

**Show Transcript**  
**Deconstructing Dinner**  
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**Title: TRADE AGREEMENTS OVER DINNER**

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**Transcript: Pat Yama**

**JON STEINMAN:** "Trade Agreements Over Dinner" is the title of today's edition of Deconstructing Dinner, a weekly one-hour radio program and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman, your host for the next hour.

It's often a topic we like to avoid - trade agreements. Those convoluted acronyms that fill any political banter, from NAFTA to GATTs to WTOs, it's enough to just not pay attention. But it's this very lack of attention that is paid to such trade agreements and governing bodies who decide upon these agreements that allow them to proceed and influence our lives without much criticism. This program Deconstructing Dinner was not only created to better understand our food, but to also provide a more accessible window into *other* important global issues, which, for the case of today's broadcast, are trade agreements.

How food systems and agriculture are influenced by trade is probably brought up on virtually every broadcast, but never have we tackled this topic head on, whereby we look into how trade agreements affect the fruits on our trees, the animals in our fields and the food on our plates.

The lack of attention Canadians pay to trade agreements can certainly become evident when exploring the impacts that NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement has had on the hamburgers, muffins and apple pies throughout the continent. But what is no doubt the focus of today's broadcast, is a recently signed agreement between the provinces of British Columbia and Alberta, and the details of this agreement, or lack of them, are a real concern for Canadians. This agreement is known as TILMA, or the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement, one in which has been referred to as an agreement that could effectively erase the borders between provinces, and reduce the ability of provincial and municipal governments to act in the best interests of the people. And while this is only an agreement between the two westernmost provinces, Saskatchewan is considering joining into the agreement, and today, on the date of this broadcast, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2007, our federal government will be calling upon *all* provinces to essentially follow suit.

How the TILMA will affect Canadian agriculture and the food security of Canadians will be the focus of this segment later on today's broadcast. And British Columbia Member of the Legislature for the Nelson-Creston electoral district, Corky Evans will share his insights into this topic. Corky is also the NDP Agriculture Critic here in the province of British Columbia. Also joining the program will be the Member of Parliament for the B.C. Southern Interior riding Alex Atamanenko, who is also the NDP Agriculture Critic, but federally. Deconstructing Dinner is lucky to be broadcasting from such a agriculturally *critical* riding. Alex also recently tabled two bills in the House of Commons, one of which calls for a ban on Terminator Seed technology, with the other calling for mandatory labeling of genetically modified foods. Pretty exciting news and we will briefly discuss these bills. But the focus of my interview with Alex Atamanenko will be

on how *NAFTA* has affected Canadian agriculture and food. And also joining the show will be Stuart Trew, the Communications Administrator for the Council of Canadians, Canada's largest citizen's organization founded in 1985. I spoke with Stuart about yet another acronym, the SPP, otherwise known as the Security and Prosperity Partnership, seen to be an extension of *NAFTA*, and a partnership that is being debated, not among the public or elected officials, but among some of the most powerful corporations in North America. Upon learning more about these agreements and partnerships, the idea that we currently live in a democracy may swiftly be tossed out the back door along with the scraps off your dinner plate.

*increase music and fade out*

Before jumping in to today's show, I would like to place myself into somewhat of an alarmist role in saying that I strongly encourage you to stay tuned for the latter half of today's broadcast when segments of an interview on the topic of TILMA will be featured. This newly signed agreement between British Columbia and Alberta has been so secretive and obscure, that I consider it absolutely essential that *all* Canadians learn about this, as the mainstream media has yet to tackle this topic head on. The information you will hear during that segment is so shocking, that TILMA effectively sounds as though it's a joke. And throughout circles of critics, the fact that the agreement came into effect on April Fools Day of this year, only backed up such a suggestion. But the agreement is real, and it puts this whole idea of local food, agricultural land reserves, environmental protection and food security into question. And if you are unable to catch the second half of today's one-hour broadcast, it will be archived on our website at [cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://cjly.net/deconstructingdinner).

*soundbite*

As mentioned just earlier, the North American Free Trade Agreement, otherwise known as *NAFTA*, and global trade agreements are a recurring topic here on Deconstructing Dinner. We have seen how *NAFTA* for one has concentrated the wealth within the agricultural and food sectors into a handful of pockets. We have seen how *NAFTA* has destroyed the ability for family farmers to compete with the industrial food system. And we have seen how opening borders is an invitation to deregulation, whereby the protections designed for Canadians disappear or are reduced as we have seen in recent months with the limits of pesticide residues in Canada having recently been raised.

In January 2006, we aired The Election Show, when I was joined by the then NDP candidate for the federal riding of B.C. Southern Interior, Alex Atamanenko. Shortly following Alex being elected to represent this riding in Ottawa, NDP leader Jack Layton appointed Alex as the party's Agriculture Critic. A convenient position given he represents the riding where Deconstructing Dinner is produced. Alex has most recently been in the spotlight since his May 31<sup>st</sup> introduction of a private members bill that calls for a ban on Terminator Seed Technology, a topic that coincidentally was featured a few weeks after his first appearance here on Deconstructing Dinner. Alex seemed like a perfect candidate to provide some critical analysis on how *NAFTA* has affected the dinners of Canadians.

He was generous enough to find the time to speak to me over the phone from Ottawa, in spite of him battling a mild illness. But as he stressed following our conversation, "when I get talking about something I'm passionate about, I forget the fact that I'm sick."

