

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

**July 19, 2007**

**Title: Fermenting Revolution and Soil Matters CSA I**

**Producer/Host: Jon Steinman**  
**Transcript: Karleigh Benka**

**Jon Steinman** - And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly one hour program, produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman, your host for the next hour.

As is usually the set-up here on the program, often one topic is the focus for the full one hour broadcast but for today, we will focus on two separate topics, with the first being a new approach to deconstructing our dinners because for the first half of the show, we will deconstruct a beverage many of us enjoy either before, during or after our meals and that is, beer. Looking behind the scenes of the many alcoholic beverages that accompany our meals, will be a focus here on the program over the upcoming months, as virtually all alcoholic beverages are very much a product of agriculture and are often very inter-connected with our *food*.

Joining the program to help deconstruct our lagers and ales, will be author Christopher O'Brien, who is behind the recent release of the book *Fermenting Revolution – How to Drink Beer and Save the World*. The book is a critical analysis of this staple beverage of many cultures for thousands of years but as Chris suggests, the masculinization of beer in the past two centuries, has led to the demise of what was not only a very feminine beverage but a drink that represents the foundation of many human civilizations.

Moving on to the second half of the broadcast, we will visit with a farm located not too far from this very radio station here in Nelson, where two relatively new farmers have launched a Community Supported Agriculture program, or CSA, from their farm known as Soil Matters. I chose to become a member of the farm back in April of this year, with the hope of documenting the creation and evolution of this unique model, whereby members of the community purchase a share in the farm at the beginning of the season and in doing so ensure a weekly supply of fresh produce. Soil Matters, invites members to offset the cost of the food, by offering the option to members to lend a hand on the farm, whether it be planting, weeding, harvesting or maybe packing the weekly bins for other members. And we will visit with Craig Smith and Laura Sachs, to learn more about the benefits of Community Supported Agriculture and the difficulties that such a program may face.

***increase music and fade out***

**Jon Steinman** - How many people out there, would love to hear that drinking beer could save the world? One might ask, "To save the world from what?" and author Christopher O'Brien would suggest, from climate change, from pollution, from corporate control of our lives, from declining levels of happiness, from increasing levels of stress, from gender inequality, from families and relationships falling apart and from communities that have lost their sense of community. *Fermenting Revolution* is the title of the book released just last year, by British Columbia's New Society Publishers.

As we often critically examine individual foods or agricultural commodities here on Deconstructing Dinner, beer is of course no different from any other food. Its principle ingredients consist of water, barley (or another grain), hops and yeast, all of which are extracted and produced in ways that can either respect or disrespect the earth. Now beer, while still a long way from being recognized as an agricultural product, has been leading a quiet revolution in small breweries around the world. If beer were to be put into a similar spotlight that is often done here on the program, we would learn of the environmental impact of the industrial chemical intensive process of growing barley. We would learn that two American companies control 75% of all the malted barley processed in Canada for beer production. We would learn that our Conservative federal government will soon be taken to court over allegations that they unfairly removed barley from the clutches of the long-standing farmer-controlled Canadian Wheat Board. We would learn that Health Canada only requires four ingredients to be labelled on the side of a bottle of beer, yet the permissible ingredients are pages long. And we would learn that none of Canada's major breweries are owned by Canadians.

Located on the back of the book cover of *Fermenting Revolution* is a warning that reads the following, and I quote; "Reading this book may lead mere beer drinkers to become beer activists, ready to fight corporate rule by simply meeting their neighbors for a pint at the local brewpub, fermenting a revolution one beer at a time."

When not writing books, author Christopher O'Brien, works in Washington D.C, at the Center for a New American Dream, as Director of the Responsible Purchasing Network. There, he helps institutions of all kinds, identify and purchase products, that are more socially and environmentally responsible. Chris is also part owner of the Seven Bridges Co-operative, which is an exclusive supplier of organic only beer making supplies.

Helping launch *Fermenting Revolution*, Chris suggests that beer could have acted as the foundation on which the first human civilizations were built. With beer representing one of the factors motivating early peoples to develop agriculture and build urban centres.

**Christopher O'Brien** – Yeah, that's pretty clear, the evidence all shows that the earliest settled urban civilizations were founded on the ability to consistently grow, store, and convert grain into consumable nutrition. The key thing to understand, in this transformation of humanity

from nomadic people, to settled urban people, is that we are able to harness the power of agriculture. Barley in particular, was the grain of choice and what was done with most of that barley, was that it was converted into beer. Part of the reason that was such an advantage, was because fermented foods of all kinds, add nutrition to food or rather what they do is unlock nutrition. So the example I like to use, all though it's a little bit gross, is that if you think of eating a hand full of corn and then a little bit later on, you find that maybe not all that corn really did much inside your body and it just kind of came right out. Your body didn't metabolize it, so it didn't benefit from the nutrition in that corn. What fermentation does, is breaks down the nutrition inside food, in this case corn or any other grain, like barley, which is the grain that is typically used for beer. It breaks down the outer barrier around the husk of the grain and unlocks the nutrition inside. So beer, is this huge nutritional advance for human kind because all of a sudden, we are able to take these grains that are highly nutritious, that the body can't do much with and now all of a sudden not only is the body able to access the nutrition but it tastes really good too and makes you feel good.

