Show Transcript

Deconstructing Dinner
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Theme Music

Jon Steinman: And welcome to *Deconstructing Dinner* - a syndicated weekly one hour radio program and podcast produced in the studios of Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY, in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman, and today marks the first of a two-part series that will be critically analyzing what is being suggested as the worst public policy mistake in a generation. A prominent UN figure has just recently called it a crime against humanity, and what I'm referring to may shock even the most environmentally conscious of individuals because I'm referring to biofuels, a technology that is in the early stages of an unprecedented boom around the world. And the green image being painted by industry and world leaders is doing little to convince skeptics that using agricultural land to grow fuel is as environmentally friendly as it is reported to be. Compounding the environmental debate, biofuels are being referred to by some of the world's most influential international organizations as contributing to increases in global hunger at staggering rates.

The seriousness of this issue has prompted a careful approach to addressing this topic, and this two-part series has been designed *to* hopefully be the most critical two hours of radio produced to date on this rapid emergence of biofuels around the world. Voices heard on the program today will be JoAnn Buth - the President of the Canola Council of Canada, Len Penner, the President of Cargill Canada, Darrin Qualman of the National Farmers Union, Robin Speer of the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association, Eric Holt-Gimenez of Food First, also known as The Institute for Food and Development Policy, and we will hear the voices of UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Jean Ziegler, US President George W. Bush, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

And should you not be able to catch all of today's broadcast, we do encourage you to tune in to an archived version of this show on our web site at cjly.net/deconstructingdinner

Increase Music and Fade out

JS: With so many issues to cover on this two-part series I will remind you that more information and additional audio on this topic will also be located on our web site. And with so much to cover in such little time, I will introduce biofuels in as brief of a way as possible. Now, the term biofuels can refer to a wide range of various technologies that are, in its most simplest form, designed to act as fuel for vehicles, for homes, for heavy equipment and really anything that currently relies on fuel. But it is important to stress that with so many forms of biofuels already out there and being proposed, today's broadcast will only be focusing on what can more appropriately be referred to as agrofuels, that is fuels derived from agricultural crops being grown on agricultural land. There are certainly other forms of biofuel technology out there, and those will receive more attention on future broadcasts, but it is the forms of agro biofuels that are receiving the most political and economic attention. The money being thrown around the world and being invested into these biofuel technologies is incredible. Prime Minister Stephen Harper recently promised 1.5 billion dollars in incentives to get the Canadian biofuel industry up and running. British Petroleum has controversially invested half a billion dollars into biofuel research at the University of California at Berkeley. And these are just two small examples of the economic interest in converting either forest or agricultural land into fuel crops.

Now it's mildly important to first differentiate between the two primary biofuel technologies that will be referred to on today's show, and those are ethanol and biodiesel. Ethanol refers to a fuel that has been used for decades in countries like Brazil, and is the by-product of distilled grains such as sugarcane, wheat and corn. Biodiesel on the other hand, is a fuel derived from extracting the oil from crops such as palm, soy and rapeseed, known here in Canada as canola.

It is this form of ethanol and biodiesel that is being promoted by world leaders and industry around the world as being one solution to our environmental concerns in light of a rapidly changing climate. At the September CropLife Canada conference in Saskatoon, it was there that biofuels were mentioned within almost every presentation, and these were the most influential figures in Canada's agricultural sectors. But regardless of whether this technology is truly as green as it is promoted to be, we would be foolish to not critically analyze any of these industrial booms that are capitalizing on climate change fever. And so, that is what we are about to do on today's broadcast. We will be questioning the messages of renewable fuel that is being thrown around wildly, and we will question whether the so-called transition to a more environmentally sustainable fuel can really be called a transition at all. We will explore the many environmental and social impacts that the biofuel boom is already having around the world. We will hear both sides of the food versus fuel debate that revolve around increasing prices of food and the fuelling of hunger. We will critically look at the incentives our federal government has promised this young industry and whether Canadians should accept such use of our public monies. And we will briefly speak on the role of the media in critically analyzing this biofuel boom, because it was this that was perhaps the most important lesson I took from my visit to the CropLife Canada conference in Saskatoon back in September. And you can stay tuned to learn more about the shocking ignorance of Canada's media in

critically addressing what many are calling the greatest public policy mistake in a generation.