Alex first shares his thoughts on the negative impact *NAFTA* has had on Canadian fruit and vegetable growers.

**ALEX ATAMANENKO:** NAFTA hasn't been the best agreement for our vegetable and fruit producers. For example, before NAFTA, we use to, I keep using this example, we use to have over 2,000 onion producers in B.C. and now we only have maybe half a dozen. It's my understanding that before NAFTA we had in-season tariffs so that people who grew carrots and other vegetables would be able to sell their produce without having to worry about the influx of produce from the United States, in particular. And now with NAFTA this has gone by the wayside so we have this free-flow of produce back and forth. And one area it has hurt is our riding specifically is the idea of dumping American apples from Washington State. Dumping means producing them for under the cost of production. And what's happened in the past is that our apple producers tried trying to make a living and American apples are dumped at a very cheap price and then that lowered the prices and our people can't compete. So that's some of the negative aspects of NAFTA.

**JON STEINMAN:** As has also been discussed on Deconstructing Dinner, Canada does maintain protections for a number of our agricultural sectors. When these protections are designed to prevent the free market from competing with Canadian farmers and Canadian food, there is certainly opposition to such protections both from across the border and around the world. And Alex Atamanenko shares his thoughts on the threats facing Canada's supply management model.

**ALEX ATAMANENKO:** Supply management is basically a tool that guarantees our Canadian producers access to a Canadian market. And there's no government interfering, there's not government subsidies. It's basically a controlled market so that the people who produce eggs, milk, and cheese, and dairy products can have a market. Other countries don't want us to do this because it prohibits because under this system, for example in the area of chicken production, we have a limit – there's a limit of, I believe it's 7.5% of our total production, we are allowed to bring in imports without tariffs from NAFTA countries. And after that, there's over-quota tariffs and I think it's in the neighbourhood of 248% which then, protects our poultry industry.

Now somehow in the last while, the level has been slit into 8.4%. The chicken producers are wondering why this has been allowed to happen. Our competitors would love us to not have any limits so they could freely flood our market with any kind of milk or cheese or eggs or any kind of produce. So that pressure is on and our Minister of Agriculture has made a commitment that supply management is not on the table. And yet a recent press release on supply management, he's saying that this ... no negotiations stands is kind of leaving us out of the process. So, my questioning and other people are questioning if on the one hand the Minister says we're protecting our supply management sector but on the other hand he's going to negotiations, how can you go negotiate if you don't put anything on the table. And then if you put something on the table obviously there are going to have to be concessions. And that's a concern to the people who are probably the only ones that are really making any money in our agriculture industry is those that are protected by supply management.

**JON STEINMAN:** In just a moment we will hear from Stuart Trew of the Council of Canadians, who I spoke with on the topic of a new partnership among NAFTA nations known as the SPP, the Security and Prosperity Partnership. One that is seen to be an extension of NAFTA, and one that is referred to as being a tool to make NAFTA work. Given the negative impacts NAFTA has had on the food supply of Canadians, it's a concern to know that there is a partnership designed to strengthen this free trade agreement. Alex Atamanenko recently referred to the SPP in a column he authored on the recent increase of the levels of pesticide residues found on the fruits and vegetables in Canadian grocery stores. And he suggests that NAFTA and the SPP are the impetus for such changes.

**ALEX ATAMANENKO:** Well you know on the one hand we want to support our producers who are crying for more, a lot of them more harmonization because what happens is that often our farmers and our food growers for example, aren't allowed to use a certain pesticide. And yet, that pesticide is being used across the border and then we import the product that has these pesticides used. So, that's not fair. So they're saying we should have access to some of these pesticides and there's ways of getting around that, they're able to through a program called O News program on a one time basis, get some of these pesticides. But that doesn't answer that whole question – how far do we go to harmonize all our regulations before we fall in with regulations that may be of a lower standard than us. You know from some of the research we've done, there's quite a corporate influence over the U.S. environmental protection agency which regulates pesticides. There's something like 60 leading American scientists including Nobel Laureates and University presidents that have formally protested the misuse of science under the Bush administration.

So here we have regulations, which are being lowered and yet we want to harmonize with them because we're trying to compete with the industry across the border. So, what should we be doing? I think we have to do is if we're harmonizing we should be perhaps harmonizing with stricter limits such as the European Union has. Another thing we probably should be doing is if we allow produce that comes in that uses these pesticide levels that maybe we shouldn't be doing that until their pesticide level meets our standard.

One fruit grower told me that the Americans now have access to a lot more environmentally friendly chemicals that they use whereas we have to rely on toxic ones because we don't have any kind of agreement because this environmentally friendly one hasn't been approved in Canada. So, it becomes quite complicated. But I think the bottom line is that we have to ensure that we have the levels that we maintain strict levels and standards in our country and at the same time allow our producers to compete in this world market.

**JON STEINMAN:** And this is Deconstructing Dinner, and today's broadcast titled "Trade Agreements Over Dinner." I was joined over the phone by NDP Agriculture Critic Alex Atamanenko, also the Member of Parliament for the riding of B.C. Southern Interior.