**Jon Steinman** - One of the most researched early civilizations, was that of the Egyptians, who as may come as a surprise, drank a lot of beer. The Egyptians who adopted Isis, the first Nubian earth fertility goddess, later referred to her as the Lady of Green Crops *and* the Lady of Beer. As a connection between beer and fertility is probably a new concept for most, Christopher O'Brien expands on this connection that he introduces in his book.

**Christopher O'Brien** – The Egyptians were extraordinary beer drinkers. Some examples, the laborers who built the pyramids were actually paid in beer. The pyramids themselves contained rooms, that were physically loaded with beer, so that the pharaohs who were buried in them, would have a physical cash of beer to carry them into the next world. That physical store, would eventually be depleted, so the Egyptians went one step further and symbolically etched into the walls brewers. Brewster's in fact, women who made beer, into the walls so that these beer rooms would have a symbolic infinite supply of beer, so that the pharaohs would never run out of beer. It was very central to the economy and the spiritual practice of Egyptians, which is very tightly linked, again, back to this concept of agriculture. It was the ability to use agriculture, that allowed civilizations like Egypt and Sumar, which is slightly to the east of Egypt, in what's modern day Iraq, where one of the earliest civilizations evolved, it was that ability to use agriculture that allowed those civilizations to thrive. So it's no wonder, that they would worship and link conceptually, crops, with fertility and the beer that they produced from those crops.

**Jon Steinman** - One of the sections that stands out in *Fermenting Revolution*, is the topic of gender and beer. It was only recently, that beer was removed from the hands of women and placed into the hands of men. In his book, Chris uses descriptions like the masculinization of beer, which we will learn more about just shortly but first we learn of his reference to *himself*, as a femALEist, that is with the ALE capitalized.

**Christopher O'Brien** – I'm a femALEist, in a sense that I believe that beer, at its best, tends to exude feminine qualities or at least qualities that we tend to attribute to women and I don't believe, nor do I want to address, the nature verse nurture debate. I'm not saying that women

and men are inherently different, in fact I think women and men are practically, nearly the exact same, in terms of nature. It's probably, mostly nurture that makes us different. But in the real world, we tend to attribute things like cooperation, to women and competition to men. We tend to attribute things like nurturing itself, the idea of motherhood and women raising children, are traits that we tend to assign to women. Where as again, this kind of aggressive, competitive attributes, are the kinds of things that we tend to attribute to men. And for me, beer, at its best, tends to evoke those feminine attributes and that has always been the case. Beer, simply put, beer has always been a beverage, produced and controlled by women. Until very recent modern times, when men turned beer into an industrial commodity essentially, through the process of the industrial revolution. With that transformation from something feminine, into something more masculine, the end result to put it kind of bluntly, is the advertisements we see during the Super Bowl, which appeal to fairly base male instincts, of just being kind of macho and not terribly smart. Which are all things, I think are a shame because beer can really lend itself towards intellectual debate, towards some of the higher qualities that humans can develop but we've pandered to the lowest common denominator of basic male attributes in recent times. And I'd like to, I'm a femALEist, in the sense that I'd like to see beer recapture, some of those feminine qualities and I think the craft beer movement, is in fact doing that.

**Jon Steinman** - And this is Deconstructing Dinner, where we are listening to segments from my conversation with Christopher O'Brien, author of the book *Fermenting Revolution – How to Drink Beer and Save the World*. As I would suggest grabbing a beer to drink while you listen to this program, unless of course you're driving, which I can imagine there's some law out there that would forbid me from recommending such an idea but I will forewarn listeners that upon reading *Fermenting Revolution*, it's safe to say, that the beer you choose to drink, may be either destroying our planet and our communities or may indeed be respecting the earth and enriching our lives and our health. And you'll learn more about this in just a moment. As we continue on this topic of the role of women and beer, *Fermenting Revolution* stresses how integral women in our own society used to be in the production of beer and while this has close to disappeared, it is still the case in many other regions of the world and Chris describes how women taking care of children at home, are able to earn an income while doing so.

**Christopher O'Brien** – In much of the world, much of Asia, much of Africa, women still do make beer at home. I have travelled pretty extensively around Africa and have found that the traditional role of providing food for the family, is still generally a woman's role and beer is part of that food. That's something that's still in the domain of women. I lived in Ethiopia recently and you could go into just about any village and find sign posts, outside of people's houses. There would be a stick in the ground, with an empty can hanging on the top and that meant, that the women of the house, had beer available. You could just walk in, sit down in the living room and for a very nominal charge, get a serving of beer that's straight from her kitchen. Then when she ran out of beer, she might brew again in a week or she might brew again in a month but chances are her neighbour or someone down the street is going to be brewing, when she isn't. So it's actually a very nice way, of distributing that role throughout the community. So that women, again, being at home and having the responsibility of child care, brewing on an

occasional basis like this, is still very important to women in places where they still do it because it is one of the few easily accessible forms of cash that they can earn. Given a cash based economy, it's more and more important that people are able to earn hard income. Women tend to do lots of work, that doesn't earn cash income, its basically uncounted work. Brewing is one way that they can brew when they have time, in between taking care of the children, in between taking care of the garden. They can brew when they have a chance and earn some income and let their neighbour do it the next time.

**Jon Steinman** - While women continue to brew beer at home in many regions of the world, in the industrialized countries most beer has been just that, industrialized and Christopher O'Brien suggests that it was beer that helped launch the industrial revolution and the men who were behind it, didn't know that it would eventually lead to a distaste of beer by women.