Soundbite

JS: Now before we begin to hear the voices of the proponents and opponents of the biofuel boom, I do want to provide a quick executive summary of sorts and share with you what I for one have learned from the research that has gone into this show. I do believe that this biofuel boom is perhaps the greatest modern example of the inability of our culture to holistically look at the impacts our political and economic decisions have on the planet and on humanity as a whole. I did hear from both sides on this issue over the past couple of weeks, and I can comfortably say that this issue exposes the clear danger posed by the amount of unrestricted power that we have placed into the hands of those whose interests are purely for economic gain. But I would say most importantly, that this biofuel boom is the greatest example of--and to use a term referred to by one of my guests today—our "consensus trance", that is our collective denial and inability to question anything that challenges what we perceive to be good. Perhaps the first voice that we are about to play for you sums this up the best.

The impact biofuels are having on food prices and hunger around the world will be the focus for next week's broadcast, but given the importance of this issue, I will play for you an introduction into the concerns being raised at the United Nations. While hundreds of billions of dollars are being set aside for the cultivation and production of biofuels, the United Nations' Jean Ziegler is calling the boom a violation of human rights, and a crime against humanity. On October 25 at the UN General Assembly's Human Rights Committee, Jean Ziegler called for a 5 year moratorium on the biofuel rush. Who is Jean Ziegler? Well here he is being introduced at the press conference following this announcement.

Unidentified male: Good morning; it's my pleasure to introduce Mr. Jean Ziegler, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. This special human rights mechanism was established in 2000, and Mr. Ziegler has been serving in that capacity since the beginning of the mandate. The Special Rapporteur, as you know, is an independent expert; Mr. Ziegler is also a senior professor at the University of Geneva, and at the University of the Sorbonne, Paris. Mr. Ziegler made a statement to the third committee of the General Assembly on the Right to Food yesterday. Mr Ziegler, please. Yes.

Jean Ziegler: Thank you very much for your kindness, for the introduction; ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much. I want make three remarks—I'd like to make three remarks. First of all, the situation of hunger in the world; I give it a definition of the human right to food. The right is the right to have a regular, permanent and unrestricted access either directly or by means of financial purchases to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food, corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs and which ensures a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free of fear. This is a definition of the human right to food.

This human right is gravely violated in many, many parts of the world, and the situation becomes worse and worse; the first Millenium Goal will never be met because hunger in the world goes up instead of going down.

JS: As Jean Ziegler continued his analysis of world hunger, he then turned his attention to the rapid emergence of biofuels - referring to them as catastrophic and a crime against humanity.

JZ: The second point was biofuel. You know that President Bush and President Lula, when they came together here, proclaimed that within five years, twenty-six million hectares of agricultural soil will be effectively transformed to the production of biofuel and biodiesel, for the sake of climatic salvation, for the sake of reducing the foreign debt of Brazil, and for President Bush, which you can understand, to reduce the dependence of America from the oil-producing countries in the Middle East where there is political resistance, turmoil, and so on and so on. So, the individual motivation of the President of Brazil and of the President of Bush are completely legitimate. You can understand this argument, it's not cynicism. But the effect of transforming hundreds and thousands and thousands of tonnes of maize, of wheat, of beans, of palm oil into agricultural fuel is absolutely catastrophic for the hungry people. For the hungry people, absolutely, totally catastrophic. I give you some examples: the price of wheat, the world price of wheat, doubled in one year; the price of maize more than augmented four times.

JS: Jean Ziegler continued his analysis of the biofuel boom by comparing what filling one's gas tank up with 50 litres of ethanol could instead provide to those in need of food. It is this among all else, that prompted Ziegler at the UN General Assembly's Human Rights Committee to demand a 5-year moratorium on the expansion of biofuels.

JZ: If you have a car who goes by ethanol and you fill up your reservoir fifty litres of pure ethanol, to make fifty litres of pure ethanol you have to burn two hundred and thirty two kilos of maize. From two hundred and thirty-two kilos of maize a child in Zambia or in Mexico, where maize is the staple food, lives one year. So it's a crime against humanity to convert agricultural productive soil into soil who is producing foodstuff which will be burned into biofuel and biodiesel. It's a crime against humanity. And I ask—that's the thing, the proposition, to create a moratorium, that the UN prohibits for five years this transformation, this substitution. Why five years? It's realistic; it's realistic because the scientific research is progressing very quickly. I can give you examples. It's progressing very quickly, and in five years it will be possible to make biofuel and biodiesel from agricultural waste.