Alex has recently fallen into the spotlight following a number of private member bills that he has tabled, and while the topic does divert away from today's focus on free trade agreements, I couldn't help but briefly speak with Alex on the first bill that he tabled on May 31<sup>st</sup> - Bill C448, one that calls for a national ban on Terminator Seed Technology. Now for any listeners who did not catch our February 2006 feature on this topic, Terminator Seed Technology refers to the genetic modification of plants so that they render sterile seeds upon harvest. This ensure that farmers are unable to save seeds from year to year and must rely on the market to supply them. Alex Atamanenko has worked with a number of groups both here in British Columbia and across the country to table this Bill introduced on May 31<sup>st</sup>, and Alex first explained what a private members bill is, and whether such a bill will result in a ban on this questionable technology that has yet to be commercialized.

**ALEX ATAMANENKO:** Members of Parliament can table any amount of legislation they want. So, I've decided this is important so we've done research, we've worked with the research staff, we've got all the wording down and I basically presented this private member's bill in the House of Commons. Now it doesn't mean that it's going to be voted on because there's over 300 members in the House of Commons and we have kind of a lottery system that is drawn when our name come up. And when our name comes up then we can take any of the private members bills that we've presented or tabled and have that one up for a vote and discussion. I think I'm

somewhere around number 170 (chuckles) so it would be a long time before I'll have a chance to do this. But, nevertheless what it does do it's a first step. It increases the awareness. It makes people aware that this is happening. It's given a stimulus to people to start writing letters to the Prime Minister and as of now there's been over a 1,000 letters, e-mails sent to the Prime Minister in support of this bill. And there's a movement now across Canada to try to make politicians aware that this is important. And what can happen is that the government in power can then choose to take this bill and introduce it as it's piece of legislation if it sees fit.

**JON STEINMAN:** As Alex suggests that the process of seeing Bill C448 voted on works upon somewhat of a lottery system, I did inquire into whether public pressure can help push the process along, and his response also sheds light on where Canada's political parties stand on this given issue.

**ALEX ATAMANENKO:** I think it's crucial now. When I gave my press conference I had the support of the Bloc Québécois Member of Parliament André Perron which shows that his party supports this. I was unable to get support from the Liberals although some individual members do support this bill, the party has not been entirely in agreement with this. And the Conservatives, the current position of the government is that they don't have a ban on terminator technology. They want to be able to look at case-by-case field test trials if they come up even though there is a moratorium right now in place. So. I think the key now for the public is to contact the members of those political parties and try to get them on board so that they will see that really this is what Canada wants. You know Brazil and India have banned this technology. It's about who controls seeds – is it the farmer or is it the multi-national corporations. That's what it's all about.

**JON STEINMAN:** And more information on the Terminator Seeds bill tabled by Atamanenko will be linked to from the Deconstructing Dinner website at [cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://cjly.net/deconstructingdinner), where there will also be a link to our February 2006 broadcast on the topic titled "Sterile Seeds."

In nearing the end of my conversation with NDP Agriculture Critic Alex Atamanenko, we return to the topic of this segment, NAFTA, and it's effect on Canada's food. And I asked Alex what the position of the NDP is on this topic of NAFTA.

**ALEX ATAMANENKO:** We believe that nothing is set in stone and there are certain areas that maybe we should be relooking – NAFTA and specifically Chapter 11 and specifically in regard to the free-flow of energy north and south. We feel that this can be or could have a potential threat to our independence, to our security. You know we're very concerned lately and we have been about the loss of manufacturing jobs as a result of these trade agreements. So, we believe that if we have to relook after then we should.

**JON STEINMAN:** And in closing out my conversation with Alex Atamanenko he ended with these final words.

**ALEX ATAMANENKO:** We have to, at some point in time, come up with a vision. And we have to have some direction from the top that decides which way we're going to go. You know our committee also spent two days in Washington, D.C. talking with American farm organizations and members of the Congress and their Department of Agriculture. The Americans, they don't care about these agreements. They're doing what's best for their country and they're finding ways of getting around them and I think that we should be doing the same. That we should just determine what is the direction we want to go. If it's food security. If it's being able to feed our nation with as much local produce as we possibly can, that we have to put policies in place to do that. Look at this apple dumping situation. In the past, apples have been dumped. We go to a joint

commission and by the time that gets in place and money is spent, months have gone by and farmers have lost money. If we had some teeth in our bosses we could say – well, apples are dumped today, tomorrow we slap on a fine. And then you, Americans, you go to the commission and you try to work it out. The same as they’ve done with our soft wood lumber for example. And people say – well it’s the department controls and then you can’t exchange, you can’t make any change. Well I would like to submit that there is a political will and a direction, then we have the capacity to determine what our future is going to be in the area of agriculture.

**JON STEINMAN:** And that was Alex Atamanenko, the NDP Agriculture Critic and Member of Parliament for the riding of B.C. Southern Interior. Alex spoke to me over the phone from Ottawa, and he first appeared on Deconstructing Dinner in January 2006.

You can stay tuned to today’s broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner titled “Trade Agreements Over Dinner” as we will shortly learn more about the Security and Prosperity Partnership, an extension of NAFTA that bypasses the public and elected officials in determining the future of Canadian food.

**MUSICAL BREAK:**

*After the NAFTA disaster  
After the deal went down  
They say we’ll all have it made  
When the arms of free trade  
Distributes the wealth around.*

*After the NAFTA disaster  
After the legislation passed  
The net result decreed by public default  
Devalued the working class.*

*After NAFTA  
I think you’ll have to  
Conclude the same as me  
That well was meant for  
The working poor is a  
Boom for industry.*

*After the NAFTA disaster  
I fear a flood of contraband  
And everything from drugs to bugs  
Will inundate the land.*

*After the NAFTA disaster  
And we’re all playing the same game  
If one should want to cheat in order to compete  
We’ll all have to do the same.*

*(chorus)*

**JON STEINMAN:** And that was After the Nafta Disasta, off the album If This Record Survives Me by musician Raymond Schultz.

