

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

May 24, 2007

Title: HIV/AIDS, Big Pharma and Food

Producer/Host: Jon Steinman
Transcript: Pat Yama

Jon Steinman: And welcome to another edition of Deconstructing Dinner produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman.

Launching our most previous broadcast on the topic of Livestock, I highlighted how inter-connected weekly show topics have become, whereby a broadcast doesn't seem to go by without the need to refer back to a previous show. And today is another one of those "making the connections" features whereby we will attempt to tie together some of the most pressing global issues and observe just how interconnected our food choices are to the world around us, and just how significant of an impact our food choices can have on the shape and future of this planet and its inhabitants.

Today's show is titled HIV/AIDS, Big Pharma and Food. Pharma is of course not referring to farming per se, but pharmaceuticals. But what will soon be discovered is that the pharmaceutical and farming industries are more connected to each other than many would believe.

Helping to make the connection between the spread of the HIV virus and AIDS to the global food system, Deconstructing Dinner will use audio productions from InterWorld Radio (IWR), a part of the U.K.-based Panos Institute, an international media organization which produces news, features and analysis about the most critical global issues of today. We will take a listen to five short productions produced by IWR between 2003 and 2007.

increase music and fade out

The connection between HIV/AIDS and Food is one that only the first audio segment of today's broadcast will imply. Otherwise, it will be Deconstructing Dinner that will attempt to weave you, the listener through the maze known as the global food system and global pharmaceuticals.

Making the connection between the companies producing the planet's medicines and the dinner's we pull out of our oven's, is most easily achieved when observing the relatively unknown push by a number of companies to begin growing crops for the purpose of producing drugs. Now I'm not referring to the cocoa plant or the opium poppy or even cannabis, but crops such as corn, soy, rice, barley, canola, wheat and even tobacco, all of which have been genetically modified to produce ingredients for pharmaceutical grade medicines. At first glance the idea seems like yet another technological miracle created by the human species. But when we look around at the cross-contamination taking place between genetically modified crops and those that are not, the idea of a Hepatitis B vaccine crossing with the corn being grown for your extra large popcorn at the movie theatre is not the most settling of ideas. While it would be ideal to remain assured that such crops have not yet been approved for commercial use, open field trials of these pharmaceutical crops have been carried out in the United States since 1992. Most of the trials

took place between 1999 and 2002 and contamination has already occurred, when in 2002, the U.S. government demanded that the Texas company ProdiGene burn 155 acres of corn and 500,000 bushels of soybeans because the food crops had been contaminated by the company's pharmaceutical crops which had been genetically engineered to produce a diarrhea vaccine for pigs. Some of the major companies working on such pharmaceutical crop trials are Monsanto, DuPont, Cargill, Dow and even cigarette manufacturer RJ Reynolds.

soundbite

So while the connection between pharmaceuticals and food could likely be much more apparent in the near future if and when such crops are approved for commercial use, the current connections take us to the continent of Africa where roughly 25 million live with HIV and where millions die from AIDS each year.

So what is the connection to food? Well to briefly outline how the remainder of this show will progress, we will discover that food shortages help fuel the spread of HIV and AIDS. We will discover that food is essential for those living with these infections as many of the antiretroviral drugs require food to work effectively and without it may lead to even more infections. These food shortages are partially fuelled by the declining agricultural labour force resulting from such a significantly high population suffering from AIDS. In countries like Namibia, it is projected that between 1985 and 2020, 26% of the country's labour force will be lost through AIDS. Botswana 23%, Zimbabwe 23%, and Mozambique 20%. But as has also been discussed here on the program, food shortages are in part the result of climatic conditions, conditions that are being fuelled by our own industrial food system and *its* impact on climate change. Food shortages are also the result of a global food system producing adequate supplies, but one that is not designed to serve the most impoverished populations of the planet. The key contributor to such economic and environmental impacts is the industrial food system that we as Canadians support every day. And profiting heavily from such a system are pharmaceutical companies, and how this is so will be expanded upon just shortly.

But so here we have the cycle. Pharmaceutical companies profit off of an industrial food system that in turn contributes to food shortages, which in turn contributes to the spread of HIV and AIDS, and then, the pharmaceutical companies profit from the drugs they produce to treat the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Before we learn more about this cycle of pharma-food connections, we will visit with a short production by IWR, InterWorld Radio, a project based out of the UK that distributes important stories coming from all corners of the planet. In this first segment produced in 2007 titled, "Malawi: Toxic Hunger" we learn how food shortages can endanger those receiving HIV treatment. Around 1 million people in Malawi live with HIV and AIDS, and many who fall ill find it hard to farm and struggle to get enough to eat. Antiretroviral drugs, which help boost the immune system can help people regain their strength, but taking such toxic treatment without food can be dangerous. And it is for this reason that food security is essential to combat this cycle, and we learn how some communities are responding by beginning to grow communal vegetable gardens.

IWR – Malawi

(baby crying, woman laughing)

Hilary Mbobe: Twenty-eight year old Steria Mazangal lives with her parents who have been supporting her since she got very sick in 2005. She found out she was HIV positive after she had her baby. Shortly after she started to take antiretroviral therapy which are medications used to help in the treatment of HIV.