JS: And that was Jean Ziegler, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. Jean was recorded speaking at a press conference in New York City on October 26. Aand again, I do encourage you to tune in next week when we will zero in on this food versus fuel debate and revisit with many of the voices you will hear today and some new voices as well.

And so while prominent figures such as Jean Ziegler call the biofuel boom a crime against humanity, what do world leaders think of converting agricultural crops into fuel? Well our very own Prime Minister Stephen Harper is so in favour of the fledgling industry that $1.5 billion dollars of public money has been promised to get the industry going. Here's Prime Minister Stephen Harper speaking
in Strongfield, Saskatchewan on July 5, 2007.

Stephen Harper: Well thank you very much, Carol, for that kind introduction. Minister Strahl, Minister Ritz, representatives of the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association, President and CEO of the facility here, Lionel Labelle; it's a pleasure to be here today with an announcement that I know is good news for Canada's farmers.

With leading edge technology and abundant supplies of grains, oilseeds and other feed stocks, Canada is uniquely positioned to become a world leader in the production of biofuels. The global appetite for more environmentally friendly sources of energy is growing by the day. The world is waking up to the fact that what and how we consume today will determine the quality of life for the generations of tomorrow. This is a grave responsibility, one that Canada takes very seriously, and that's why our government is acting.

Last December, our government began to move Canada towards smarter consumption by putting in place a regulation requiring a five percent average renewable content in gasoline by 2010. We also signalled our intention to develop a similar requirement of two percent for diesel fuel and heating oil by 2012. Close to 3 billion litres of renewable fuels are going to be needed annually to meet the requirements of these proposed regulations.

As it currently stands, however, Canada produces less than 400 million litres a year. We need to bridge this gap and we need to do it quickly. Today I'm proud to announce a program that will help us do just that. Through ecoEnergy for Biofuels, our government will make a substantial investment in the form of incentives to producers of renewable alternatives to gasoline and diesel. As a result, we're going to see a lot more biofuel plants cropping up across the country in the coming years, like the one we're breaking the ground for today.

A project, I might add, that our government was proud to play a role in developing. Primarily owned by local farmers, the Gardiner Dam Agro-Energy Ethanol Facility will convert 10 million bushels of wheat into 100 million litres of ethanol a year once it's up and running. I think I rounded the numbers a little bit there. This represents a tremendous economic opportunity for Saskatchewan farmers. Indeed, across the country, plants such as this one are going to provide an exciting new market for Canada's 61 000 grain and oilseeds producers. But while rural communities stand to benefit greatly from our new program, the ultimate winner is going to be the environment, a resource I mentioned a moment ago: the air we breathe, the water we drink, the land that grows our food.

JS: Stephen Harper speaking in Strongfield, Saskatchewan in July 2007. Now what about other world leaders? What to they think of the biofuel boom? Well Brazil has long been a

leading producer and user of ethanol derived from sugarcane, and the United States sees Brazil as a key partner in helping reduce their dependence on volatile Middle Eastern oil. In March 2007, Presdient Lula and President Bush met in Sao Paulo to announce such a partnership. Here is President Lula, speaking through his translator.

*Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva: (translator - Lula's voice in background)…*to the final incorporation of the energy blend of our two countries. It is a major satisfaction, that I was very pleased to know about President Bush's decision to give greater value to biofuel within the energy blend of the United States. This agreement brings into reality an idea which was born on the occasion of our meeting in Brasilia in 2005, when President Bush first became aware of Brazil's success story with biofuel. It's important to remember that when President Bush went to Brasilia, I was truly obsessed with biofuel, and he almost couldn't have lunch because I wouldn't stop talking about biofuel. But I think that was important, because the world is not always ready and prepared for major changes unless we have untiring debates and people are convinced that planet Earth needs to be de-polluted. And it's in our hands, we who have polluted it, to de-pollute it. We're doing the same thing in our betting on biodiesel; by 2010 Brazilian diesel, five percent of it, will come from native, abundant plants in our country such as: African palm, cottonseed, sunflower, castor beans and many other seeds. Also our biodiesel program has a major social impact. It is aimed at small farmers, to family farmers. It will help create jobs and income in the poorest regions of our country, especially in the north-eastern semi-arid region where many of these crops are actually native.

Today the entire society is reaping the fruit of these efforts, and other countries want to share Brazil's experience. The memorandum is an important step in that direction.

JS: Now I do want to play one more clip from Brazil's President Lula because in this one he refers to the term that we will be critically analysing today, and that is the term renewable. You just heard Prime Minister Stephen Harper refer to it in his July announcement and here's President Lula, doing the same.