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, your host for today's broadcast tilted "Trade Agreements over Dinner," a look into how trade agreements affect the food supply of Canadians. This is a topic that often sneaks its way into almost every broadcast of the program, but today we take apart such influential agreements and learn more about how they influence our glasses of wine, our stalks of celery, our containers of yoghurt, and, well, our food.

I encourage listeners to stay tuned for the last half of the program when we will hear segments of a conversation I had with British Columbia's *provincial* NDP Agriculture Critic, Corky Evans, on the topic of a newly signed trade agreement between the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia. An agreement that may soon spread its way into other provinces, unless, Canadians simply learn more about it. And I say this, because the TILMA or the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement, seems to bypass the process of democracy, and restrict the ability for provincial and municipal governments to protect the people they represent, you and I. And I say "*seems to*," because the agreement has been put in place with such secrecy and lack of dialogue, that even Corky Evans, the representative for the people in the provincial electoral district of Nelson-Creston, remains quite uncertain as to what TILMA really is.

But before we get to that segment, we can connect both NAFTA and TILMA to what is known as the SPP, yet another acronym referring to the Security and Prosperity Partnership signed in 2005 by the leaders of the three North American nations. The SPP is seen as an extension of the North American Free Trade Agreement, yet does not involve the public, *or*, elected officials. TILMA, is also seen to be a precursor to the very motives of the SPP, and that is, to bring down borders and create what is essentially a North American Union. Now we can only imagine how such agreements and partnerships will affect our food, and I spoke over the phone with Stuart Trew, the Communications Administrator for the Council of Canadians. Formed in 1985, the Council is Canada's largest citizen's organization, working to protect Canadian independence by promoting progressive policies on fair trade, clean water, energy security, public health care, and other issues of social and economic concern. The organization is led by the well-known Maude Barlow, and they have recently launched a campaign titled "Integrate This." One that is set upon educating Canadians on the topic of Deep Integration, that is the ongoing pursuit to integrate Canada with the United States.

I spoke with Stuart over the phone from his office in Ottawa, and when this new Security and Prosperity Partnership is seen as an extension of NAFTA, and when the Council of Canadians has been much more involved with *this* agreement, Stuart first explains what the organization's position is on NAFTA.

**STUART TREW:** The Council of Canadians basically comes out of the FTA and the NAFTA struggle. Currently we still have a big problem with NAFTA, we see that Canada is losing jobs to the U.S. and Mexico. It's a fact and it's the reason why actually a few thousand workers showed up on Parliament Hill at the end of May to demand a national manufacturing strategy. But the common line about NAFTA is always in that it's been an indisputable boom for the Canadian economy and the Canadian people. But our position is this just isn't true and not only does the statistics show that middle class and low income families wages have actually stagnated since the late '80s when the FTA was signed but trade with the U.S. is actually down unless you exempt things like oil and gas and other natural resources. So that old saying about Canada becoming hewers of wood and drawers of water is basically becoming truer every day. We've also seen a widening gap between the rich and the poor in both Canada and the United States. It's an incredible gap which is kind of strange if NAFTA was suppose to make everybody more

prosperous but wealth has been highly concentrated into few hands after NAFTA or since NAFTA. We saw a good example of this earlier this year when the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, they put this into perspective when it reported that by 12:13 a.m. on January 1<sup>st</sup>, Canada's 100 richest CEOs had already pocketed what it would take middle wage earners the rest of the year to make. So we have this growing class of working poor in Canada as well as where high paying unionized jobs are kind of heading south to Mexico while we're getting part-time work-force expanded.

**JON STEINMAN:** In learning more about the Security and Prosperity Partnership and how it acts as an extension of NAFTA, I visited the official American website for the partnership at spp.gov. The introduction reads as follows. "The SPP provides the framework to ensure that North America is the safest and best place to live and do business," and Stuart responds.

**STUART TREW:** Well as we understand it I guess it's an executive level agreement that was ratified in March 2005 by the previous Prime Minister, Paul Martin and President Bush and the Mexican President, Vicente Fox. And it was done without any legislative debate or public consultation or anything and it kind of sets out a broad agenda for a continental, economic and security integration. Things like a common security perimeter, common immigration policies, there's been some discussions related to the SPP about common external tariff for or that kind of thing, which would essentially get Canada's independent, international trade policy. But we don't see it at all as being a way to kind of increase prosperity or security. In fact more likely will decrease the security of a lot of Canadians and also the prosperity of quite a few Canadians.

**JON STEINMAN:** The Council of Canadians has proclaimed that the SPP is the end of Canadian sovereignty and democracy as we know it, and I asked Stuart to expand on what is a very, heavy statement. His response introduces the influence on this partnership by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, led by Thomas D'Aquino, who is acknowledged as one of the architects of NAFTA.

**STUART TREW:** The reason why we got into sovereignty and democracy is because we do see it as very much a corporate-driven process that at no point has had any public input or public participation. It was initially the idea of a small group of Canadian business leaders and they've been kind of since 9/11 pushing this idea of closer integration, a security perimeter, that kind of thing, in order to keep the border open to trade. They got really scared that the border would actually be shut again in case of another event and they wanted to make sure it would never happen again. So they thought how are we going to do this? We're going to basically give the United States whatever it wants in order to keep that border open.

