

**Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY
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Title: “Farmers Speak Out”

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Transcript: Pat Yama**

Jon Steinman: And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly one hour program that looks to foster more educated eating. This program is produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. I’m Jon Steinman.

An increased understanding and appreciation of the food we eat is often better achieved through an increased understanding of agriculture and the farmers who work the land. As we as Canadians walk into grocery stores where we are presented with seemingly endless choices as previous broadcasts of Deconstructing Dinner have proven, any increased understanding of agriculture can very easily make many if not all of our choices seem to not be choices at all.

In October 2006 at the Bridging Borders Toward Food Security Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, a panel of four farmers were invited to speak to an audience of food activists from predominately North America and share with them their definition of food sovereignty - food sovereignty being the ability for communities to determine what food choices are available to them.

This session of the conference presented a critical opportunity for those of us whose connection to food only exists in the aisles of the grocery store. The four panelists who presented at this session of the conference titled “A Vision for Food Sovereignty, Farmers Speak Out” were Dena Hoff, the then-chair of the Northern Plains Resource Council and a farmer from Glendive, Montana, Alberto Gomez of Mexico’s National Union of Autonomous Regional Farmers’ Organizations - he also represented La Via Campesina. Also on the panel were Carlos Marentes, the director of the Border Agricultural Workers’ Project in El Paso, Texas, and Karen Pedersen, a farmer and bee-keeper from Cut Knife, Saskatchewan and the ex women’s president of Canada’s National Farmers’ Union.

And Deconstructing Dinner attended the 2006 conference and recorded this panel of speakers.

increase music and fade out

JS: The first speaker on today’s broadcast titled “Farmers Speak Out” is Dena Hoff. At the time of this recording in October 2006, Dena was the Chair of the Northern Plains Resource Council located in Montana. The organization looks to protect water, land and promote rural prosperity. Dena is a farmer in Glendive, Montana.

October 2006 Conference

(applause)

Dena Hoff: So I'm going to challenge all us during this conference and beyond to build connections and bridges towards food sovereignty so that we can use food sovereignty to replace the destructive industrial model of agriculture that's being forced on people all over the world.

First a really simplified definition of food sovereignty would just be based on rights – the right of people, countries, nations to decide their own food and agricultural policies; the right to produce for their own domestic markets and the right to protect those domestic markets from being dumped on by corporate commodities that are produced below the cost of production wherever they come from. La Via Campesina has been working on the food sovereignty proposal for well over ten years and I think that many of you in this room along with millions of people all over the world have developed the holistic approach of food sovereignty that is, includes human rights, biodiversity, agrarian reform, migration, the environment, women's rights, fair trade, indigenous and pastoral peoples rights. All these issues are crucial in the questions of who gets to eat, who gets to grow and gather, who gets to decide where and how our food is grown and who controls the distribution and the profits from this production. My family is lucky enough to be almost completely food self-sufficient on our farm in Montana. But sadly, this blessing is out of reach for most of the people in the world and that's because there's no access to land, to water, to seed, to credit, to capital, and no voice in the policy making that's going to decide who gets the resources and on the other hand, who gets poverty, oppression, starvation, and death.

In Montana as in many places in this country in Canada, in the region and around the world, there are lots of community-based projects relating to food and food distribution. In my own county we have about 10,000 people and we are working on a farm to table restaurant that will be also connected to a community kitchen and a cooking school. And in our county we are blessed with economic development in the form of a regional prison which by the way 37% of the budget is paid for by local farmers who are not 37% of the population. But this year we have this great, creative county agent and he asked for help setting up a project at this prison in the form of a garden. So I was privileged to donate seeds and plants to this garden and the inmates take care of the garden. And they harvested a tremendous amount of food which was good for the diet of the prison population and also was really good for the inmates that got to work in the garden. And we're planning to enlarge this program and find a place where inmates can be selecting seeds and growing their own seedlings and involving more of the population. But I was upset about one thing and that was that the sheriff and the warden decided that the - it's a men's prison, decided that they wouldn't let the men plant the flower seeds that I gave them. So, next year they will have flowers in their garden because it is an election year and the sheriff is up (audience laughs and claps).