**Christopher O'Brien** – It really began with the industrial revolution itself. The industrial revolution took what had been by in large, an agricultural and craft based society and transformed it into one that was focused around industrial production and with that, social roles changed dramatically. There were massive migrations of human beings, all around the world, as a result of industrialization. Tens of thousands people, every year, left Europe and moved to the New World. That was a massive migration of people and it was people looking for jobs and opportunity. They had, in many cases, lost their ability to provide for themselves, in part because of their transformation of their role as agriculturalists, to the need for cash for cash. This was kind of the beginning of the predominance of cash in the economy. People could no longer really be subsistent farmers in Europe, they needed to get jobs in factories. A lot of those factories were in the New World, where the raw ingredients were cheap or where the gathering of the raw materials was incredibly cheap.

So people moved and women's roles changed, as a result of this. Men needed to leave the household, in order to get cash paying jobs. This left women in a position where they had even more responsibility over the household because the man was often no longer around. Not only was he no longer around the household as much, he may even be in different country, may have moved from England to America and was trying to get the family to come over when he had established himself. Or he had moved from Philadelphia to Ohio because he was pioneering the frontier, looking for opportunity on the frontier, often at times leaving the family behind. This started contributing to a real breakdown of social roles and in the US in particular, one of the ways of coping with this massive change in society, was alcohol. In particular, hard alcohol in North America because it wasn't very practical, to carry barrels of beer across the frontier with you. But if you condensed that in to whiskey or rum, that was a lot, more easily transportable, along the frontier and in fact became a commodity of exchange itself, in a cash strapped existence on the frontier. People used rum and whiskey, as a barter commodity and people being away from their families, turned towards drink much more often. Even if they were with the families but they were in a city working in a factory, maybe fifteen hours a day, this is prior to any strong labour laws, life was hard and so they looked to alcohol, as a release from a very difficult lifestyle, where they may no longer have the community support structure, that they had in the old country. The long-term affect of this was that

women ended up rejecting alcohol, basically targeting alcohol as the culprit, when really the culprit of the social transformation was industrialization.

**Jon Steinman** - These social transformations that took place in the newly industrialized world and in particular here in North America, now represent the very social fabric we live among today. It is for this reason that looking back on the history of beer and how its important status within society was taken, by what are now a handful of corporations, is so important. *Fermenting Revolution*, addresses our current relationship with beer in North America and suggests that to overcome what has essentially become a hostile attitude towards a pint, can all change if we take back beer from the large corporations dominating the industry.

**Christopher O'Brien** – We're conflicted, on the one hand prohibition, was an overwhelming voice of society saying we have a problem with alcohol. On the other hand, we have ten thousand years of history prior to that saying, actually beer is one of the most central assets of civilization and it should be not only celebrated but even worshiped. So, we have this historical memory that beer is something that's good but we have this very recent memory, that beer or really hard liquor because hard liquor was really the target of prohibition, is something bad. So we now kind of, don't really know what to think about alcohol. It's kind of a, like you say, a guilty, "nudge, nudge wink, wink," had a couple drinks last night. As if that's something to be ashamed of because in fact, some Americans still do feel that alcohol is a social bad. Where as the majority of people, even today, do consume alcohol.

So, we haven't really resolved that yet and I think part of resolving that, is taking beer back from the corporations and making it something that's of the people again. It's not a commodity to be bought and sold but it's something, to actually be appreciated and celebrated, integrated into our food ways, if you will. Something, that is part and partial, to a good meal. Something, that's part and partial, to a family or community celebration. Something, that brings us together, rather than divides us. I think craft beer is doing just that, so I think it will take a long time, social change is very slow but eventually there will be a tipping point, I think and we'll reach the point where it's embraced again, as something that contributes to society rather than detracts from it.

**Jon Steinman** - As the idea of challenging corporate control of beer may sound revolutionary, one of the most interesting factoids, found in *Fermenting Revolution*, is that beer was used long ago in a very similar way and that was by the founding fathers of the United States, who essentially launched the first drink local campaign, in an effort to gain independence from their imperial domination by Britain. This example, is an encouraging one to those wishing to use beer as a means through which to gain ones own independence and self-determination.

**Christopher O'Brien** – That's exactly what it was. The founding fathers of the United States of America, very intentionally stimulated a local beer industry, specifically as a way of declaring independence from Great Britain. The concept is that simple. As long as we're dependant on imports from the empire that we just severed ourselves from, we will continue to be dependant. As a new nation we want to be independent, we want to rely on our own ability, to

provide for our needs. So, one of the first laws that was passed in the new nation of the US, was that local beers should be subsidized, that American beers should be subsidized and the result was that breweries started opening up all over the place. Prior to that, people who really wanted good traditional English ales, would get them imported from England. With independence that really changed and most of the founding fathers themselves, were brewers. Many of them had their own home breweries and many of them had commercial breweries, in fact, they also had distilleries. Some of them made wine but beer was really very central to establishing our economic independence from the empire. Which, is just another way of saying, support the local economy rather than globalizing the economy in a way that's kind of irrational. We can grow barley just as well here and make it here so why should we be shipping it across the ocean.

**Jon Steinman** - And you're tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner, a weekly one hour program produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman and should you wish to learn more about today's topics or listen to archived broadcasts of our shows, you can do so through our website at [cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://cjly.net/deconstructingdinner)

Following this first segment of today's broadcast featuring author, Christopher O'Brien of *Fermenting Revolution*, we will meet farmers Craig Smith and Laura Sachs, who this year launched a Community Supported Agriculture program at their farm, called Soil Matters. I became a member of this farm, back in April of this year, to not only gain the opportunity to lend a hand on a farm and receive a weekly bin of fresh produce but I also joined to document the creation of what is a very innovative model, through which people living in cities, can connect with where their food is coming from and who is growing it. And you can stay tuned for that in about 15 minutes.