Steria: Back then, I had not started to see the nutrition support and my body was weak. This was because I was lacking food. I was unable to care for my children. Instead, my parents had the responsibility of feeding my children and I and their food is not enough. We were expecting more this year but now we are left with about 25kg of maize. That will last us a month. It will be very difficult times in the days to come because I do not see myself bringing any food to my family, looking at my condition.

HM: When I spoke to Steria, it was about four months before harvest. She was still sick and unable to work. Fortunately her family were able to help her although it wasn't easy. Her father, Nixon Chacooney explains.

NC: In 2003, actually I had what is concerning the growth of my grandchildren was the husband of Steria was sick. He passed away. Then in 2005 she married to another man. The same year we saw that she was bed-ridden. In my household I was saving some household assets to have money to access the health facilities. Sometimes we go to sleep without eating. Sometimes we go even to eat miles away looking for the money to feed my family.

HM: There are strong links between HIV/AIDS and food insecurity. People who are sick often find it hard to work which in turn threatens their livelihood. What is less understood is the role that food shortages have on HIV/AIDS. John Plastow is a policy researcher.

John Plastow: Whether you're taking the vital drugs, which we call ARVs, antiretroviral drugs or whether you're not in the position to have those you need food. People who don't have ARVs are susceptible to getting what we call opportunistic infections and if they're not well fed then they are more likely to get them. But even people are on ARVs, the chances of them having a long and healthy life is very much linked to food. If you have food then the ARVs will work. If you don't have food the chances are that they won't work effectively. In fact research has shown that you're six times more likely to live a long and healthy life if you do have adequate nutrition.

HM: Steria was lucky enough to get ARVs but the medication is very strong.

Steria: The hospital staff advised me that if I get the medication without food I will get side effects and whenever I got ARVs on an empty stomach I would feel a headache and become dizzy or start nauseating.

HM: Sylvester Kathumba is a nutritionist in Malawi's Department of Nutrition HIV and AIDS.

SK: There are some drugs, ARVs that can be taken on an empty stomach, there are others which cannot be taken on an empty stomach. We have a nutrition section where people are counseled on what type of food to be taken with the type of the ARV they are taking. We do discuss about the drug food interaction. We do discuss about dietary management of side effects of the ARVs.

HM: Which is all very well if people have enough food to eat but what if there is no food at all. What if there is another drought, if crops are destroyed. How are people to get the food that they need to take with their medication. John Plastow.

JP: In Malawi but also in other countries we've seen both men and women often expose themselves to high levels of risk because they're searching for food. This can be the case with people who engage in transactional sex. Migrant men, lorry drivers being one classic case but also many commercial sex workers are also doing it because they're basically poor, lacking food and that's the main reason they're in that situation.

(Sound of garden tools and people talking)

HM: Thanks to a charity community project, Steria now has enough food and is no longer totally dependent on her family. Through the project, villagers in Matipila have been encouraged to grow their own food. I'm standing in the garden of Steria Mazangal as she grows maize, pumpkins, beans, potatoes, and tomatoes. She can grow even more crops in this enclosed garden, less than the size of a punitive box. There are about a dozen other similar gardens in this village. I'm told the gardens are transforming the lives of many who could not afford to buy food on a daily basis. I have a volunteer here who helps in running these gardens.

Volunteer: We are encouraging growing vegetables with a little water and a little work. We are talking about matching, cultivating the soil with leaves, grass between the plants. The advantage of this matching is that it prevents the sun shining direct on the soil. It keeps the soil cool and moist even when it is hot. That's why we encourage this type of trench gardens.

Steria's Mother: We had the problems on how to get food but the problem is solved. And now my daughter is well because she can drink her medicine with the food. So it is really helping us.

HM: Like many charity projects this is only a small scale. Researchers say the real change lies in making plans for the long-term.

JP: HIV/AIDS is still unfortunately regarded in many places as a health issue. But of course there are huge health dimensions but it's about much more than that. HIV/AIDS is a development problem. It's about poverty, it's about getting adequate food and nutrition to people who really need it. So it's absolutely not just the responsibility of people working on health issues. It's people working with farmers, people working with herders – that means projects, ministries, agricultural ministries. We really need to make sure that people working in these areas have got a good grasp of HIV/AIDS, how it works and respond appropriately.

HM: If people living with HIV/AIDS are to live full and positive lives then food security needs to be integrated with HIV/AIDS care. They should not be thought of as two separate issues. If people are feeling well they can work and continue contributing to household incomes. What is more, they can care for their families and add to the general well-being of their communities.

JS: And this is Deconstructing Dinner. That was a segment produced in 2007 by InterWorld Radio.

Through the lens of food, and using such stories as the one you just heard, we can recognize that the spread of such infections as HIV is due in part to political, economic and social conditions, conditions that in jumping back here to Canada, many of us help create on a daily basis. And what do I mean by that. Again, the inability of populations around the world to produce food for themselves increases as the global industrial food system spreads its wings around the world. We see this when heavily subsidized crops and industries in the U.S. and Europe, create a food system whereby farmers in other countries cannot compete with such cheap product. But this is of course the idea. Make any country dependent upon you for food, and that is likely the greatest

method of control any one economic power can exert. Adding more fuel to the fire is the effect climate change has had on the agricultural regions of Africa, an area of the planet that has been most heavily hit by climatic changes. With an industrial global food system that is both heavily contributing to climate change *and* contributing to the demise of local food systems, the social and economic conditions are then ripe to help spread the pandemic of HIV/AIDS. As mothers look for ways to feed their families, transactional sex becomes an unfortunate last resort for many. As the HIV/AIDS epidemic sweeps across the continent, one of the hardest hit countries in the world is South Africa.