So, while I take great hope from all of these projects everywhere in this country, Canada, Mexico, and around the world, I know that we have to make it a priority to change food and agricultural and trade policies in this country. Because if we are going to reverse a system that rewards exploitive and destructive industrial factory food production models which destroy family farms, the environment, workers, we are going to have to make this a priority. Whether you want to get involved in politics or not, there's no longer a choice. Because I don't think there's anybody in this room really believes that the North American Free Trade Agreement was good for any of the three countries involved and you're going to hear more about that from Alberto and Carlos and Karen a little bit later.

And even though we're supposed to be one big economic entity and capital and goods can freely pass the border, in fact anything can go through the borders except people (audience laughs) and that really doesn't make it free trade, does it (audience hoots and claps). Despite the disaster that NAFTA is, we now have bilateral trade agreements based on that same failed model and right

now there's the Korean-U.S. trade agreement that's being negotiated and I think fairly soon the fourth round of negotiations will be held in Seoul. If this is ratified, it will effectively end Korean subsistence farming on which their culture is based and it's also going to let the United States enforce indiscriminate trade liberalization policies for agriculture on other countries. So, the Koreans, a civil society mostly led by farmers, they've been in the forefront, are mounting this huge, wonderful, strategic campaign to which they are absolutely dedicated and committed, they're really, really ... it's been a privilege for me to work with them because they are so absolutely well-organized and committed to saving agriculture in their country. But they need our help. And we are going to have to pressure decision-makers in this country to make sure that we have no more NAFTAs anywhere around the world (applause).

These trade agreements drive our food and agricultural policies and they allow transnational corporations to indulge and urge any urge to merge, deregulate, or plunder. And does anybody really think that corporate profits equal the common good? I didn't think so (laughs). Our decision-makers lack the will and the vision to adopt farm and food policy based on food sovereignty. The National Family Farm Coalition over the last couple of years developed a food sovereignty campaign along with our allies which is part of a regional and international campaign. What we want for this country is the first rights to market. We want to make food sovereignty commonly understood and make it a household word so that everybody here can say food sovereignty all together. Okay (along with audience) – Food Sovereignty. Thank you. And we want to grow the size and the strength of the international campaign for food sovereignty and Alberto's going to tell you later about plans for an international conference on food sovereignty which will be held in Mali in February of next year.

Current low commodity prices are the planned result of overproduction and the ignorance of the need to manage that production. Because an unregulated market benefits transnational corporations because it provides cheap commodities for them to have animal factories which otherwise they could not have unless they have these cheap commodities. It also allows them to dump this overproduction on the export market and destroy domestic agriculture in other countries. Despite the low prices that farmers get, consumers aren't benefitting in any way. The National Family Farm Coalition also has a proposal based on food sovereignty for a farm bill and that's called the Food From Families Farm Act and among other things it would establish an actual floor price for commodities and you can think of that as minimum wage for farmers. It would provide for farmer-owned reserves that would be for food security, for humanitarian aid, and for biofuels. It would provide for an effective disaster program; it would mandate supply management and conservation programs; and it would have access to credit for minority farmers especially and young people so they can start farming; access to programs also. And these proposals along with proposals for reforming the common agricultural policy in Europe have become permanent commission with Via La Campesina because they realize that unless there are fair prices in these industrialized nations, there aren't going to be fair prices anywhere around the world. And even though 90% of the food that's produced is consumed domestically everywhere, the 10% that goes to the export market is what is driving the entire policy. So, it's an unfair system but without food sovereignty as the basis for new farm and trade policy, we're never going to have food security. And we're never going to have this new policy unless we have the committed engagement of a huge portion of civil society. So let's all use our imagines and let's build the bridges and connections from farm to farm, from kitchen to kitchen, community to community until we have a mass movement worldwide with a vision and a commitment so strong that policy makers all over the world are no longer going to be able to resist the will of the people. That they're either actually going to have to start leading or just get out of the way. Thank you. (applause)

JS: And you're tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner and the broadcast titled, "Farmers Speak Out." All of the speakers on today's broadcast were recorded at the Bridging Borders Toward Food Security Conference held in October 2006 in Vancouver, British Columbia. Deconstructing Dinner was on hand to record the conference.

We were just listening to Dena Hoff, a farmer from Glendive, Montana, and who at the time of the recording was the Chair of the Northern Plains Resource Council. Dena is also active with the National Family Farm Coalition.