Currently, we are listening to segments of my conversation with Christopher O'Brien, author of the book, *Fermenting Revolution – How to Drink Beer and Save the World*. Coming back to what was mentioned earlier, beer is the byproduct of an agricultural commodity as it relies on grain, most often barley. Hops, is another one of the two primary ingredients. Now, as we often compare the benefits and threats of organic and conventional forms of growing food, doing so for beer is hardly ever done within Canadian media and this becomes apparent when looking at how few organic beers are available in bars or on liquor store shelves across the country.

**Christopher O'Brien** – The good news and bad news here is that beer is what most people would consider a natural product, in other words it's not made from an unsustainable source of raw materials, things that are extracted and not replaced, like petroleum. It's made from renewable resources i.e: barley, hops, water, and yeast. However, how we grow barley and hops is another matter and in fact, the unfortunate reality is that barley and yeast are both highly chemically intensively grown, by the conventional industrial agriculture industry. Hops in particular, one of the things that I like to point out about hops and chemicals is that what one country considers a safe pesticide to spray on hops, another country may not. In fact what we find, if you compare a number of countries like Germany and the US for example, the number of pesticides that are allowed and prohibited in each, drastically different, dramatically

different. Many of the pesticides that are used in the US on hops, are actually explicitly prohibited in Germany and the ironic thing is, the opposite is also true. America prohibits the use of certain pesticides that are allowed in Germany. And so, what that points out to me, is that we're dealing with a lot of unsafe chemical applications, in our food supply. Even large smart nations, so called, can't agree on what's safe and what's not. So, why not choose what we know is safe, which is organic. Actually in increasing numbers, brewers are turning to organic, at least here in the US, where unseen organic beer is popping up all over the place. I think there has been a recent controversy about defining what organic means in the context of beer in the US, at least. I think the very fact that we're having that controversial debate is an indication that there's a market there. Otherwise we wouldn't be, Anheuser-Busch, wouldn't bother to be arguing about, what should count as organic beer, unless they were interested in tapping the market for it, which they clearly are because they have two organic beers. So, I think, well there's actually a great latent demand in the market place, for more organic beer and brewers are starting to recognize that. There are some problems that we face, particularly with hops, which is that, while malted barley is available in fairly stable supply, organic hops are not quite so widely available. Definitely not available, grown domestically in North America, they are almost exclusively imported from Europe and New Zealand. So, what I'd like to see is for us to stimulate an organic hops growing industry, back here in America. Where frankly, and I'll put my bias, wear them right on my sleeve, some of the best hops in the world are grown in the Pacific Northwest and it's just a shame that we can't get them organically.

**Jon Steinman** - So here we have this example, of how beer is very dependent on fossil fuels, as barley and hops grown conventionally, are very dependent on chemical inputs, most of which are derived from these very fuels. Such a shift in our beer choices, can have a significant impact on the health of our waterways, soil and air and it's this among other reasons, why Christopher O'Brien writes this in his book, *Fermenting Revolution*, and I quote, "If beer helped create civilization, then perhaps it also has a role to play in preventing its collapse." Chris expands on this suggestion and in doing so introduces some of the many environmentally responsible breweries located throughout the United States.

**Christopher O'Brien** – The scary and sad truth is that, we are on the verge of ecological collapse. Climate change is now a well established science, that if we don't change our consumption habits, particularly around our use of fossil fuels, we will face devastating consequences. In fact, many argue that we are already seeing those consequences, with some of the extreme weather events that we are seeing and of course with the most unsustainable human endeavour of all, war. Thousands of people are dying, as a result of a war based around the scarcity of a commodity that we're completely and totally addicted to, which is petroleum. So, I pause at the question, could beer, which helped create some of the industrial breakthroughs, in fact many of the scientific breakthroughs, during the industrial revolution, were actually done by brewers or scientists that were working for brewers. Pasteur for example, Louis Pasteur basically, was studying fermentation, as his primary scientific breakthrough. Likewise the microscope, thermometers, these were all tools of brewers and they were developed and honed in order to be used by brewers. So the question is, brewers in



some ways, were the cause of industrialization and so don't we bare some responsibility to fix some of the problems we created?

Some of the largest industrial operations of the time and when I say of the time, I am referring to the eighteen hundreds, were breweries, specifically in London. Some of the largest industrial operations in the world, were *Porter* breweries, *Porter* was a very industrialized beer. So today, what can we do to undo some of the harm that industrialization has brought? Well, I think the good news is that brewers are in fact pioneering environmental practices and technology. You look across North America and you'll find brewers both small and large innovating things like waste recovery, byproduct reuse, energy efficiency, and renewable energy use. In fact, right there in British Columbia, you have one of my favorite breweries, which is called *Crannóg Ales*, they're basically an integrated, closed loop, farm based brewery. They produce much of the ingredients that they rely on, and the waste products go to processes right on their farm and it's a very closed loop. I think they only sell in kegs and growlers, which are reusable packages. They don't ship very far, I think they only sell within their immediate area. Other brewers, are using solar panels, a good number of breweries are sourcing wind power, to power their breweries. There are breweries like, *New Belgium* that has a living roof, on one of their main buildings.