LLdS:(translator) Brazil has been a tireless defender of renewable energy resources and renewable fuels. I am convinced, President Bush, that the United States with its great technological and entrepreneurial capacities will be an extraordinary partner in this undertaking.

JS: Brazilian President Lula. And here is US President George W. Bush speaking after Lula on the opportunities of biofuels.

George W. Bush: And I, like the President, am very upbeat about the potential of ethanol and biodiesel; and that's why we're here. People have wondered why the President of the United States would be so interested in diversification of our energy supply, and here are the reasons. One, if you're dependent upon oil from overseas you have a national security issue. In other words, dependency on energy from somewhere else means that you're dependent upon the decisions from somewhere else. And so as we diversify away from the use of gasoline by using ethanol we're really diversifying away from oil.

Secondly, dependency upon oil creates an economic problem for not only the United States but anybody else who imports oil. In a globalized world, if the demand for oil goes up in China or India it runs up the price of gasoline in our respective countries. And therefore diversification away from the oil product is in the economic interests of our respective countries. And finally, as the President noted, we all feel incumbent to be good stewards of the environment. It just so happens that ethanol and biodiesel will help improve the quality of the environment in our respective countries. So I'm very much in favour of promoting the technologies that will enable ethanol and biodiesel to remain competitive, and therefore affordable to the people in our respective countries and around our neighbourhoods.

One of the things I like, as the President noted, is that a good ethanol policy and good alternative fuel policy, actually leads to more jobs, not less. In other words, at this plant there are jobs. But as the President noted, when you're growing your way out of dependence on oil, you're dependent upon people to work the land. And the distribution of wealth, the distribution of opportunity, to farmers—particularly to smaller farmers in our respective countries—will enable the economy to be more on firm foundations. Ando so Mr President, your vision is absolutely correct.

JS: To give you a better idea as to how lucrative and valuable biofuels are seen to be to the US economy, it is important to note that President Bush's brother, Florida State Governor Jeb Bush, was recently appointed to co-chair the Interamerican Ethanol Commission. A sure sign of an agenda worth being critical of.

In this next clip, President Bush continues with more reference to his biofuel goals, and judging by his first sentence, he does not seem to have a teleprompter. But his concluding remark is most important. Take a listen.

GWB: And in America that technology is available, so my fellow citizens shouldn't fear the development of an alternative source of energy industry, because the consumer's got the capacity to buy an automobile that will meet those new productions. I'm very optimistic that America can benefit from alternative energy sources; so optimistic that I laid out an ambitious goal for our country, and that is to reduce gasoline consumption by twenty percent over ten years. In other words, we have a mandated fuel standard of thirty-five billion gallons of alternative fuels to be used by 2017. That is now seven times more than the amount of alternative fuels we're using. Right now we're using about five billion gallons of ethanol; I believe that the technologies will be such that America will be consuming thirty-five billion gallons of alternative fuels. And that's important for our country; it is a commitment to becoming less dependent on oil, and it's a commitment to be better stewards of the environment.

JS: Now it's this final remark by US President George Bush that lays the groundwork to cover on the remainder of today's broadcast, as it's this ongoing promise of environmental benefit that leaves many wondering if these world leaders are even paying any attention to the implications of such decisions. And so first, let's explore the key term being used by industry and government to promote the conversion of agricultural crops into fuel, and

that term, again, is "renewable". The word presents an image of green and clean fuel, so much so, that the main biofuel industry association here in Canada is not only called the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association but has secured the web site address greenfuels.org. Quite an eco-friendly image being painted by the industry. The Canadian government has even placed biofuel initiatives under their new "ecoaction" programs. But are Canadians being duped into thinking that biofuels are the answer to climate change?

Eric Holt-Gimenez thinks so, and he is the Executive Director of Food First, also known as the Institute for Food and Development Policy. The Oakland, California based organization was launched 32 years ago by well known author and environmental advocate Francis Moore Lappé, most well known for her early 1970's release, *Diet for a Small Planet*. I asked Eric if biofuels are renewable.

Eric Holt-Giminez: Yes, well, technically fuel crops are renewable because you can grow them over and over again, but in practical terms that doesn't mean that they're sustainable. So what's happening here is that the industry is attempting to greenwash fuel crops by saying "renewable", and by association leading people to think that that means they're sustainable. But in fact, a lot of industrial agriculture is not sustainable at all, and in fact is one of the major causes of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide, as well as erosion, deforestation and landlessness. So it's really pretty evasive to use that term, I think. It doesn't quite describe things the way they really are.

