivery, and to several restaurants. It is an economically viable business, anytime you reach a certain scale it is economically viable, now of course if you go beyond that scale again within biodynamics you have limits as to how many chickens you can have per acre and it is a 500 chickens per acre in biodynamic and it is a 1000 chickens per acre in certified organic production because you're land is supposed to bear only a certain manure load and considering the amount of chickens you basically exhaust your land because you are not supposed to apply more manure to it. Biodynamic production is different from other production because you have limitations to a certain size.

*Jon Steinman:* And that was Karl Hann of Biota Farm in Abbotsford.

## **Music**

*Jon Steinman:* As we continue tonight's show on the topic of eggs, we've now discussed some of the various methods by which eggs are produced. To provide further critique on egg production here in BC, I briefly spoke with Maria Castro. Maria operates Quennell Lake Poultry, a small family farm in the community of Cedar on Vancouver Island. The farm is dedicated to the conservation and promotion of traditional breeds of livestock and poultry. Maria is also on the Steering Committee of the Beyond Factory Farming Coalition. She is director of Rare Breeds Canada, and sits on the Steering Committee of the Agriculture Caucus of the Canadian Environmental Network. If that's not enough, Maria is also very involved with Food Link Nanaimo, a food security organization. Maria explains what additional factors we need to consider when walking into a grocery store to buy eggs.

*Maria Castro:* You also need to take into consideration that not only is the welfare of the animal compromised, these large farms have a larger environmental impact than smaller ones, than smaller farms generally not just organic ones but generally than smaller farms. Because if you cram a lot of hens together into one barn with a lot of cages. A all of those structures obviously have to be built from something, there is a lot of resources go into that, and a lot of energy. They have to be artificially ventilated, they have to be artificially lit, and they lead to concentrations of very large numbers of animals all in one spot which means you also have manure disposal

problems and all sorts of other things. The Abbotsford-Sumas Aquifer has nitrate levels that are so high that they periodically have to give out warnings to pregnant women not to drink the water and this is probably mostly because of all the poultry in the Fraser Valley because they don't have enough manure disposal options and they bring it out on the land too much.

*Jon Steinman:* Maria has also been very involved with the recent debates over the supply management control of eggs here in the province, as I stated earlier, the politics of this industry deserve at least an entire show, but Maria sheds some light on this issue.

*Maria Castro:* The way things are functioning now is that we have a very small number, I think it is like a 130 or thereabouts, quota holding egg producers in the province, all of which are quite large, and then we have legally a bunch of backyard flocks, a large number, probably, that are allowed to keep up to 99 birds and then there is a huge gap in the middle where nobody can do anything. I mean if you have a mixed farm and you want to do eggs and you use the poultry for various things and this and that, 99 might not be enough, but you are not allowed to have more than 99 without quota. But you couldn't have 500 because you would never be able to buy 500 units quota either because these large holdings get turned over in units of 10 or 20 or 50 thousand at a time. So this is never available. There is just a range whereby the cost and the overhead of quota production and levies and all that simply don't make economic sense. And that is what a lot of producers particularly the organic producers have been arguing for years that there has to be something in the middle. And they are trying to move the farm industry review board toward having something called a permit that would allow small scale production of a few hundred or something like that. But we are not yet entirely clear where that is going to fall out. So far the egg marketing board has suggested to make that available only to certified organic producers that of course leaves a lot of other small scale egg producers out in the cold again. This is a war that has been going on for years and years and it's going to take some considerable time to disentangle again. But there seems to be some political will on part of the government to at least start moving in the right direction. So, you know, fingers crossed.

*Jon Steinman:* For argument's sake if any of these regulations, these supply management systems if they did not exist, do you still feel the local farmer down the street would have the opportunity to sell to the chain grocery store located in town?