There are breweries like, *Anderson Valley* in California, that are using what's called, living machines, to clean the water that comes out of the breweries. Water is the number one, most important, ingredient in beer because it comprises 90 to 95 percent of every beer. So, it's important to make sure that our water supply is safe and secure. Brewers have taken the responsibility, of making sure that the waste water that comes out of their breweries, they're going to clean it up, they're not just going to put it back into the municipal water supply and force tax payers to pay the bill. Instead many are using this really innovative environmental concept, of using living organisms, to feed on the waste in water and thereby cleaning the water with living organisms. That's what's called, a living machine and a number of breweries are using that now. So, I think the answer is yes, brewers do have a responsibility, to help pioneer more sustainable production levels and that they actually are doing just that. Another good example is that Anheuser-Busch, is the world's largest recycling company, they actually recycle one can per every can, that they produce. So, they're approaching net zero impact, in terms of their aluminum use. Aluminum mining is a different story, which is still very environmentally harmful. But, the idea is that you can take the waste stream and reconvert it back into useful products again. You're going a long way to preventing, the unsustainable withdrawal of natural resources and the unsustainable disposal of natural resources.

**Jon Steinman** - In wrapping up this first segment, where we are deconstructing beer, we arrive at what many will consider a very important question and that is, how healthy is beer? It's not a common message one hears, that beer is healthy but *Fermenting Revolution*, is filled with information on how beer is indeed a very healthy beverage and that the public has been kept ill-informed of such benefits. And before you run off to the fridge to grab a stout, Christopher expands on this exciting news.

**Christopher O'Brien** – I dedicate the longest chapter in my book, to the issue of health and alcohol. That's because, as you say, there is wide spread misconception, about health and alcohol. The general common sense wisdom is that drinking is bad for you, end of story. And, that's really unfortunate, that we have that as our common wisdom because exactly the opposite is true. This is not an off the cuff claim, that I'm making myself, based on anecdotal evidence, this is based on stacks of studies, done by huge, scientific based organizations. Tests done on tens of thousands of participants and the conclusion is uniform. Which is that, alcohol in general and this is not peculiar to beer, alcohol in general, when consumed consistently and in moderation, drastically improves health. In particular, it improves heart health and the number one cause of death, in industrial society, especially North America, is heart disease. Most studies say, that a reduction in heart disease of between 30 and 40 percent, is seen in moderate drinkers, compared to people who don't drink at all. In other words, if you're not drinking consistently and moderately, if you're not drinking at all, you actually have a much worse chance of getting heart disease. Compounded on that, is that not only do you have a worse chance of getting heart disease but you also stand, a greater liability of dying, from heart disease. So, moderate consistent drinkers, both limit their chances of getting heart disease and they also reduce their chances, if they do get it, to have a lower chance of actually dying from it.

So, this is actually well established, in the medical community but it's simply not widely known. That's largely because there are some pretty strong, special interest, lobby groups, that don't want to share that message because they're afraid that it will be interpreted, as a green flag for alcohol abuse and no one wants that to happen. So, I understand the concern but preventing knowledge, is never the solution. Informed decisions are always better than uninformed. Unfortunately, what we have now is a very uninformed public, on the health benefits of alcohol. Now, getting to beer specifically, compared to say wine, which actually has done a pretty decent job of educating the public, if you ask most people, they might say "Oh, red wine is supposed to be good for you, right?" or "A glass of red wine, with dinner, that's suppose to be good for you but nothing else." The truth is, the red wine industry, did some of the earliest research on the health effects of alcohol. When they found the shocking results that, "Hey, guess what? Drinking moderately, is actually good for you," they got their research out there, in the public and were able to garner, a lot of media attention around it. The sad news is that, other industries haven't been able, to make such a splash but the fact is, the source of alcohol doesn't matter, in terms of the heart healthy, effects of alcohol. What is different, among different sources of alcohol, is that beer, compared to wine has a whole different set of nutritional impacts. Beer, being a fermented grain whereas wine, being fermented grapes. Grain, has a lot of carbohydrates and a lot of protein, compared to wine which has, a much more robust, nutritional profile, then wine does. So, beer has the helpful impact of the alcohol but it also has the helpful impact, of nutrition itself and that gets back, to what I was saying earlier, about fermentation of grains, in general, being a way of unlocking nutrition. So, the bottom line is, drink moderately and consistently. The consistent part of that is also important because the studies also show, that drinking ten beers on Friday night and then not drinking for a week and drinking ten on the next Friday night, that's not healthy. What is healthy is having a couple of beers, every day. So bingeing is unhealthy, consistent over consumption is unhealthy.

Not drinking at all, is a health negative but moderate consistent drinking has a dramatically positive helpful impact.

**Jon Steinman** - And that was, Christopher O'Brien, author of the book, *Fermenting Revolution – How to Drink Beer and Save the World*, published by British Columbia's, New Society Publishers. I spoke with Chris over the phone, from his office in Washington, D.C. And, you can learn more about the book, by visiting Chris's website at, [fermentingrevolution.com](http://fermentingrevolution.com) and you can also keep your eyes open for his forthcoming book, on the topic of coffee. And again, all of this information including this broadcast, along with some unheard audio from my interview will be posted on our website at [cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://cjly.net/deconstructingdinner).