The purpose of this recorded session of the conference and hence this broadcast was to hear how farmers from around North America define food sovereignty. When farmers are increasingly losing the ability to choose what and how to farm, we as the final consumer are left with pretty limited choice when browsing the aisles of a grocery store. But Alberto Gomez lays out the global scenario relating to this topic very well as he describes the way in which trade agreements are smothering family farms in Mexico. As free trade has allowed the very companies who supply Canadians with food to equally do the same in Mexico, the food that we choose to eat here in Canada is in many cases supporting the very same companies that are forcing a whole new way of life on the people of Mexico.

Alberto Gomez is the National Coordinator of UNORCA, a Union of Autonomous Regional Farmers Organizations. And he also spoke on behalf of La Via Campesina, the International Peasant Movement.

A reminder that more information on today's broadcast can be found on our website at cjly.net/deconstructingdinner.

Alberto Gomez: Ten years ago at the World Food Summit, there was a failure in the contracts that countries signed. It was reported in 1996 that there were 800 million people in the world that were hungry and now in October 2006, there were 850 million hungry people in the world. And so that the principle of food security that they were putting forth actually created more hunger. It guaranteed food but it didn't guarantee that the food was produced locally. The situation of family farmers in campesinos is worse. Exported food is abating our local markets and being sold at a price lower than the cost of production. And food security interpreted this way was based on the idea that the free market will solve the problem of hunger.

La Via Campesina and the International Campesino and Family Farmer movement which included farmers from Africa, Asia, Europe and all of America since the Summit 1996, we have proposed food sovereignty as an alternative. So this alternative creates an argument for the future of agriculture and for the future of food and for the future of our own campesinos and family farmers. And so those who have named themselves architects of the future of humanity and of the new international order have in their view, agriculture and food as a way to increase their business and accumulate more capital. So a few transnational corporations want to decide, completely decide what we eat in the world with a model of industrial agriculture, agricultural exports and genetically modified organisms. With free trade agreements, NAFTA is one example and the World Trade Organization. And so they're co-opting the government of countries for their own purpose and the administrators of these countries for their own purpose and Mexico is a classic example of this. The Monsantos, the Cargills, the Walmarts to mention a few, are trying to privatize the world, commercialize everything including life itself. And on the other side are campesinos and family farmers. We are resisting them and they haven't defeated us yet (applause).

With 21st century, it's the campesinos and family farmers that are feeding the world, not the transnational companies (applause). Almost one-third of the world's people are campesinos or family farmers and there are ten companies that control half of the agricultural trade and food in the world. So last June, Pascal Lamy in Geneva, he recognized in a public way the failure of the World Trade Organization. It was a victory for La Via Campesina and for campesinos and family farmers (applause). Since 1995 when the World Trade Organization included agriculture, La Via Campesina has opposed the principle of free trade as an engine behind the development. And we propose as an alternative food sovereign. From Seattle to Delhi, going through Cancun and then Hong Kong, we as La Via Campesina and our allies, we are manifesting industries to oppose the World Trade Organization and the liberalization of agriculture. And with all of our strength we say WTO Out Of Food! Out Of Agriculture! (applause) We want the WTO out of food. The time for food sovereignty has arrived. But in the world, we as campesinos and family farmers, we're resisting. So I've been invited here to talk about Mexico, this is only an introduction (audience laughs).

NAFTA and the free trade agreement are - corn is an important part of our agriculture, an important part of our life in Mexico. In 1993, before the free trade agreement Mexico produced 93% of the corn that we consumed. So as of last year, 43% of the corn that we consumed was imported and most of that is transgenic corn. Today we are third in the world in importation in corn. 78% of the rice that we need for our own consumption is imported. 56% of the wheat that we need for our own consumption is imported. 58% of all the products that we need to eat in Mexico are imported. It's not possible and it's not possible to get rid of our livelihoods as campesinos, as family farmers. We're campesinos, we're family farmers, we're proud to be family farmers and we're going to keep doing it. (applause)