To respond to the epidemic the country amended its Medicines and Related Substances Act in the late 90s to allow the importation of cheap generic drugs as the patented versions were far too expensive. This infuriated the world's largest pharmaceutical companies, and in 2001, 39 of these companies took the government of South Africa to court. The suit was filed in 1998. Companies such as Alcon, Bayer, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Glaxo Wellcome, Merck, Roche, Schering-Plough, SmithKline Beecham, Wyeth, and Zeneca were among the 39. The most significant opposition to the lawsuit was a group by the name of TAC, or the South African Treatment Action Campaign. The campaign presented data demonstrating the impact of such high prices of medicines. Over the previous year that the data was presented, 250,000 people had died because of AIDS-related illnesses in South Africa. The lawsuit was later dropped, but the intentions of these companies remained clear. That when millions of lives are threatened, pharmaceutical companies stand for profits before public health. And as their efforts to stop the South African government from providing medicines to their people was not successful, many of these companies also continue to profit from an industrial food system that is also leaving millions to abandon their farmland because of an inability to compete with low-priced imports.

In the case of livestock production, a recent topic here on Deconstructing Dinner, many of the very same pharmaceutical companies profit generously from this industry. The European livestock industry is heavily subsidized, and so too is the American rice industry. In this next segment produced by InterWorld Radio, we learn of one country, Ghana, that is finding it unable to compete with cheap poultry and rice imports coming from these subsidized industries. Following this segment, we will learn how the very same pharmaceutical companies wishing to halt cheap aid medicines from reaching millions are also profiting off of the destruction of Africa's food security.

IWR - Ghana

Isaac Tetteh: In 2001 Ghana's President John Agyekum Kufuor declared a golden age of business. It was suppose to herald the beginning of more production and jobs in Ghana. Five years on, it actually seems there is less being produced in Ghana, not more. In fact, many basic items are imported, some of these are used goods from the west ranging from plates and cups, underwear and ties. But imports that are causing most trouble are those that directly compete with local producers.

(sounds of music and people in background)

I just ordered a rice and chicken in Nakosh restaurant, the place reputed for several local dishes made from local ingredients.

Interview:

IT: Is the rice local rice?

Female: No, the rice is not local.

IT: Why?

Female: Because the local rice is of poor quality and they're not available.

IT: And what about your chicken. Is the chicken local chicken?

Female: The chicken is imported one. I can't afford a local one. I also don't have to lose customers so I use imported chicken and imported rice.

(chickens clucking)

IT: My sister Cecilia Celifou has a small-scale poultry farm in her backyard here in Accra. She sells live chickens to those who can afford.

Cecilia: At the moment it's 65,000 and a very large one it costs 75,000.

IT: And if you compare that to the imported one, how much do they sell for the same size of chicken in the shops?

Cecilia: Some are 30, 35. So people right now prefer to go in for the imported chicken and that is affecting the local industry.

IT: So do you think that the agenda for Ghanaians to wear and buy and use locally made items would ever succeed?

Cecilia: I don't think so. We need to work on reducing the importation so that the local industry can also progress.

IT: Here are mountains of packed and drained rice. About 50 families are busy going about their duties in the morning before the sun becomes too hot for comfort. Francis and Georgina are rice farmers.

Georgina: Our problem is during harvesting. We don't get to have the stuff to do the work. Fertilizer is also very expensive. We also don't have a dryer.

Francis: We have a problem within irrigation canal. What they build is another problem. We get nothing, practically nothing from it. We talk to our unionist but nothing has been done about our problems.

IT: So do you think the Ghanaians can ever change the attitudes and begin consuming local rice?

G: People come and we tell them the price of our rice. But they simply turn away and go and buy the imported rice.

F: There is no difference between the local and foreign one. We have grades 1, 2, and 3 which is the same as the imported one. We are too gullible with the imported rice.

G: People complain that the local rice contains stones. We dry our rice on the bare ground and that introduces the stones. If we get better means of drying the rice we will soon see that our rice is the same as imported.

IT: Some say the development of organization Oxfam, believe the Buy in Ghana campaign can have an impact.

F: People are beginning to choose commitment, there is an increasing desire to buy Made in Ghana products. Day in and out we get phone calls asking us where they can find some local rice to buy. Hotels and individuals call us day in and out so I think there is hope and in course we are making a lot of noise.

IT: What a national campaign cannot do however is to adjust some of the imbalances in world trade, they make it so difficult for Ghanaian farmers to compete with imports. Some citizens think the answer lies in part by Ghana making sure goods from overseas cost more.

F: We're calling on the government of Ghana to protect the local producers by increasing tariffs on imported rice and chicken. When that is done, then prices of the imported rice and chicken will also rise, possibly above prices of local rice and local chicken.