### **soundbite**

**Jon Steinman** - For the remainder of today's broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner we are going to move away from the topic of beer, although we will visit with more beer-related topics in months to come and instead we will visit with a subject that is more often discussed here on the program and that is alternative models, through which Canadians can begin sourcing our food. One of the greatest threats facing farmers today and hence, facing our own food supply is the financial rewards found in the field of farming, rewards that are seemingly more often than not, in the negative digits. The suggested cures for such an income crisis that plague farmers around the world, are numerous but one argument that has always been at the forefront, is to remove food and agriculture from the global marketplace. One of the reasons for such an idea, comes from a belief that farmers themselves should not have to bear the financial risks associated with such a volatile industry and all people should equally share such risks, as food is a need and not a desire, like most other products. Now of course, some of our tax money does end up in the form of government bailouts, dished out to farmers in time of dire need but much of the revenue available for farmers from the market itself, is extracted by the handful of corporations controlling our food and they do this in a very calculative and efficient manner. So, one of these alternatives to the dominant food system is the model of Community Supported Agriculture, whereby, a set number of people within a city or town become a member of a farm and in doing so, pay the farmers at the beginning of the season when farmers need the money most. Members who join, are then guaranteed what is most often a weekly box of fresh produce. Now, as many farmers know all too well, how easily an entire crop can be lost due to weather, pests or unforeseen circumstances, members of a CSA share this risk with the farmer and on the other side, can also share in the abundance as can often be the case. Another option, often offered by a CSA, is for members to lend a hand on the farm, in exchange for a reduction in the cost of the member share and it's this, that really helps connect people of all ages, with where our food is coming from, how it is grown and who is growing it.

Launching a CSA is not something many farmers or communities have experience with, as there is administrative work that for most *farmers* requires too much extra time. But here just outside of Nelson, British Columbia, two intrepid farmers, who only began farming a few years ago have launched a CSA this year and I chose to become a member and document the process of creating a CSA, learning of the benefits, the difficulties and the potential, for such a model to

reconnect people with their food and also provide farmers, with a more secure source of income.

The farm is known, as Soil Matters and is run by Craig Smith and Laura Sachs. It is located between Nelson and Castlegar and is Certified Organic. They maintain 7-8000 sq. feet of greenhouse space and a few outdoor plots, which between all of this space allows for growing between early spring and late fall. And so, the remainder of today's broadcast will mark the first of a series of segments, that will document the creation of the Soil Matters CSA, with most of the recordings you are about to hear having been compiled between May and June. We do hope that this series of recordings will act as an educational resource for other farmers and communities, wishing to launch a CSA but who remain unsure of the difficulties and structure of such a model.

This first clip, is introduced by some of the other members of the farm and that is the flock of chickens, providing fresh eggs to both Laura and Craig's family and sometimes members, if the hens are happy enough to provide. Following this choir of clucking, we will hear a short clip from my first visit to the farm to pick up the first box of food on April 20<sup>th</sup>, long before most Canadians have access to *any* local food. That clip is followed by comments from both Craig and Laura on what they were doing prior to farming and why a CSA was chosen as a model to base their farm upon.

#### **CSA Clip – (chickens clucking and a rooster crowing)**

**Bob Olsen** – So, where's this root cellar?

**Laura Sachs** - Yeah, it's over here.

**Bob Olsen** – Oh, it is over here, before the chickens.

**Laura Sachs** - Yeah.

**Bob Olsen** - Ok, oh, alright then. Yeah.

**Laura Sachs** - It stores perfectly in here.

**Bob Olsen** - Wow.

**Laura Sachs** - These are the bins that haven't been picked up yet.

**Bob Olsen** - That's us!

**Laura Sachs** - Yeah, so we've got some bok choy, we've got arugula...

**Bob Olsen** - Right on.

**Laura Sachs** - Some ah...

**Bob Olsen** - Radishes?

**Laura Sachs** - Some radishes, some spinach, some carrots.

**Bob Olsen** - Oh good carrots, how do you get carrots this early?

**Laura Sachs** - Well, these are the last of the carrots, that the ones that we were talking about Jon.

**Jon Steinman** - Yeah, these carrots what about a month and a half ago when you had the ...

**Laura Sachs** - Yeah, yeah.

**Jon Steinman** - Tasted great, they were great yeah, I got...

**Laura Sachs** - So these ones tasted great but I put a little note on there, that these are the ones that we saved because...

**Jon Steinman** - Because you couldn't sell them at the market?

**Laura Sachs** - Yeah, or we preferred not to you know, the multi-legged or the ones that the tops snapped off, or too small, or yeah, so, that will be where the bins will be and yeah, everything went good in the harvesting yesterday, so that was pretty neat.

**Jon Steinman** - Good.

**Laura Sachs** - So this is where we do our... and oh, if you are here working or anything, we got the working log.

**Jon Steinman** - Sure.

**Laura Sachs** - So, we've got that here.

**Jon Steinman** - Ok.

**Laura Sachs** - So, this is where we wash and everything and bag the stuff right here.

**Jon Steinman** - Ok.

**Craig Smith** - No, we had no farming experience before we came here and the learning curve, was very steep. Fortunately, when we bought this farm, it was an existing farm, and we became

friends with the previous owners. It was an unwritten part of the deal, I believe, that they would kind of mentor us, for the first season, first spring, first fall. We adapted the previous farmers plan, originally and kept that going for the first couple of years. While, we started to understand the cycle and the system and our weather and so forth and then we started expanding the farm into other vegetables in other areas. I think the learning curve stays steep when you're a farmer. You learn to approach things better and learn more what to let go, what you really need to focus on because you're always overwhelmed being a farmer. Understanding those kind of priorities on the fly because they're always changing is kind of a key to getting done, what needs to be done because you're never really, going to get it all done. What we did, before we moved here, well Laura and I are both environmental scientists/geologists, so we dealt with a lot of water quality issues, contaminated sites and things like that and really became to realize, how everything, is related to everything else. As scientists, we were faced with inter-relationships of systems, of water and weather all the time. When we really started to consider some of our problems, that we face as a challenge, as our society, many of them can be traced back to agriculture and elimination of the small farms, elimination of the organic farms.