*Maria Castro:* Depends much on the grocery store, if you're talking Safeway and Overwaitea not a chance. I mean the really big chains have absolutely no desire to deal with little farmers. I mean they want to be able to back their big trucks into one distribution system and take it all out. Some of the smaller ones would be amenable. I don't know what you've got up in your area but here on Vancouver Island some of the smaller local stores like Thriftys or the 49<sup>th</sup> Parallel, they do sometimes try to work with local producers. They can not at the moment do a huge deal with small scale producers. We do have some local commercial producers on the island and they do supply these stores. If you wanted sort of small scale free range and all that kind of production that would be very difficult because they are not allowed to sell ungraded eggs in stores recently. Which is another regulation that has nothing to do with supply management nor are we supportive of it. We can only sell on our own farms which is kind of a big hindrance.

*Jon Steinman:* And that was Maria Castro of Quennell Lake Poultry located in Cedar on Vancouver Island. You're listening to Deconstructing Dinner and tonight's topic of eggs.

If we can draw one distinct conclusion from the methods of egg production we have just discussed on the show, it's certainly safe to say that the ethics and morals that govern the various forms of agriculture and processing in the egg industry are in many ways opposed to each other. The exposure of these options, the pros and cons of choosing a factory produced egg versus a biodynamic egg should then be of the utmost importance, so that we as British Columbians can make the choice that's best for us, and in line with *our* values and *our* principles.

In addition, given what we've heard tonight about these methods, there's no arguing that Organic and Biodynamic methods of farming and production are much more along the lines of how farming has been for over 6,000 years since the advent of agriculture. Yet organic methods are always referred to as "alternatives", when ultimately in the grand scheme of things, it's the experiment of industrial production of food that is the alternative, and should it therefore not be industrial food production that is the most transparent to the consumer?

As stated on their web site, the BC EGG Producers – the provincial body of the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency, think and I quote "it is important to understand where our food comes from" Is it possible that this information is having trouble making it's way to the consumer, because I for one haven't seen it.

So I got in touch with Peter Whitlock, the Operations Manager of the BC Egg Producers. Peter shares some background information with us on the agency's role within the industry, and then I pose the question we're all wondering.

*Peter Whitlock:* Basically BC is part of a national supply management system. We have an allocation by the national government to produce eggs for BC and certainly our goal is to produce eggs for the Canadian requirements etc under a supply management system. We have about 125 producers that are allocated 2.4 million birds, our farm sizes run from about 500 birds to about 70,000, average about 20,000 birds, and of that production about 26% is not the conventional type of production are specialty production.

*Jon Steinman:* On the show tonight Peter we've discussed an incredible range of differences between the various methods by which eggs are produced. As has also been mentioned on the show and what is the impetus for this show is that there is significant disconnect between the farmer, the producer, and the consumer, and this is especially the case in urban centers. In taking a look into the different methods of egg production in terms of farming, in terms of processing, these differences represent options for two very opposed sets of morals that a consumer may hold and an example of these differences can be seen by the efforts in countries such as Switzerland and Austria that have banned the practices that are utilized to produce 98% of Canada's eggs. Another example is the European Union banning the utilization of battery cages after 2012. Retailers even such as Whole Foods, an American based chain, and Caper's Markets, another American based chain, with outlets located in Vancouver have also banned the use of battery cages in the eggs that they sell in their stores. Now the BC Egg Producers think it is important to understand where our food comes from as is stated on the website. What sort of

efforts have the BC Egg Producers taken to educate British Columbians on the history behind their options when it comes to eggs?

*Peter Whitlock:* Basically we use our website, we also use a lot of school education tools. Canada went for a science based concept of agricultural production. Eggs are produced based on a recommended code of practice that was developed by the Canadian Agri-Food Research Council including the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies. It was a group of scientists that got together and decided what kind of production methods were in the best interest of the birds themselves. Most Canadian eggs are produced in that method. BC has reacted to the different demands from the consumer of different production types etc. and we have a huge range. 18 or 19 different methods of production that are available in BC for the consumer and our goal has been to let people know that there is a choice. Depending on what your concerns are in the way that your food is produced the likelihood is that your going to be able to get the product in the way you would like to have it.