JS: And this is Deconstructing Dinner, and that was a segment produced in 2006 for InterWorld Radio by Issac Tetteh, and is titled "Ghana – Foreign Flavours." On today's broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner we are making the connection between HIV/AIDS, pharmaceutical companies and food. Just prior to this most recent segment, I introduced how the very pharmaceutical companies who attempted to derail the South African government's promise to provide low cost generic AIDS drugs, are also the same companies profiting heavily from the destructive industrial food system. In the case of Ghana, this system is forcing local producers into poverty and out of business. In one instance Bayer, one of the global leaders in pharmaceutical products, is also a significant player in the rice industry.

In the case of companies such as Schering Plough, another company that went after the South African government, also produce animal health products for the livestock industry here in Canada and around the world. They are equally profiting from the destructive coastal aquaculture or salmon farming industry.

In yet another case, global pharmaceutical leader Novartis, maintains an animal health unit whose products end up in the cattle providing our sirloin steaks, our glasses of milk, and the cheese topping on our pizzas. So we begin to see that even our own food purchases here in Canada are unknowingly contributing to and supporting such deplorable circumstances in places like Africa. The company also produces Boost liquid supplement beverages, energy drinks, weight loss products, and also owns baby food manufacturer Gerber. We can also look back to the April 2006 broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner that exposed food and beverage manufacturer PepsiCo. Sitting on the board of PepsiCo is none other than Novartis President and Chief Executive Officer Daniel Vasella. As we learned from that broadcast, PepsiCo can be looked to as a significant contributor to the demise of local food systems and human health around the world.

But bringing this company back to the topic of AIDS drugs, Novartis has recently become the target by an influential campaign being waged by Oxfam, an international organization working towards finding lasting solutions to poverty, suffering and injustice. While the South African example may have been over six years ago, pharmaceutical companies like Novartis are continuing their war against cheap generic drugs being produced in countries like India. India is

the main centre for production of low-cost generic AIDS drugs distributed to the impoverished world, particularly Africa. In fact more than half of the medicines reaching Africa come from India. Now Novartis is challenging India's drug patent law, which if successful, will deprive millions of people from access to these low cost medicines. The case began on January 29th of this year, and Novartis has launched two suits against India after the country refused to grant a patent for Glivec, a cancer drug. They are also challenging a section of India's patent law that is designed to promote cheaper generic medicines for patients who cannot afford those with patents. Now Canadians are fortunate to have a system that pays for much of our medicine, yet we continue to complain about our health care system while the very companies we support, are attempting to deprive the majority of the world's population who pay for medication out of their own pockets from accessing such potentially life-saving drugs. But the worry is not just about Glivec, but the lawsuits attempt to derail the low-cost generic HIV and AIDS drugs being produced in the country and then sent to populations in places like Africa.

You can learn more about the campaign trying to stop Novartis from continuing with their lawsuit by visiting Oxfam's Make Trade Fair website, at maketradefair.com.

But the efforts by these pharmaceutical companies does not stop there, and the connections with our food continues. The Philippines has also recently been under pressure for bypassing patents and importing low cost medicines, and Pfizer, another pharmaceutical giant is behind this pressure. And where is the connection to food, well Pfizer, is yet another major producer of farm animal vaccines and medications. And here is *another* rather interesting food connection, the Chief Executive Officer of Pfizer is Jeffrey Kindler, who prior to his role at Pfizer, was employed by McDonalds between 1996 and 2001. McDonalds is of course a major contributor to the destruction of local food systems around the world, and is certainly one of the leading reasons why animal health products from companies like Pfizer are so profitable.

soundbite

Yet another country facing pressure from big pharmaceutical companies is Thailand. With well over half a million people living with HIV, the country announced in January that it would defy patents on three drugs and provide its citizens with low-cost generic drugs. But Thailand now faces pressure from the United States who has placed the country on a list of those who are not respecting American intellectual property rights. The drugs in question are patented by companies such as Bristol Myers Squibb, Sanofi/Aventis and Abbott Laboratories. Abbott, based in Chicago, announced that in response, it would stop releasing any new medicines into the country. And here again, is a company who, showing little concern for global epidemics, is also heavily invested in food products. Abbott is the producer of well-known infant formulas such as Ensure, Similac, Pediasure and Isomil. The company's interest in the global food system and its impacts on local food security around the world is also rather startling, because sitting on the board of Abbott Laboratories is Samuel Scott III, the President and CEO of Corn Products International, one of the largest corn refiners and corn ingredient companies on the planet. Corn is one of the world's most heavily subsidized crops, which has destroyed the ability of many farmers around the world to grow corn for their own communities. Also sitting on the board of Abbott is William Smithburg, the past Chair, President, and CEO of The Quaker Oats Co. now owned by PepsiCo.

soundbite

And you're tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman. If you miss any of today's broadcast it will be archived on our website at cjly.net/deconstructingdinner. There will also be a wealth of more information on

the topics covered today, and all that will be listed under the May 24th 2007 broadcast titled, “HIV/AIDS, Big Pharma, and Food.”