And since then it has been only a corporate-driven process. We have the CCCE putting out a security and prosperity initiative document in 2003. We have later on some of the same people becoming involved in this task force and the future of North America which was put out by the Council on Foreign Relations in the United States but with Tom D'Aquino's involvement and participation in the final document. And then we finally in 2006 the creation of this North American Competitiveness Council which essentially formalizes the role of this group of Canadian business people who basically created the idea of this Security and Prosperity Partnership in the first place. It formalizes their role in directing the future progress of the SPP and so now they have a formal role seat at the table and they're basically running the show as we see it. So, the SPP is completely antithetical to democracy. I mean there was a formal role for the big business, no role at all for the public and only a cursory role for parliamentarians who are basically being briefed on issues as the executive in each country feels they need to know about.



**JON STEINMAN:** I did look more into the structure of this SPP and who within Canada and the United States are influencing such a partnership. Stuart Trew did refer to the Canadian Council of Chief Executives led by Thomas D'Aquino, who, coincidentally, is a native of Nelson, British Columbia, right here in this small community of 10,000 where Deconstructing Dinner is recorded. The CCCE represents the most powerful corporations in the country, with member companies administering 3.2 trillion dollars in assets and over \$750 billion in annual revenues. Needless to say, an influential organization. When the SPP was first established, the three governments created the NACC – the North American Competitiveness Council, designed to collect guidance from the private sector. Here in Canada, Stephen Harper appointed the Chief Executive Officers of ten Canadian companies to the council, all of whom are members of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives. On the Canadian contingent of the NACC is the CEO of Suncor Energy – one of the major companies behind the Alberta tar sands, the country's leading emitter of greenhouse gases. On the American side, CEOs from the Campbell Soup Company, Walmart, Procter and Gamble, Chevron and weapons manufacturer Lockheed Martin are influencing the partnership. As the Council of Canadians suggests that the SPP will mark the end of Canadian sovereignty and democracy as we know it, it's probably important to look at who then will be controlling Canada, if not the citizens and elected officials of this country. In the case of food, and if we look at the make up of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, we see member companies representing agriculture and food such as Agrium, Cargill, Dow Chemical, DuPont, The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, Clearwater Fine Foods, Keg Restaurants, Maple Leaf Foods and McCain Foods.

#### *soundbite*

In exploring how the Security and Prosperity Partnership among North American countries will affect our food and agriculture, we can begin by looking at the recent threats to Canada's supply of fresh water. The Council of Canadians has taken this issue very seriously, especially since April 2007, when they obtained a leaked document produced by a Washington think tank, revealing that business and government leaders in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico are actively discussing bulk water exports. They met in Calgary on April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007 to discuss the issue in a closed-door meeting as part of a larger discussion on North American integration. Water is of course central to the irrigation of Canada's agricultural systems, and in the United States, through their mismanagement of water resources in California agriculture and in the relentless expansion of cities in the middle of deserts such as Las Vegas for one, our neighbours to the south are getting thirsty, and the situation is seen as critical. We already see how the thirst for Canadian oil sees most of our reserves heading south, so what about our water?

In 2006 the British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Lands published a report titled "B.C.'s Food Self Reliance – Can B.C.'s Farmers Feed our Growing Population." The report indicates that the province currently produces only 48% of all the meat, dairy, grains, fruits and vegetables currently consumed. And that in order to produce a healthy diet for the projected population by 2025, farmers will need to increase the amount of land with access to irrigation by 49% over 2005 levels. So water security is a serious concern. On a positive note, just recently on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007, the House of Commons voted 132-108, calling for the exclusion of water from NAFTA, with the Conservatives and a few Liberals voting against it.

But while protecting our water from bulk exports may come across as a sign of greed, Stuart Trew of the Council of Canadians indicates that the concern lies around the terms with which interest for Canadian water is being presented, and the lack of conservation initiatives with respect to its usage.

**STUART TREW:** We don't want to come across as saying we will not give our water to anybody but the kind of terms under which the United States would like to get access to water, it's all in the lines of market. It's all in the lines of paying for water and for a large part, continue unsustainable practices, right? Like we know that the United States is getting thirsty. We know that aquifers are drying up and they're relying increasingly on ground water for their supplies and it's nearing situation critical in much of western United States. And much of the problem does lie in things like mass agriculture and other industrial uses for water. These can drain it or they can make it undrinkable. So, we also know that climate change is going to exacerbate this problem. There is some discussion in the U.S. around conservation but there is much more energy going into discussion on things like technology, desalination and you know, technology is the solution to everything. They want to clean up dirty water and they want to be able to move water by pipelines to places where it's needed, right? And we see that's where Canada comes in. Bush has already said that he would like to discuss with Canada at any time whenever they want to start talking about water exports and although we only have 7% of the world's useable water, for some reason the figure of 20% keeps getting around. And so this increasing pressure in the U.S. for Canada to come to the table and discuss bulk water exports and other diversions into the U.S. on market terms. As in we want to pay for it, please let us buy it. And that's the problem we see. We need to see conservation. We need to see water as water considered a human right internationally so that it can't be kind of bought and sold in this casual way.