*Jon Steinman:* Peter I may be citing two examples I went to one of the local grocery stores here in Nelson. One is a carton from an organic producer located in Richmond, another is a standard store bought carton with twelve eggs here. Now if we look at the labels on the front here, the organic eggs here indicate that there is all vegetarian organic feed, these eggs come from cage free chickens on certified organic land, there is SPCA certification with these, this is all indicated on the cover. Opening up, on the inside, there is actually a whole wealth of information, answers to questions. Are the hens fed vegetarian feed? Are eggs an economical food? What are certified organic eggs? There's nutrition facts in here. Picking up the other carton here the cover lists that there are twelve large eggs inside. And opening this carton up we find a recipe for fruit salad with honey lime dressing. Now in terms of education obviously in this case there is much more education in terms of what organics are, what are the methods used in organics. But in terms of the methods that are used say for these other eggs, why aren't these located on the carton, should this be up to the producer, the retailer.

*Peter Whitlock:* It's basically up to the retailer to determine what kind of information he wants the grader to put on his cartons. In other words the retailer decides how much information is going to go out on the carton, they advise the grader what to print on the carton and it's really between the competing products to determine how much information they want to put out. We have a sort of most common answered questions on our website. And a lot of the questions come this way. I mean people want to know what free run is, what organic is, and those questions are all listed on our website but we don't control what's printed on the cartons. It's really between the retailer and CFIA that controls the packaging and labeling that decides what actually goes on the carton. Our avenue of education to the public is through our website and our school programs.

*Jon Steinman:* Can you cite examples of some of these programs that you run in schools?

*Peter Whitlock:* There's a teaching program we put a package out for teachers to provide information about how eggs are produced, what the nutritional qualities are, about the health and safety processes are that farmers follow. There's a "Start Clean Stay Clean" program that the national agency runs to ensure that people are following the code of practice that CARC put out

and all of this is put together in an educational packet and schools order what it is they want to use in their process.

*Jon Steinman:* Peter to wrap things up are there regulations that regulate the standards behind free range, free run, behind the factory farming methods, behind organic methods, what regulations are out there that more or less ensure that these standards are being met?

*Peter Whitlock:* The number one thing is the code of practice itself that CARC put out and that the Canadian Federation of Humane societies contributed to etc. Those rules are the ones that are recommended that all producers follow it. And the “Start Clean/Stay Clean” program that CEMA operates where they go from farm to farm on a regular basis to determine those recommendations are being followed. It’s certainly our number one goal is to make sure the eggs are being produced in the way the consumer expects them to be.

*Jon Steinman:* Sir, you mentioned CEMA?

*Peter Whitlock:* CEMA is our national agency in Ottawa.

*Jon Steinman:* Okay. And that stands for?

*Peter Whitlock:* Canadian Egg Marketing Agency and they’re the ones that actually run the “Start Clean/Stay Clean” Program. We have a BC inspector from CEMA and he goes from farm to farm and visits all the farms at least once a year to determine how they rate in the “Start Clean/Stay Clean” Program.

*Jon Steinman:* And that was Peter Whitlock of the BC EGG Producers. Again, the goal behind that interview was to find out how British Columbians are being informed about the production methods in the egg industry, and as Peter pointed out on both occasions after posing this question, there are two options - educational programs for schools that are provided should a teacher request them, and for the population above the age of 17 who have access to the Internet, all that information is on their web site.

So I went to the web site. [www.bcegg.com](http://www.bcegg.com) to find out all about the factory methods of egg production that we discussed today and the alternatives to these methods. And he was right, there on their web site, in the “Education” section, are two brief paragraphs about factory production of eggs. And as was the case with the egg cartons mentioned in the interview, almost all of the *educational* material within the web site consists of *recipes*, that, you guessed it, contain eggs.

### **Music by James Asher, Star of Madras, East Westercism vol. 3**

*Jon Steinman:* Again this is Deconstructing Dinner. My name’s Jon Steinman. After checking out the educational informational on the BC EGG Producers web site, I took a quick ride over to the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency’s web site to see what sort of education they provide, and I wanted to list one tidbit of info they do list, and it reads, “The eggs that you buy in a grocery store are not fertilized and therefore will not hatch into a chick.” Again that’s courtesy of the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency.