For this reason we are fighting for food sovereignty in Mexico to inform the policy, the food policy. But to achieve food sovereignty we have to get rid of the North American Free Trade Agreement. (applause) As campesinos we are owners of half of the territory. They want to privatize our land but they haven't achieved it yet. To achieve food sovereignty we need a country that's in peace and we won't have peace until they recognize our indigenous culture. And we won't have food sovereignty until they recognize the treaties of San Andreas and they incorporate the needs of campesinos and the local people in the national policies. To achieve food sovereignty we need protection of our biosecurity and protection of our biodiversity and we need to achieve control and the rights of local campesinos to control over their own resources. (applause)

For August of 2007 we're preparing ourselves, we're gaining strength and to organize ourselves as campesinos and all of our allies to mobilize ourselves. We're going to Mexico City to demand the end of the chapter of free trade for the campesino agriculture and family farming for food sovereignty. Getting rid of the free trade agreements in food is not a simple thing. We need a lot of strength and we need a lot of information. La Via Campesina and all of our organizations, we need alliances and we need a common agenda with respect for our own self-sufficiency. It's the only way to stop the commercialization of everything. (applause) For the right to continue to be campesinos and family farmers, for our right to continue to produce food, we say globalize the struggle, globalize hope! (applause) Thank you very much for your attention.

JS: And that was Alberto Gomez representing both the International Peasant Movement known as La Via Campesina and the Mexican union of farmers known as UNORCA.

And you're tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner, a weekly one hour program produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia.

The speakers featured on today's broadcast were recorded by Deconstructing Dinner back in October 2006 at the Bridging Borders Toward Food Security Conference held in Vancouver. And you can find out more about the speakers on today's broadcast by visiting our website at cjly.net/deconstructingdinner.

The next speaker on today's broadcast titled, "Farmers Speak Out" is Carlos Marentes, the director of the Border Agricultural Workers' Project based in El Paso, Texas. Carlos spoke to the conference on the topic of migrant workers and how the existence of migrant workers in North American agriculture is both a *symptom* of the agricultural and food model that we are all a part of. Yet at the same time, migrant workers have become a necessity to support such a system.

Carlos Marentes: Buenos días. My organization, the Border Agricultural Workers' Project is based in El Paso, Texas. El Paso, Texas is one of the most important recruitment sites for migrant agricultural workers along the United States-Mexico border. Our organization is also one of the two members of La Via Campesina for the United States; the other member is the National Family Farm Coalition. But we also serve in the international commission on migrations and rural workers.

Some people think that food sovereignty is a political slogan. A nice and trendy cliché. But for us it is an alternative to challenge neoliberalism and more specifically to challenge the current agricultural system that has failed to improve the life of the people, to improve the life of our communities. This system of agriculture has created destruction, extreme poverty and an irreparable damage to our environment. Like my fellow companion Alberto of La Via Campesina, I would like to talk about the fight for food sovereignty. But I would like to do it from another perspective – from the perspective of the migrant workers that I represent this morning. So let me talk about immigration. You know, since that different persons, different sectors of society have different perceptions of immigration. For some, immigration is a problem. For other persons, immigration is a historic, social and economic process. But we have another way to see immigration

You know, more than 100 years ago, United States empire waged another unjust war against Mexico. And as a result, half of the Mexican territory was occupied. So when you think about immigration you think that when the migrants are crossing the border we are only coming back to our homeland. (applause) You know, while we are here in Vancouver sharing information, each other making linkages and relations under the premises of bridging borders towards food security, the United States government is working to build a wall in the border with Mexico in the name of national security. If this wall in Mexico becomes a reality and I hope that all of us can stop it, this wall will divide people. This wall will represent the third wall built in the world at this moment to separate people. The other two walls are one in Palestine and the other one in Melilla Spain to stop the African people.

So today, we realize that the American government, North American government in reality in dealing with immigration, the intentions is to stop, to limit and at the same time control immigrants. These anti-immigrant policies not only affect migrants, immigrants, this anti-immigrant policies are now turning against everybody. Whether you called yourself an immigrant, a citizen because these anti-immigrant policies are destructing our civil and constitutional rights whether you live in the United States or Canada. (applause)

The point that I am trying to make is that if all of us continue to fail to demand a full protection of the most basic human rights of the migrants and their families we will continue to put our own

rights at risk. And more than that, we will continue to give away the sacred rights of our children, sisters and brothers who are the immigrants endangering their lives to make the journey from the south to the north. They are the displaced people from rural communities destroyed by our current neoliberal agricultural modeled policies. They are the campesinos, the indigenous, the women, the children, the victims of this inhumane and disasterous agricultural model. A model that imposes upon the farmers and the producers of the United States and I believe is the same for Canada, the mandate to produce more every time and to produce cheaper. But not better or healthier agricultural products. And of course, the easiest way to produce more and cheaper is to have a supply of desperate labourers. And we keep them in condition so legally we can exploit them, we can abuse them, we can be discriminate them, and you know what, we can deport them at any time.