**JON STEINMAN:** In closing out my conversation with Stuart, we ended on the topic of how food is an ideal tool to raise awareness of what are often pretty boring topics – trade agreements. As mentioned at the beginning of today's broadcast, the lack of interest most Canadians pay to trade agreements, has allowed for such resounding impacts on our food and water supply. The recent changes to the limits of pesticide residues on food is just one good example of how the Security and Prosperity Partnership will affect Canadians. Changes to pesticide regulations have been fought for since 1996 as part of NAFTA, and the SPP is now trying to fast-track the process. In a 2006 report released by the SPP, they identified stricter residue limits as "barriers to trade." As listeners may recall our November 2006 broadcast which featured the topic of pesticide residues on our food, a David Suzuki Foundation report had discovered that Canada's limits were already *well* above those which exist in the more seemingly conscious, European Union. And Stuart ended with these remarks.

**STUART TREW:** We've come across this kind of issue every now and then when we're talking about how do we talk to these people about this. You can talk about the harmonization of agricultural standards until you are blue in the face but it doesn't mean anything to us people, to us Canadians until they hear something like that. The fact that Canada has just increased the amount of pesticides it's going to allow on certain products and produce from the United States in order to match the U.S. standard. So that means because of the SPP, Canadians will now be ingesting more pesticides. And there are plans and these are carried over from NAFTA, for the most part but there are plans with the SPP to harmonize all kinds of agricultural standards on meat, poultry, eggs, milk, and other produce. So, you can see that when you start doing things like this, to an extent you lose control over the regulations you have on your food. You lose control over what you're eating. And so the SPP is about market solution. We have this kind of harmonization with a government that is about market solutions, the corporations voluntarily abiding by rules instead of strong regulation and that's where you're going to see problems with food and drugs and that kind of thing. It seems like an irresponsible thing to do for the sake of integration just to hand over the market of what you're putting into your body.

**JON STEINMAN:** And that was Stuart Trew, the Communications Administrator for the Council of Canadians, Canada's largest citizen's organization, founded in 1985. Stuart spoke to me from

his office in Ottawa. And I encourage you to check out their Integrate This campaign to learn more about this topic of deep integration with the United States. And you can do so by visiting their website at [canadians.org](http://canadians.org).

### *soundbite*

And you're tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner, a weekly program produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. You can learn more about this program, today's topic, and access archived broadcasts by visiting our website at [cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://cjly.net/deconstructingdinner).

Today's broadcast is titled "Trade Agreements Over Dinner," where we have now explored how NAFTA and the new Security and Prosperity Partnership have affected and will affect the meals of Canadians. In this last segment, we will learn of what I can only call a shocking and secretive trade agreement signed between the provinces of British Columbia and Alberta. And this agreement connects in with this SPP, as it seems to essentially be a precursor to what the SPP is calling for, and that is a removal of borders that prevent the easy administration of trade, and the easy acquisition of profits. The agreement is known as TILMA, or the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement. TILMA came into force on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007 and the lack of public knowledge on this agreement and its possible repercussions for Canadians, has left many thinking it's just an April Fools joke. Critics of the TILMA are greatly concerned on how this agreement will affect agriculture and food security within the two provinces, but all Canadians should pay attention to this issue, as the federal government is currently pushing for all provinces to adopt similar measures.

Here in Nelson, British Columbia we are fortunate enough to have a Member of Parliament representing us who also happens to be the NDP agriculture critic Alex Atamanenko, who we heard from just earlier, but Nelson is also represented in the provincial legislature by Corky Evans, who is also the NDP Agriculture Critic for the province. Corky has represented the Nelson-Creston electoral district on and off since 1985. He has on two occasions come very close to becoming the Premier of British Columbia and he *has* acted as the Minister of Agriculture Land and Fisheries.

When I first sent Corky an idea of what kind of questions I was hoping to ask for my interview with him, he responded by indicating that he didn't really know the answer to really any of them, and it's not because he's not paying attention, but TILMA has *not* been discussed among elected officials, and has thereby been implemented without *any* discourse among the citizens of the two provinces. I invited Corky onto the program to share his thoughts on how TILMA will affect food and agriculture in Alberta and B.C. and perhaps the rest of the country, as it *seems* as though the protection of agricultural land, the environment and supporting local food production is under attack. And he first describes what TILMA, *seems* to be.

**CORKY EVANS:** The acronym TILMA stands for the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement. It is a trade agreement signed by British Columbia and Alberta which came into effect last April and was apparently negotiated the year before. Which essentially does something which has never happened to Canada before to my knowledge and that is give corporations and businesses a huge giant step forward in their right to be treated as citizens and have the right to sue if anything gets in the way of money being profitable on both sides of the Alberta and British Columbia border. Traditionally governments had the right to govern and you know, you make laws and regulations so that food is safe or land is looked after or municipalities can organize or zone themselves for the kind of growth they want. And the function of government is to take care of the aspirations and needs of the people. The Trade, Investment Labour Mobility Agreement

appears to decrease the power of government to represent citizens and increase the power of money to be treated on both sides of the provincial border, the same. And wherever there is conflict over regulations or land use or something, this agreement appears to be supreme to provincial law and give businesses and corporations the right to sue for anything that impedes their ability to make a profit regardless of the wishes of the public.

**JON STEINMAN:** As it may create a level of discomfort to know that elected politicians are unaware of the details of what TILMA really is, and hence the constant reference to things *appearing* to be so, I asked Corky what sort of dialogue has taken place and is taking place with regards to this interprovincial trade agreement.