One of the recurring comments that was made both by Fred Reid of Olera Farm, and Peter Whitlock of the BC Egg Producers, was that the principle responsibility of educating consumers about the history behind egg production was the responsibility of the retailer themselves.

Here in this province our 3 largest food retailers are of course Loblaw Companies Limited, Safeway, and the Overwaitea Food Group. With Loblaw being an Ontario-based company and Safeway having their head office across the border in Arizona, I contacted the British Columbia-based Overwaitea Food Group who are the parent company of Save-on-Foods, Cooper's Foods, Urban Fare, Bulkley Valley Wholesale, Price Smart Foods, and the Overwaitea stores themselves. With 14,000 employees in 65 different communities in BC and Alberta, this is a company that has an enormous impact on determining what foods are available to us, and what methods of production can thrive in this province.

Who better than to contact? I left a message on the Overwaitea Food Group's Media Hotline, indicating I represented a radio program here in Nelson that discusses the impacts of our food choices and dissects the methods by which our food is farmed and produced. I requested a spokesperson from the company to speak with us about the topic of tonight's program, EGGS.

I did receive a response and here it is, and I quote, "hi Jon, this is the Overwaitea food group phoning, we got your message on our media line, and we did pass it to our media spokesperson, she wants to thank you very much for thinking of us, but we are declining to participate at this time, thanks again, and good luck with your program, by by."

Now when a company as powerful and influential as the Overwaitea Food Group declines discussing the impacts of our food choices, we have to question how concerned this company really is with the well-being of British Columbians and the well-being of this province. Especially considering one of the company's core values as indicated on their web site is "Integrity".

## **Music**

*Jon Steinman:* In wrapping up tonight's show, it is certainly of high importance to remember that when we choose what method of egg production is in line with our set of values, whether it be factory produced eggs from battery caged hens, free-range, free-run, organic or biodynamic eggs, and where we choose to purchase our eggs, whether it be at large grocery stores, delis, farmer's markets, or from farmer's themselves, remember that the presence of eggs is not limited to the 12 of them we find in a carton. Eggs are an ingredient in an incredible number of other products and here is a list of some of those foods, a full list will be available on the show's web site.

For one you can find eggs in Alcoholic cocktails, Baby food, baked goods and baking mixes, e.g., breads, cakes, cookies, doughnuts, muffins. You can find eggs in all of these. pancakes, pastries, battered/fried foods, candy, chocolate, dressings and spreads, especially mayonnaise, Desserts custard, dessert mixes, ice cream, pudding, icing, glazes, e.g., egg wash on baked goods Meat mixtures such as hamburger, hot dogs, meatballs, meatloaf, salami. Even Pasta, especially, egg noodles. Quiches, soufflés....

And you can find eggs even in non-food sources such as: Anesthetic, e.g., Diprivan® (propofol) for one, certain vaccines, e.g., MMR (Measles, Mumps and Rubella), Craft materials, Hair care products and even Medications

And all of this certainly makes purchasing food more intimidating than it should be. And that only emphasizes the importance of how we as British Columbians need to become more involved in determining what foods are available to us, because in the end, food is a natural right that we all deserve a say in.

I want to leave you with an excerpt from one of the interviews we heard on the show today.

*Peter Whitlock:* It was a group of scientists that got together and decided what kind of production methods were in the best interest of the birds themselves.

### **Music...**

That was this week's edition of Deconstructing Dinner, produced and recorded in the studios of Nelson, British Columbia's Kootenay Co-op Radio. I've been your host Jon Steinman. I thank my technical assistant tonight Diane Matenco. All of those affiliated with this station are volunteers, and financial support for this station is received through membership, donations and sponsorship from local businesses and organizations. For more information on the station or to become a member, you can visit [www.cjly.net](http://www.cjly.net), or dial 250-352-9600. And should you have any comments about tonight's show or perhaps want to learn more about topics covered, you can visit the web site for Deconstructing Dinner at [www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner). Till next week...

### **...Music Increases and Fades Out**