But the current model, the current agricultural system not only depends on the exploitation of the undocumented labour force. In February in Quebec, representatives of the migrant rights group informed us of the exploitation and violation of the rights of farm workers in Canada who were brought legally under the Commonwealth, Caribbean, and Mexican Seasonal Worker program. So these are the victims of the current agricultural model. But also victims of the system are the thousands of farmers and producers of United States and Canada who are unable to fulfill the mandate of producing more and cheaper. So is more farmers and family farmers of Canada are also falling down like their poor colleagues from the south. The only winners are the large agribusiness and agriculture and food corporations.

In 1915 in El Paso, Texas where I live, a revolutionary, a Mexican revolutionary and a doctor, a physician from Jalisco, Mariano Azuela wrote the most beautiful novel of the Mexican revolution, *Los de Abajo*. The Underdogs was the English translation. Let me end by saying that the underdogs have risen up. That the migrants in the United States, Canada, and all over the world have say, as the North Americans say – no more business. Things have to change for better. We have to say Ya Basta. Enough is enough and we have risen up. You witness it and participate in it in the massive mobilization of migrants across United States and Canada. In the midst of these destructive system of anti-immigrant active ads of poverty and exclusion, I'd like to say this morning that the migrants are ready. That we are now ready to join you and to unite to work together to make the social transformations we all have been dreaming for years. (applause)

JS: And that was Carlos Marentes of the Border Agricultural Workers' Project in El Paso, Texas. And you're tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner and today's broadcast titled "Farmers Speak Out."

The final speaker on today's broadcast that has been featuring recordings from the Bridging Borders Toward Food Security Conference held in October 2006 in Vancouver, is Karen Pedersen. Karen is the former women's president of the Saskatchewan-based National Farmers Union. Karen is a 5th generation farmer and bee-keeper located in Cut Knife, Saskatchewan. Karen defined food sovereignty in a Canadian context and offered suggestions as to how we can help the farmers work towards food sovereignty for all Canadians.

Karen Pedersen: I'm going to start off with just talking about the Canadian agricultural crisis. These guys have done a great job in terms of explaining what food sovereignty is so I'm going to put it into the Canadian context. You need to know that Agriculture and Agrifood Canada, the government of Canada, actually most of the provincial governments think the trade agreements have done a fantastic job. I mean look at that graph. That's our exports, I mean they're happy. That's what farmers see. That's our net farm income without paying us for our labour. So you put those two together, we're not very happy.

In 2004, farms lost on average in Canada, when we look at net farm income not counting labour, \$10,000 per year. That was exceeded only by 2003 where we lost \$16,000 per year. The last 20 years have been worse than the depression years. People talk about the depression years, we're long past that you guys, it's been 20 years now. The last 10 year average, if we look at net farm income over 10 years, we're at negative \$323.00 per farm is what we make every year without paying us for our labour. Oddly enough in the last census period we lost 11% of Canadian farmers. Odd that you would put those kind of numbers together. What it means is that in agriculture in Canada we are subsidizing Canadian farms. We're doing it a little bit with the government but mostly what we're subsidizing them with is non-farm incomes. Most of us work two jobs. We're subsidizing it with depleting savings, depleting equity, debt – debt is increasing. That's how we're continuing to produce food in Canada.

So that's the farm situation. Then if we look at well, where do farms fit in the Canadian context of the food chain? Well we're smack dab in the centre between kind of the energy companies and the chemical and the fertilizers. Those companies and then the processors, packers, and the retailers - we're smack dab in the centre of them. So how are they doing in the food chain? We compared companies in 2004 when we lost \$10,000 per farm. We looked at those companies in the food chain and we looked at 75 of them in Canada, 57 of them or 76% made record or near record profits that year. Now I don't know about you but I don't think that's a coincidence. Canadian farms are generating huge amounts of wealth. This particular graph – graphs bread and wheat prices, corn and cornflake prices, hog and pork prices, and barley and beer prices, and you don't really need to know which one is which because they all look the same. Consumers continue to pay more and more for the food that they're consuming and farmers continue to get paid what they were getting paid in the 70s. So we're generating a huge amount of wealth – where is it going?