On today’s broadcast we have been exploring the many pharmaceutical companies who are challenging the attempts of governments to provide their citizens with low-cost drugs to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic. As the very same companies are involved in producing our food, we are learning that so long as we support these companies either through the purchase of their pharmaceuticals or the industrial foods they profit from, we are supporting their actions to derail efforts being made to reduce the suffering of millions of people around the world. We have also explored how essential food is to those suffering from the HIV virus and how integral food is to accompany the use of antiretroviral medications. As it is the global food system that is contributing to food insecurity and food shortages, these very same pharmaceutical companies are also profiting from this industry. And here is one way to look at these connections - the demise of local agriculture and food systems leads to hunger and poverty which further leads to the prevalence of transactional sex, which then further leads to the spread of HIV/AIDS, and then further to food insecurity as many agricultural workers are unable to continue working as a result of the virus. It’s quite the cycle, but the connections are important, because even we here in Canada are unfortunately a part of it. We support these companies and the global food system every day, and understanding these connections and what we can do about it is essential if we choose to take action to prevent the cycle from continuing. But the problem may very well lie in the way we view ourselves and our place among those around us. North Americans are probably more than any culture in the world, dead set on seeking a state of individualism in order to separate ourselves from others, as so long as we remain in this quest for individualism, we do so at the expense of others. And this is the topic of today’s Deconstructing Dinner.

soundbite

To better understand how the industrial food system contributes to food insecurity around the world, we will now take a listen to another segment produced for InterWorld Radio. In this next segment titled, “The Food on Your Plate” presented by Grant Clark, we learn how more and more countries are producing food they don’t eat and eating food they don’t produce. And as is often the end point of many broadcasts of Deconstructing Dinner, supporting local food production in our own communities and providing the resources necessary for global communities to do the same, is the response to derailing an industrial food system out of control. And here is The Food on Your Plate, produced in 2003.

IWR – Food on Your Plate

(sounds of people in the market)

Grant Clark: A busy street market in the heart of London. Here we have some yams from Jamaica and some garlic from Thailand. And over there, there’s fish from Mozambique and avocados from Cypress. These days, it may be cheaper to buy food imported from the other side of the world rather than from a local farm. And many of us are now use to eating foods our parents never heard of. Welcome to the global market. It’s right there on your plate.

Female: The nice thing about Canada is that we are a very multicultural country. You have a very wide range of food from Chinese to Thai to Italian.

Male: The kind of food I saw there I have never had in Africa, which I had to try and find how they taste and surprisingly they tasted quite well.

Grant Clark: Everyone needs to be able to get hold of enough food and at an affordable price. But according to the United Nations, today 800 million people are undernourished. Some of them live in very poor areas of course where there isn't enough food. But even in places where there is enough food not everyone can afford to buy it. Governments may choose to subsidize basic foods such as flour, rice or milk. For example, they could guarantee to buy milk from dairy farmers then sell it in the shops at a much lower price. This way, consumers and farmers are both secure and taxpayers share the cost. But throughout the world, governments are minimizing their control over food production and distribution. Instead, they're relying on the private sector and market forces.

(sounds of traders yelling) On the floor of the London International Exchange traders are buying and selling next season's crops like coffee, sugar and cocoa beans. Jo Shannon, one of the directors of The Exchange explains how it works.

Jo Shannon: These traders are receiving calls from around the world telling them what to do – to buy or to sell and they must do it immediately. It's called open outcry trading and the idea is that it's open, it's transparent, it's accessible, and it's fair. We're looking over the cocoa trading ring and we can see that there's a huge price board which is telling people on this floor and around the world the prices that cocoa is trading, right now through to March 2000.

Grant Clark: All over the world people are producing food they don't eat and eating food they don't produce. Countries are under pressure to earn more foreign dollars and sometimes land that was used for local food needs is now used to grow new crops for far away markets. Ruth Ayaza describes the changes she's observed in her native Ecuador.

Ruth Ayaza: The lower plateaus of the highlands are being used to export flowers. If you go to the second highest mountain in Ecuador - Cayambe it used to be all lush green mountain with cows you know. You would see people working the land. Now what you see is greenhouses in plastic and you can smell the fertilizers. And that whole region that was the producer of milk for most of the country now it looks like a big city.

Grant Clark: Ruth Ayaza in Ecuador. New crops such as the flowers in the Ecuadorian Highlands are often grown specifically for export. If a country grows something that it can easily sell abroad at a profit, it can use the money to import food. Food that costs less than it does to grow at home. This can be a problem. Sri Lanka for example has opened its doors to foreign investment in the belief that exports will lead to prosperity and development. Nalika Gunawardena in Sri Lanka, counts some of the costs.

Nalika Gunawardena: In Sri Lanka, the 90s have been dubbed the decade of exports. A huge push to produce more to sell on the international market. And as you drive around the country you can actually see the signs of export production in both urban and rural areas. We are heading north of Colombo, driving through the Katunayake free-trade zone which was the first of several to be set up in the country. Free-trade zones, sometimes called investment promotions zones are areas where foreign investors have set up hundreds of factories producing exclusively for foreign markets. All we can really see is a concrete jungle of large installations surrounded by high security walls. Inside these, thousands of Sri Lankans work by day and night in shifts to produce shoes, garments, electronic items, and other products.