**Laura Sachs** - Sort of to back track to before we moved, I was involved in a CSA, for probably about five years as a working member. So, before that, I was also always really into gardening and stuff. We were living in Florida and the season was completely backwards there. So, I had a hard time gardening in Florida because I never got the rhythm right exactly, where your supposed to be planting in November or September for your winter. So anyhow, I really enjoyed the CSA and I really enjoyed the community aspect of it and learning more about gardening and farming and sort of a subtropical climate. Craig was interested in making that transition and moving to the Kootenays. So, we were looking for property, then this property became available and it had a working organic farm. So, I wanted a connection back to working with the soil and knowing where the food comes from that our family eats and providing them with good, fresh food. The farm, as Craig was saying was already established and we were taking on their model but it was not completely a monoculture but two, three crops that they were growing. For me, that wasn't where I wanted to go. So of course, I was planting all of the diversity that I wanted, for my family to eat. Yeah, I started thinking again, about the CSA. Craig, you had a couple of people say, "You can't do it here in the Kootenays, people don't have the money to put upfront." You know, things like that. So, I was a little bit discouraged but then I think, it was some of those food forums and some discussions also before that, with Jeanine, who had earthly organics and started to see a sale last year, that I was real inspired that I wanted to work with her originally. Thinking instead of starting something from scratch and finding members and all that because I had maybe a half dozen friends, that were interested but doing something on a bigger scale, I wasn't sure. That's how I sort of decided to jump into it. I did try to contact, some other farmers and that didn't work out so I just decided to jump into it with Craig's help this spring.

**Jon Steinman** - And you're tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner, where we are listening to the first of a series of segments that will air over the coming months. A series that tracks the creation and evolution of a Community Supported Agriculture program that I recently joined

here in the Nelson area of British Columbia. The voices you hear are those of Craig Smith and Laura Sachs of Soil Matters Farm, who being very new to farming chose to launch the CSA program this year. As they indicated, farming is not a financially rewarding job and this was certainly understood by Craig and Laura before they entered into the agricultural world. I had to ask them upon one of my visits, why would they do it, knowing how little money there is in farming?

**Craig Smith**— We only farm part time. We both kept are jobs for professional telecommuters but you kind of have to have that going, to jump into farm. There are some in this area, that are full time farmers and you make a lot of sacrifices. You could probably feed your family and stuff like that but you're not sending your kids to college I don't think, at least not now.

**Laura Sachs** — I think we learned the lesson the hard way, when we first moved here and we didn't really have, we weren't really working our jobs that wasn't really part of the plan. It was a big eye opener after the first six months, watching the money drain out of the bank accounts quickly and I didn't want to go there in the major debt cycle that a lot of farmers find themselves into. So, because of that we've kept ourselves small and made it so that we could figure out a way to juggle. I'm having a real hard time juggling it right now. It's so much easier to be outside. Especially, in beautiful weather and you've got plants that are needing to be weeded or watered or planted or harvested. And, that's just so much more immediate and concrete than sitting in front of a computer looking at data and trying to write a technical report. That's pretty dry.

**Jon Steinman** - When I first sat down with Craig and Laura to learn more about why they chose to adopt a Community Supported Agriculture model for their farm, one of the most interesting reasons had to do with the previous absence of having any connection with those purchasing their produce. As prior to launching the CSA, they were only dropping off their product at the local co-operative grocery store.

**Laura Sachs** — For me I felt like I didn't know who was eating the food I was growing. So, part of the reason I wanted to do this was, besides the fact that my family is eating good food, is to connect with the people who are eating the food and I didn't realize I needed that. As much as I really appreciate doing business with the co-op and it's a great store and the employees are great, I'm just dropping things off at a loading dock. There might be a little sign in the store, saying whose. I know they're trying to get people who actually have a farm tour coming out, with the staff, in a couple of weeks and that's really nice but I still just feel like the CSA, lets people be so much more in touch with their food. They can come out and work. I mean we had a great working party yesterday. We had probably five or six different people out here, sort of staggered from seven in the morning till noon and it was great. People are asking, "Well you know, I've got family in town. You mind if I come and bring my parents here?" you know things like that. To me, that's really community and I wanted the community part of the agriculture, not just to get them food but to have them be part of the experience.

**Jon Steinman** - As is often a component of any CSA, members are presented with the option of lending a hand in exchange for a reduced cost in membership and Laura Sachs describes what a working member is and how their CSA model differs, from others.

**Laura Sachs** – Any member can be a working member but they don't have to commit upfront, if they want to start working. Let's say, in the summer, when things might be slowing down for their schedule, they can come out and work. I like to know when they are coming out, so I make sure I have something set up for them. They can work up to half of the price off of their membership. So, they get a rebate at the end of the season. This CSA is set up different than maybe any other one, any that I've seen is that I've actually decided to offer a spring season, summer season and fall season. I did that, so people didn't feel like they had to upfront commit, to such a large financial commitment and in that way, they can pay it in installments.