So one of the things we have to think about is power in the marketplace. Agrium Corporation, which is one of the biggest fertilizer companies in Canada published this particular graph in their 2001 agricultural or annual report. Nitrogen prices follow grain prices. What that basically tells you is that when prices go up they extract that extra profit. When prices go down they lower their prices. Those two lines almost follow each other perfectly. And so what this tells you is that farmers just don't need higher prices for their product because if they get higher prices for their product it just gets extracted or stolen. What we need is power in the marketplace. Well and I guess the other thing I should put in there, is so then when you look at subsidies from taxpayers, exactly the same thing happens. For example the BSE payment. Packers knew that farmers got a BSE emergency payment. Guess what happened? The price of cattle went down to sufficiently extract that payment. Those subsidies are basically going directly into corporate hands and barely passing through our pockets.

So is technology going to be our saviour? Because that's quite often what I get told is well if we just you know, produce better or you know there'll be some new technology and somehow that will save our bacon. Well, Canadian farmers have adopted technology over the years at an incredible rate. And if you plot that on net farm income, guess what, net farm income has declined and technology hasn't helped us. Now I don't particularly want to go back to hand crank extractor but let me just tell you that it hasn't helped my income on my farm or what I'm doing. So what basically technology has done in the agricultural sector is we've taken what we use to do for centuries that didn't have any cost and we've created input costs. So now we have chemical costs, we have tractor costs, we have fertilizer costs. We've taken what use to come from free from the sun and we've basically created ourselves this little addiction. And what we have now too is the new frontier is seeds. Where we've saved our seeds for generations, now they want to take that one too and either make us buy them or my particular favourite is terminator technology

or GURTS - Genetic Use Restriction Technology, I wonder what that means. Do you think they might be trying to take away the control of our seeds? So they're trying to make it so we'll have to buy our seeds every time. That we'll take seeds from being a renewable resource to being a non-renewable resource. Technology isn't going to be our saviour.

I could go on about how they're extracting wealth from us but those are three really sort of specific ways that they're doing it. And so let me just tell you this, family farms in Canada, they're not just dying, they're being systematically killed.

So what's our solution? How do we solve this problem? Well let me tell you. Buying local food and you know selling directly to consumers, that's a great individual response. It's a great individual response. But if we're going to change our direction and if we're going to change our response or change our system, we need to move that to a collective political response. (applause) If all we do is buy local, we're not going to stop going down the road that we're going down. What's going to end up happening is a few producers around urban centres, because Canada is very geographically diverse and the population is very centralized in certain areas. What's going to end up happening is producers around urban areas may be able to make a living, the rest of us will continue to go out of business creating a vacuum and what's going to fill that vacuum is factory hog barns, corporate agriculture, ethanol plants so that they can have feedlots. You think ethanol's about biodiesel and environmentally sustainable stuff? Sorry, you're dreaming. It's about getting feedlots going. It's about getting cheap product from us and turning it into cattle. So that's where we're going to continue unless we make this a collective political response which is food sovereignty. I'm not going to define food sovereignty again, we're running out of time. They've done a great job of it.

So let's look at models in Canada, because the neat thing is that in Canada we actually have some models of food sovereignty. We've lost a few but anyways, we still have some that we need to protect. Co-operatives are a big one of course. Again we've lost some of our co-operatives but we need to support our co-operatives. Co-operatives that are based on making sure that all producers get their product to market, that they get a fair price that's pooled, that they deal with transportation. So for myself, I produce honey. All of my honey goes to Manitoba Honey Co-op and then Manitoba Honey Co-op and Alberta Honey Co-op market it under the name of Bee Maid. So when you're in the grocery store and you can't necessarily buy locally, the retailers price Bee Maid honey higher than their own particular brand because they're trying to extract profit from us. It's a succinct choice to choose to buy co-operative products. We need to do that, we need to protect those kind of products or those kind of structures in Canada. We need to protect farmers' rights. So right now our government continues to go down the path of taking away our right to save seeds. Well, farmers are 2% of the population. We're not going to protect that right by ourselves. This is an issue of food and you need to help us. Everyone needs to help us protect that right. And we continue to go down – like you know they'll get a response of – oh, people don't want that. And then, when it starts to die down a little bit, they push it forward some more. They just opened up another consultation period for the next two months looking at variety registration which again wants to move us from the system we have now – merit-based to moving it to what's called the closed-loop system so that basically farmers have to buy their seeds every time.