About 100 kilometres north of the capital Colombo, we've arrived at the village of Ratmale Galewela and entered the country's dry zone. In this village, farmers used to grow rice for one

season and minor crops like vegetables during the other. But 12 years ago, the ripples of this export market reached this village and completely changed farming practices and the farmer's lifestyle.

We wanted to hear the story of how the farmers have responded to economic reforms.

Farmer: He says that the cultivation was introduced by a private company and as it was something entirely new to the farmers and since it was around 10 years, the interest shown by the company diminished. Then they were cultivating for the export market, officials from the company came to the village and they paid a standard price. But it is now they have to take it to a local market, they have to sell it to a trader in this area. They don't know what crops are in demand, what are the market prices and they lack access to information about the export market.

Nalika Gunawardena: Despite working hard to produce for faraway markets, rural producers are not benefitting much. Instead, it's the middle-men who reap bigger profits. Meanwhile, the government has removed safety nets for supporting farmers through times of crisis and many farmers are now worse off under the new policies. In Sri Lanka, on one level reforms are working. The economy is growing, foreign investment pausing and tourists increase. But the benefits are not distributed evenly. Over half of the people live below the poverty line. The real financial gains are felt by the urban middle classes while the rural poor are increasingly marginalized.

Grant Clark: That was Nalika Gunawardena. Under present free-trade rules if countries want to sell on the open market they must also open their doors to imports from anywhere in the world. (sounds of supermarket) For the consumer, this may mean cheaper food. For example, here in a London supermarket I can buy this apple that has travelled thousands of miles from Australia at a lower price than I can get this apple grown just a hundred miles down the road. The price may be good for me personally but it's undercutting my local food producer and could put him out of business. In South Africa recently, when there was a flood of super cheap canned tomatoes from Europe, South African tomatoes couldn't compete and were left on the shelves. As a result, hundreds of local canning factory workers lost their jobs. In this fiercely competitive climate it's the biggest agricultural industries that are winning. They're putting small farms out of business both in the richer countries as well as in developing countries.

But there are signs that some people prefer to eat food grown locally. Manhattan Island, New York City is sometimes called the food capital of the world because of the wide variety of international restaurants in every neighbourhood. With more than a million people crammed onto the island there's hardly enough space to grow food, perhaps a few herbs on a window sill. Yet recently there's been an increase in city vegetable plots and in markets selling local produce. Janet Daglidagli explains how it began and talks to shoppers and vendors at a farmers market where everything on sale is grown within 80 miles of the city:

JD: New York's community garden movement was launched 25 years ago by some bomb throwing environmental activists. The bombs were some old socks filled with seeds thrown over fences in barbed wire into vacant lots. The seeds sprouted, flower and vegetables began to grow and the idea took root. In 1976 the city's council on the environment offered farmers from the surrounding area an opportunity to sell their produce directly to shoppers in the heart of Manhattan. When New York's green market program began, there were fewer than 100 farmers markets left in the United States. Now there are more than 2,000.

Farmer: We grow 50 kinds of apples on our farm. We grow eight kinds of pears and we specialize in fruit that's highly flavoured. Everything we do is very labour-intensive which in America is very unusual because our culture has gone to very mechanized things – things made in factories, food made in factories. We grow our vegetables organically, our food is minimally sprayed. Market forces that impact growers and agriculture are global now. Competitive pressures from larger, more organized business corporations and agribusiness are very hard to compete against. It's tough and we cannot erect trade barriers easily in this country. So our only hope is to raise enough consumer consciousness.

(music)

Grant Clark: Buying local produce is one simple way of taking control over what we eat. The food is healthier because it's less processed, we know where it comes from and it's in season, and by buying from a local farmer we contribute to our local economy. At the market in New York, a lot of the food is organic. But organic farming isn't just for small producers. It's becoming big business and international trade in organic food is growing. Supermarkets in some countries can't get enough organic food from farmers nearby. They're turning to farmers in developing countries to meet the rising demand. Jorge Garreton reports from Chile.

Jorge Garreton: Chile is becoming a major exporter of organic fruit and vegetables. Produce travels thousands of miles to eager consumers in Europe, the U.S, Japan, willing to pay the extra cost for organic produce. Jose Edalgo is an agronomist who turned to organic farming more than 20 years ago. Speaking from his farm near the town of Chilán, about 450 kilometres south of Santiago, Edalgo says he has dedicated his last 20 years to organic agriculture. And for the last eight he has been successfully exporting his product. Edalgo is now part of an association of 12 to 15 growers who are developing their own organic brand name. There's excitement in Chile about the potential overseas market for organic products but growth is slow. Less than 1% of all agricultural exports are organic. Rodriguez is an agronomist. He believes his country is wasting a major chance to make its name in a growing market. Rodriguez is also worried about what he sees as a new kind of exploitation or colonialism, as he calls it. International companies flying to certify products as organic. Under their own brand name taking a share of the profits, he says, it is essential for Chile to establish a recognized organic certificate as soon as possible.

Grant Clark: That was Jorge Garreton in Chile. We've heard that the international trade in food links farmers and consumers in different parts of the world. The question remains is the relationship that drives this trade a healthy one. Tim Lang is Professor of Food Policy at Thames Valley University in London. He's been researching the effects of the global food trade and concludes that the large supermarkets and hypermarkets buying food have too much power.