**Craig Smith**– And a lot of people have vegetable gardens in the summer.

**Laura Sachs** – A lot of people have summer gardens. So, I wanted to let people that did have their big summer gardens be able to get the spring and the fall off season.

**Jon Steinman** - The hands-on farming education that a CSA can provide to its members is one that is certainly not common enough within a society that has become so disconnected to where our food is coming from. But maybe of greatest interest is the education, the presence of such a farm near a community can provide to children. And I asked Laura to comment, on how involved children have been on the farm and included in this segment are a few recordings of a day I spent with Aidan, one of the more active members at Soil Matters.

**Laura Sachs** – I think it's fantastic to have kids coming out. To me, that's part of what really makes the experience really worthwhile, to see the kids really enthusiastic. I mean, most of the kids are just really into wanting to plant food and harvest food, even the weeding.

### **CSA Clip**

**Jon Steinman** – What is that?

**Aidan** – I don't know.

**Jon Steinman** – Looks like bok choy. How many do you have to put into each bin?

**Aidan** – Hmm, one.

**Laura Sachs** - One extra bok choy, is there one extra?

**Aidan** – Yeah, too many.

**Laura Sachs** – The extra little one, was there one that was tinier than the others?



**Aidan** – Wait, should we put these in the box?

**Laura Sachs** – Yeah, that would be great.

**Laura Sachs** – We have some kids and they're all come and look at the kittens and the chicks and that's all part of it. Yeah like yesterday I had two kids out here and they're ten and thirteen, they work every bit as hard as an adult does out here and they're enthusiastic. Yeah, you had Aidan in your car the other day. It's great, because he's just really curious about everything. They want to know.

**Aidan** – Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.

**Laura Sachs** – Let's make sure everyone's got one of these other ones.

**Lady** – Ok, me and Claire, can work on this one.

**Laura Sachs** – Did you put one in for yourself too?

**Lady** – Make sure you put them in the bag.

**Laura Sachs** – Bok choy? No.

**Lady** – No, a basket.

**Aidan** – In here?

**Lady** – No. This one already has one like that. So, go find some bins that don't have one.

**Jon Steinman** - What are these right here? Are these onions?

**Aidan** – Spring onions.

**Laura Sachs** – I'm going to have the co-op's staff tour. They are going to come out here, in a couple of weeks. It's going to be the staff, with their kids and to me that's great. I would almost rather have that and let the kids go ahead and let them pick a few carrots. To them that's just wow! I think they see that they're in touch. They see the miracle that food is. Whereas I think when we get older and "Yeah ok, that's a broccoli plant, big deal." But there it's the food and to let them connect with the food that they are seeing here and are harvesting. Then go home and cook and eat it or eat it raw. They can have that sort of circle there where they can see where their food is coming from.

**Jon Steinman** - As I joined the farm and their community supported agricultural program back in April I have since received a plentiful box of produce each week. Which this week, as an

example, included radishes, carrots, cabbage, lettuce, broccoli, basil, cucumber, summer squash, zucchini, kale, and parsley. All of which were grown less than thirty kilometers from my home.

At the beginning of the season, farmers Craig Smith and Laura Sachs, hosted a potluck of all the members. Where we learned how integral they both wanted members to be in determining the future direction of the farm. A proposition that instilled a real sense of empowerment through which I could take control of the food that is and could be available to me. And in closing out today's broadcast Craig and Laura speak about this member involvement.

**Craig Smith** – Well some members, they have more time than others to work on the farm. Though the people who are able to work on the farm a lot, they really start to learn how we do things then they have very valuable input. We're not farmers and a lot of our members have all sorts of experience growing vegetables or grew up on farms and things like that. They have all sorts of ideas and we really like to have those ideas.

**Laura Sachs** – Yeah, and I'd certainly like for next year, to get more member input on what we are growing and timing, things like that. This year I pretty much came up with the plan myself and the early days of March or late February, trying to come up with a sort of a matrix, of what's growing, what we'll be harvesting. And, I did that just based on, what I kind of like or what I just generally crops but I certainly would love to have input and I'm welcoming it. I did send out a survey to people. I think I was just mentioning I was just planting parsnips or I am going to plant some parsnips because that was the members least favorite vegetable. Not planting lots of parsnips but I haven't grown parsnips before, so I want to see what the hypes about. Yeah, let's try some parsnips and let's figure out how people can eat parsnips and enjoy them or maybe not. So yeah, a lot of education on what to do with things, what to do with some of the vegetables that we are growing. Right now there is lots of greens, although that is quickly changing with this warm weather. People have been sharing recipes and so that they can come up with some new ways to eat some of the food that they may not normally be eating. I've had a lot of compliments on the greens and so I don't think I am overwhelming them. I'm worried about overwhelming people to much with all of it. You get a whole box of greens every week, for four weeks in a row and what are you going to do with them? But, it's been good and our bodies need that in the springtime. So, I think that that's a good thing.

**Jon Steinman** - That was Craig Smith and Laura Sachs of Soil Matters Farm located near Nelson, British Columbia. And, you can expect more recordings from the evolution of this Community Supported Agriculture program in the months ahead and you can stay posted to our website and follow this series by visiting [cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://cjly.net/deconstructingdinner).

### ***ending theme***

**Jon Steinman** - 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 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 [cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://cjly.net/deconstructingdinner) or by dialing 250-352-9600.