Terminator technology. We need to call for an exact, complete ban on terminator within our country (applause) so that Canada cannot continue to go internationally and try and push that technology forward.

Supply management. Supply management within Canada is a great model. If we're going to export a model, that should be it. It's got some problems but let's not export what we've got. Supply management looks at what we need in dairy, milk, and poultry and it allocates quotas so that farmers can produce according to the market or what the Canadian domestic market will take. What it does is it ensures a fair price for producers and it ensures a reasonable price for consumers. Yes it has problems with the valuation of quota but unless we're going to throw out all farming because it has a problem with the valuation of land, we don't throw out supply management because of the valuation of quota. It's got good principles. It's a good model we need to continue to support and protect that because the WTO and the trade agreements are constantly targeting it.

The last one that I'm going to talk about is the Canadian Wheat Board. We are in the fight of our lives right now to protect the Canadian Wheat Board. We've already undergone 14 challenges under the trade agreements from international players. The fight that we're dealing with right now is Stephen Harper's government. They're targeting the single desk on the Canadian Wheat Board. The simple way the Canadian Wheat Board works. Imagine I'm the Canadian Wheat Board, you guys are grain farmers and these guys here are the buyers. With the Canadian Wheat Board functioning under the single desk, I know that I've got all of your grain. I sell it and I go to them and I say what do you want to buy or what's the price. I become the price setter rather than the price taker because I'm one dealing with them. The moment that that becomes voluntary and a few of you guys can sell, undercutting the Canadian Wheat Board, the Canadian Wheat Board's toast. Like, there's no point to it. That's the purpose of the Canadian Wheat Board is that single desk to extract a higher price for producers.

The Canadian Wheat Board also makes sure that equality is a function so that people that are producing up in northern Saskatchewan who are far away from sort of the main lines, their wheat will also be sold. It's not just the people that are close to urban centres that will have their wheat sold. They also are the ones that make sure that there's someone there to stand up in terms of transportation to the railways.

So the Canadian Wheat Board is absolutely key. And if nothing else that you do when you're here in Canada as Canadians, I ask you to take 15 minutes to write your MP to defend the Canadian Wheat Board. (applause) We're collecting letters, I've got information on our website and I've got information here. But we're collecting letters. We're ccing them to all MPs and it's a political action that we're doing. It's a concrete collective political action that we can do in Canada right now towards food sovereignty.

So we need to when we're thinking about food sovereignty, we need to think about the Canadian context. We need to think about the geographic diversity. We need to think about the cultural diversity. And other parts of the world are going to have a different way of dealing with this. But we need to look at that whole Canadian context and that's how we need to come up with a fair domestic and international food system.

Food sovereignty isn't just about buying local, it's not just about acting local. What we do is we act local to create an international collective vision. And that's what we need to do in this country. It's what we need to do as we leave this conference. (applause)

ending theme

JS: And that was this week's edition of Deconstructing Dinner, produced and recorded at Nelson, British Columbia's Kootenay Co-op Radio. I've been your host Jon Steinman. I thank my technical assistant Diane Matenko.

The theme music for Deconstructing Dinner is courtesy of Nelson-area resident, Adham Shaikh.

And the last speaker on today's broadcast was Karen Pedersen of Pedersen Apiaries in Cut Knife, Saskatchewan. Karen was recorded in October 2006 in Vancouver. And more information on today's broadcast titled "Farmers Speak Out" can be found on the Deconstructing Dinner website.

This radio program is provided free of charge to campus/community radio stations across the country and should you wish to financially contribute to this program we invite you to offer your support through our website at cjly.net/deconstructingdinner or by dialing 250-352-9600.

'Til next week.