Tim Lang: Here in the richest parts of the world Britain's one of the richest countries ever humanity has created and we have immense pockets of poverty. There are huge differences that stand between food poverty today and food poverty in the 1930s. Today the shops are absolutely groaning with food and that is paradoxically meant that there is vast amounts of food for the rich but for the poor, they have to go further to get to it. Instead of the shops being local they are farther and farther away. So that means actually transport becomes a cost of food. If we look at those supermarkets we find that they are controlling production. They're placing the contracts, they're determining the specifications, they're determining the quality standards and the grower in the south has to jump those hoops. And what I anticipate is that we're going to see growth of that internationalization of supermarket power. That has immense implications both for consumers in the north and producers in the south. I'm absolutely convinced the future does not lie with more trade liberalization. The future lies with trade relocalization.

Grant Clark: That was Tim Lang of Thames Valley University.

This program was produced by the Panos Institute and was funded by the British government's Department for International Development as part of the ID-21 program.

soundbite

Jon Steinman: And this is Deconstructing Dinner, produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. That was a segment produced in 2003 for InterWorld Radio, a project by the U.K.-based Panos Institute. You can learn more about the network at interworldradio.net.

Today's broadcast is titled, HIV/AIDS, Big Pharma and Food. As we attempt to connect the HIV/AIDS pandemic to our own food choices, we arrived at that last segment to help lay out the impact the industrial food system is having on local food security around the world. As the food system that provides the backbone of Canada's food supply is creating poverty and food insecurity in *other* countries, the modern approach to responding to such crisis is through the donation of food aid. On our August 10th 2006 broadcast, we heard from Anuradha Mittal of the Oakland Institute who shared the organization's report titled, "Food Aid or Food Sovereignty," a report that indicated how Food Aid is simply a tool for promoting foreign policy interests and trade, and is a means through which excess surpluses of grain can be dumped into foreign markets.

But in countries like Zambia, we see how many of the issues raised on today's broadcast are affecting its population. And here are the connections, global livestock production contributes 18% of all human-caused greenhouse gases. Much of this is from industrial livestock production. Climate change has significantly affected Zambian agriculture and the country is facing a crisis. Profiting from the industrial livestock industry are the big pharmaceutical companies as mentioned earlier who supply the industry with animal health products. The heavily subsidized global livestock industry further destroys local food security, leading to an increase in transactional sex, leading to an increase in HIV/AIDS where 1 in 6 Zambians are HIV positive, leading to a decrease in the availability of agricultural workers, and further leading to an increase in food shortages. And as the very same pharmaceutical companies try to prevent low-cost generic AIDS drugs from reaching these populations as indicated earlier on the broadcast, the assistance of Food Aid also arrives.

In Zambia, many are in opposition to the response of Food Aid, and given the connections, it seems rather justified. In this next segment produced for InterWorld Radio, we listen to a production produced by Pamela Mnyantha in 2007 titled, "Zambia: Buying Your Way Out of Hunger." The segment highlights a scheme in the western part of the country where instead of providing food aid, assistance is provided in the form of cash handouts. And the results are said to be promising. This is Deconstructing Dinner.

Pamela Mnyantha: If you were to ask any Zambian what the western province of Zambia is famous for, they'd probably tell you of two things - the Kuomboka ceremony of the Lozi people (sounds) and the sandy soils. However, despite the sandy soil many of the occupants in Mongu District, which is the provincial headquarters, are farmers. Sadly, last farming season was not favourable. The President of Zambia declared it a disaster area and sought donor assistance. Montgomery Malengishe is a project worker for Oxfam in Mongu.

MM: This province was one of the provinces that was badly hit by hunger and food insecurity which was declared disaster by the President in 2005. The way of living western province was solely dependent on agriculture and because of the drought, production dwindled as the season was not promising.

Pamela Mnyantha: Most of the crop dried up leaving very little or nothing to harvest for sale let alone to eat in the households. A villager from Mongu talks about how people managed to get by during that time.

Villager: When there was a food crisis the experience was hard here. People use to look for wild fruits, samulite and mangos. They use to cook mangos then they feed. Some use to look for those who offered piece work, you could plow in their fields and you are given some food for the family. But it wasn't enough. But we never experienced anyone dying because they relied on wild fruits and we have plenty of wild fruits like mangos and what we call malwawa in Lozi.

Pamela Mnyantha: In the past when hit with a food crisis Zambians were given assistance in the form of food aid. Many argue however, that food aid can disrupt local markets and make it harder for people to recover from a crisis. Another argument against food aid is that people are often given food which they wouldn't usually eat. In an attempt to solve the problem, Oxfam introduced a scheme which involved handing out money instead of food. We spoke to Lavinda Kwalewa of Mongu District.

LK: The money when we were given we were told it had come to buy food. Our brothers would go to Mongu, use it for transport to buy food, seed. It was very unconvincing at first but when people heard there was money, we received people selling as food were bought directly from although it was expensive. But when we calculated according to transport it was just the same.

Pamela Mnyantha: Researchers looking at the scheme found that giving people the power to decide how aid should be spent helped maintain their sense of dignity. But there are risks involved in transferring large sums of money from the banks to the distribution centres as Montgomery explains.