**CORKY EVANS:** Well it would be best or most honest to say no dialogue. I am an elected member of the legislature and I had never heard of the TILMA until the government announced it had done the deal. In other words, it would appear that we have entered into an agreement, a huge far-reaching agreement beyond anything I think any of us could imagine, leveling the provinces of B.C. and Alberta without any conversation at the parliamentary level about whether it was a good idea to do so. And then, having entered into the agreement, we had no debate on what it means. So there is no point at which you can go and look up an answer on the record and see what is the government's position or explanation of what the agreement means. The government even introduced a Bill to bring parts of the TILMA in this last spring session and then withdrew the Bill, so the agreement is in place but there was no moment of debate. And because there was closure imposed on the Spring session and there was no Fall session or just three days, there hasn't even been a lot of time for simple questions. So, I'm embarrassed to say this because of course it's my job to represent the people, but I would be totally out of line if I pretended that I or any other elected person understood what the TILMA means. It's an enigma which will be tested first in courts rather than in democracy.

**JON STEINMAN:** Critics of TILMA have been pointing to a comment made by Todd Hirsch of the Canada West Foundation, a right-wing think tank based in Winnipeg. Hirsch was quoted in 2006 as saying that "within TILMA are the seeds of a true economic union, an erasing of the provincial boundary for all purposes except voting and the colour of the plates." I asked B.C.'s NDP Agriculture Critic Corky Evans if he thinks this is true.

**CORKY EVANS:** I don't know if I agree. It's interesting that that is the opinion of the right-wing. I would certainly say that I think the TILMA has the possibility of erasing the differences between provinces except the name of the province, at least for the business class. And to give you some examples, Alberta is a fairly flat place with its own ecosystem. It tends to be like prairie ecosystem and British Columbia is a very mountainous place with rain forests and deserts and rocky mountains and all kinds of ecosystems and so government have very different regulations about how you manage that land and develop cities and how you take care of the water and what have you. And it's always been. One's called Alberta and one's called British Columbia and they're different and that's good. That lends to diversity. But the TILMA would appear to say that a business on either side of the border has to have the same rules on both sides of the border so it would appear that it would wipe out the differences of ecology and geography and landscape. And everyone worries. I think both people who care about land whether they're right-wing people or left-wing people. It doesn't matter their political ideology, people think that this might move to the lowest common denominator. A business in one province who is told that the regulations in the other province are more onerous would over time have the right to take the government to court and win and wipe out the regulations that that province put in place to manage its land and people.

**JON STEINMAN:** With respect to agriculture and food, there is great concern that British Columbia's Agricultural Land Reserve which protects agricultural land from any use other than growing food, presents a barrier to economic development, and is thereby threatened by the TILMA trade agreement. I did visit the official TILMA website at [tilma.ca](http://tilma.ca), where it indicates that provincial governments do not expect TILMA to affect land use decisions with respect to agricultural land reserves or parks. Now I found this rather perplexing, that the provincial governments were able to come to such a decision when we hear first hand from a member of the legislature and the NDP Agriculture Critic that no official dialogue has even taken place. And Corky Evans comments.

**CORKY EVANS:** I have no idea. I asked the Minister of Agriculture was he part of discussions prior to signing the TILMA about how it would work and his answer was "no." And I asked him if it would affect the Agricultural Land Reserve and he answered "no." But I have no idea how he knows that. What I think is that they've signed an agreement which will not be worked out by cabinets or legislatures or parliament. It will be worked out by courts or tribunals appointed with the power of courts and over time, may take decades, it would appear that the decision-making power of a society will evolve away from parliament and the Minister of Agriculture with the Agricultural Land Commission to these courts or tribunals who will decide whether or not a decision is injurious. Just like the GATT, just like the free trade agreement, we are giving away the power of government to courts and whoever has the most money will probably decide the answer to their question because they can afford the lawyers to prove their case.

**JON STEINMAN:** And this is Deconstructing Dinner where we are listening to segments from my conversation with Corky Evans, the MLA for the electoral district of Nelson-Creston, and British Columbia's NDP Agriculture Critic. Today's show is titled "Trade Agreements Over Dinner," and we are currently learning of a new interprovincial agreement between Alberta and B.C. known as TILMA. Critics of the agreement suggest that local food security is threatened by such an agreement. One example of such threats is where municipalities have begun implementing local procurement strategies whereby policies are being put into place to support local food producers or perhaps reduce taxes for local agricultural projects. As this is an impediment to trade, TILMA is said to threaten such initiatives. But Colin Hansen, the B.C. Minister of Economic Development indicated in a letter to the editor in the Kamloops Daily News, that "the agreement does not require either province to get rid of measures that protect consumers, the environment, or which address other legitimate public policy objectives." And Corky comments on this statement.

**CORKY EVANS:** TILMA does not require us to do deleterious things to our environment or agricultural land. But the problem is, does it allow? If the province specifically did not want, say, to interfere with municipality's ability to regulate land or use of chemicals in their municipal borders then they could have exempted it, put it right in there and say municipalities, the zoning is exempt. But it's not like that. There's all kinds of wishy-washy words all through the TILMA which governments don't understand and will be interpreted by courts. So yeah, he's right. He's telling you the truth in the sense he's actually honest. It doesn't require that horrible things happen but it may very well allow it. And the question is, why on earth would a government, any government or two governments, want to sign an agreement that essentially wipes out the people's ability to govern themselves. Why do we want money or a corporation to have the power of a person or to eliminate the power of governments to regulate their own society? Like what's that about? How did money become more important than people?

**JON STEINMAN:** One of the greatest concerns regarding the TILMA, is the potential of such an agreement to limit the ability of municipalities to protect the interests of, people. B.C. Minister of

Economic Development Colin Hansen was quoted in January saying that consultations *were held* with local governments prior to the agreement being signed. But, as at the Annual General Meeting of the Lower Mainland Local Government Association held in May in Whistler, British Columbia, the topic of TILMA was discussed. And the City of Burnaby and district of Kent declared insufficient consultation and asked to be exempted from the terms. And the City of Coquitlam and Delta call for municipalities to have the right to choose whether or not to be bound to such an agreement. And Corky Evans comments on the effects TILMA will have on municipal governance.

**CORKY EVANS:** I'm sure able to speak to it but the hugely stupid thing or difficult to fathom is that without debate I can't answer the question because there's never been an opportunity to know for sure. That's the most appalling thing. But in terms of municipalities, the TILMA agreement says that school boards and municipalities and all other regulatory bodies will come under the terms of the TILMA, two years from last April and they are to be phased in. Now suppose you live in a town that has a rule that if you're building a new town building you would hire local people to do the contracting. You can't do that anymore. Any contract over \$25,000 it would appear that a person from Lethbridge has just as much right to the job as a person from Nelson. And that will change the economic development provisions of probably most of the towns in regional districts in British Columbia or school boards.

Let's say your school board has a policy of having a breakfast program and let's say the local farmers supply the food for the breakfast program. Well it would appear that the TILMA says you can't do that. You have to go to the bid and the lowest common denominator and you can't support local agriculture producers in any official way anymore. Or what if your town says – we really don't want sprawl. We don't want the town growing out over the agricultural land. We want a density in the town core – commercial activity in the town core. So, we don't want a Walmart store or Canadian Tire setting up on the outskirts and drawing business that way. We'll zone the centre of the town for commercial activity. If rules are more lax in Alberta than they are in your town and if a business wishes to come to your town and perceives that your local laws restrict their ability to make a profit, it would appear that the TILMA will allow them to take you to court and change your zoning regulations or your growth strategy so that they have the same ability to make a profit in your town that they do in any other town in two provinces. It would appear that everything about the TILMA for agriculture and all other interests essentially decreases the power of governments, school governments, municipal governments or provincial governments to manage land and people for the well-being of the community.

**JON STEINMAN:** Further on the topic of agriculture and continuing on with yet more comments from B.C. Minister of Economic Development Colin Hansen, he has also been quoted as saying this, "In fact, the TILMA is designed to eliminate subsidies – making it the strongest response to-date to agricultural producers' longstanding concerns." And NDP Agriculture Critic Corky Evans has an interesting response to yet another perplexing statement.

**CORKY EVANS:** Well yeah it's nonsense. It's ridiculous and I don't think Colin Hansen wrote it. I don't think he's that stupid. I would guess that it's written by a PR flack and he signed his name to it and sent it to the newspaper. Of course I don't know that, that would just be my guess. Of course, international subsidies is a big issue for farmers especially grain industry because you're up in the United States, subsidized for example, wheat and corn to the place where Canadians often can not compete. But that has nothing to do with the majority of agriculture in British Columbia which does not suffer from external subsidy, certainly not from the province of Alberta. And even if it did, even if the TILMA did address the issue of subsidy, it certainly has no power in the United States or Europe, so it's a stupid statement.

The TILMA I think has the possibility of affecting the availability of irrigation, the nature of the Agricultural Land Reserve, the cost and value of land. It has the possibility of affecting the province's ability to regulate food quality. It has the possibility of changing organic regulations in future. It has the possibility of stopping municipalities from passing laws that say for example, against pesticide use and the like. It has huge ramifications for the possibility of agriculture; it has nothing to do with subsidies.

**JON STEINMAN:** In closing out my conversation with Corky Evans, I asked him how British Columbians, Albertans and what sounds to soon be Canadians as a whole, can become more involved in learning about the TILMA agreement and voicing concern.

**CORKY EVANS:** Well, firstly I very much appreciate you and all other commentators. We, in the Legislature have proven impotent to even discuss the issue or to get it out there in order to create public interest. So it is only the press really that is making it so Colin has to write letters or pay his flacks to write letters to defend themselves. And I think people need to remember that the governments of British Columbia and Alberta have a history of backing up when the public gets angry. In Alberta you remember Kline, the premier who signed this thing, he wanted to move to private hospitals. He got right up against almost being able to license private hospitals in spite of the Canada Health Act and the people of Alberta told him or told his MLAs we don't want this and they backed up. So I think our job is to keep on talking about it and not necessarily being paranoid and say – oh woe is me the sky is falling, but saying it is wrong to pass an initiative that we don't understand.

**JON STEINMAN:** And that was Corky Evans, the British Columbia NDP Agriculture Critic, and the MLA for the electoral district of Nelson-Creston. Corky spoke to me over the phone from his home in Winlaw, British Columbia. And you can learn more about TILMA by visiting the Deconstructing Dinner website and selecting the show titled "Trade Agreements Over Dinner." And that website is [cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://cjly.net/deconstructingdinner). I will also note that additional unheard audio segments from my interviews today will also be posted on the website.

*ending theme*

*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.*

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*Till next week.*