MM: In every program there are pros and cons. The major challenge we had was the secret part during cash transfer. Although we never had any incident of being attacked by thieves. And looking at western province the terrain is really very bad and we had a problem in getting through most parts of the province.

Pamela Mnyantha: Another potential risk was that the money wouldn't be spent on food. A world food project found that when the money was given to men they were more likely to spend cash transfers on non-essential items. Oxfam found a way around this problem.

Male: They say the money would go directly to the wives because they are the owners of the home and can buy food without misusing the money. And they preferred giving money to the women because they know how one suffers when one is married.

Pamela Mnyantha: Researchers found that Zambian households who took part in this scheme spent 85 to 95% of the money on food. They found that giving people social security doesn't necessarily make them act irresponsibly. Others found that the handouts were just not enough.

Female: We are thankful for the help given. The problem is the money given is not enough. Here in Mangola we are farmers. We grow maize, beans, and groundnuts so if they can give us more money it can help us buy food, sort and other things that will help us.

Pamela Mnyantha: On the whole, this particular scheme was a success but may not be appropriate for every food emergency. For those in areas even more remote than Mongu, getting to markets to buy food could prove a challenge. Some might argue that handing out cash is just another form of aid dependency, which fails to tackle the root causes of food insecurity. Actual real success would mean eliminating food shortages altogether.

Jon Steinman: And that was a segment produced for InterWorld Radio titled “Zambia, Buying Out Hunger.” As such methods of handing out cash instead of food aid is seen as a promising alternative to responding to hunger, there is still much food aid arriving in the country. Food aid being sent around the world is often the product of genetically modified crops being produced by the very same companies introduced at the beginning of the show who are currently testing the viability of GM crops for the pharmaceutical industry. Zambia was catapulted into the heart of the GM controversy in 2002 when it famously refused American food aid during a famine because it contained GM corn. And in this next segment also produced by Pamela Mnyantha for InterWorld Radio in 2005, she explores this issue in Zambia in a segment titled “Zambia: GM Under the Microscope.”

Pamela Mnyantha: I’m standing on a very busy lorry park right now. About 40 trucks a day coming to the border area between Zambia and Zimbabwe. They’re mostly carrying fertilizers, maize and soybeans. And the trucks are being checked to make sure that they’re really carrying what they say they are.

Male: Today I’m carrying soybeans. Most of the times you find 10, 16 trucks on both side of the border and sometimes you spend a night or two and we also have deadlines to meet. If there was an introduction of testing our grain or most of the goods that we are carrying, I think the process would given more cumbersome.

Pamela Mnyantha: Last year, the Zambian government said it would start to change border check points like this one to test whether genetically modified soybeans were being smuggled into the country. I asked the Agriculture Minister, Mr. Mundia Sikatana why he was anxious to keep GM out.

Mundia Sikatana It is a technology that requires lots of precautionary measures and it is only after our scientists have satisfied us that the technology will benefit us, that technology will not be a risk to either environment, human beings or livestock.

Pamela Mnyantha: The Zambian government has made its stand clear. Farmers are divided on the issue. Some like Mr. Madooma agree with the government’s “wait and see” position.

MM: I think as a peasant farmer one of the main reasons is that we have very little knowledge about these GMOs. Once we accept things like that I think we are stuck with them for a long time to come. And I think the effects they may have on our health and the environment and just the general agriculture, the farming part I think it will be a lasting problem to us. I think that’s the fear that we have.

Pamela Mnyantha: For others, GM isn't so much of a problem. It's an opportunity which they are being denied. We spoke to Mr. Lovemore Simwanda from the Zambia National Farmers Union, who's a consultant and an adviser for Technical Management.

Lovemore Simwanda: We help the people in cotton and soybean. They are very interested in trying the technology that might, as far as the information that they have, improve the yields and the economic returns and to be able to eradicate poverty.

Pamela Mnyantha: Zambia's main export markets, the UK and Germany are generally hostile to genetically modified foods and they want products tested for GM before they leave Zambia for the EU.

LS: The EU has preference for non-GM products. So since we trade with the EU, there's fear that we might lose the market.

Pamela Mnyantha: So what next? The Zambian government is busy keeping GM out until its made up its mind about GM. So far, its stand has been to ban it outright. But Dr. Luke Mumba from the University of Zambia believes that could change.

Luke Mumba: Once the Zambian government has put in place all the necessary safeguards to regulate the people practicing this technology to show that the rules that they game are attended to I see us moving forward. So, I don't think banning is the answer.

Jon Steinman: And that was a production titled, "Zambia – GM Under the Microscope" produced in 2005 for InterWorld Radio. I'd like to thank InterWorld Radio for providing the audio segments heard on today's broadcast. You can learn more about the UK-based organization and browse their resources by visiting their website at interworldradio.net

And again, today's show was titled HIV/AIDS, Big Pharma and Food. The broadcast has been archived on the Deconstructing Dinner website where more information on the topics discussed will also be located.

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 radio program is provided free of charge to campus/community radio stations across the country, and relies on the financial support from you the listener. Support for the program can be donated through our website at cjly.net/deconstructingdinner or by dialing 250-352-9600.

Till next week.