JS: The very use of the word renewable to promote the biofuel industry was most apparent during my recent attendance at the September CropLife Canada conference in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Presenting at the conference was JoAnn Buth - the President of the Canola Council of Canada. She spent much of her time promoting the promise of canola as an important crop to help meet the 2% government set mandates for the inclusion of biodiesel in all diesel engines by 2012. And so first take a listen to these two brief segments from her presentation.

JoAnn Buth: You also have to remember that biodiesel is a renewable fuel….we also get the benefits of less tillage in summer fallow. We also see the savings in terms of fuel because of that one less pass, and also we documented a reduction in herbicide use.

JS: Standing out from these two segments was one, the reference to biofuels being renewable, and two her reference to the inputs required to grow such crops. What are these inputs, but fossil fuels, petrochemicals for tractors, herbicides and pesticides, perhaps natural gas for fertilizers, only a sampling of the countless non-renewable fuels required to grow biofuel crops. While the term renewable may be true, it is certainly deceptive and misleading to suggest that biofuels are renewable when they require so many non-renewable inputs. And so, following her presentation, a media scrum ensued with about five members of the media following up with questions. None of them questioned the environmental message, and so, I chose to do just that, and what occurred following the asking of my question, may shock you, and it presents a clear illustration of the inability of Canadian media to critically question this major issue. Once I finished

asking the question, the media in the surrounding scrum proceeded to turn off their cameras and audio recorders and walk away. Now take a listen to her evasion of the question, and try not to be distracted by those representing Canada's agriculture and mainstream media, who you can hear in the background shutting down their equipment and packing up after the question is asked.

JS: (interview clip): Now biodiesel is referred to often as a renewable resource, but you indicated of course there's all these inputs to go into the growing of these crops such as fossil fuels, petroleum, natural gas, which are non-renewable resources. Can you speak to this?

JB: Well, when you take a look at the total energy balance for biodiesel, if you take into consideration everything in terms of growing the crop it takes about a litre of diesel to produce two and a half litres of canola biodiesel. So that's taking everything into consideration. If you're producing petroleum diesel it takes about a litre of petroleum diesel. So that is taken into account, and yes it's not as—you know, the energy balance is different than biodiesel, but it is a renewable so you're able to pay into it every year, whereas with strictly fossil fuels obviously you're drawing down completely. And the other thing you need to take a look at, too, is the carbon emission side of things. And if you look at the carbon emissions you see a dramatic decrease in carbon emissions with the use of biodiesel; and then because growers are able to use zero tillage, you also get soil carbon. So when you look at the balance overall you are looking at a very positive message, or a very positive endpoint in terms of canola biodiesel.

JS: Now I will say the actions by the other media to not record this critical question was a shock to say the least, and to be quite honest, I was barely able to listen to the response to the question as I was far too blown away by Canada's agriculture and mainstream media as they packed up their equipment. And so, it is this incident that will spark a future broadcast on which we will explore how the media addresses agriculture and food issues, because to not choose to question what is being called a crime against humanity is one thing, but to have a recording device rolling and to not record a journalist doing so, is maybe too, a crime against humanity

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JS: Now I did present this audio clip to Darrin Qualman, the Director of Research for the Saskatoon-based National Farmers' Union. Darrin first introduced the biofuel concern here on *Deconstructing Dinner* back in January of this year, and he comments on this ongoing reference to biofuels being renewable.

Darrin Qualman: The most interesting philosophical distinction that you can make here is between renewable and sustainable. Yeah, these are renewable fuels but the question is: are they sustainable? And that really comes down to a question of scale. And to explain, you can think about past biofuels, past renewable fuels: the world used to run on renewable fuels, biofuels. We heated our house with wood and we lit it with whale oil. And when you think about something like whale oil, when they started collecting whales,

killing whales and bringing them back and extracting oil, that was a renewable, sustainable resource. The whales would renew themselves by reproducing, and as long as you didn't kill whales faster than they could reproduce it was actually sustainable. But as you scale that up, and try to double and redouble and redouble the amount of oil you took, the resource remained renewable, it just ceased to be sustainable in that you soon get down to your last pair of whales, and you kill them and you'd be done. So what I think they are trying to do is they're saying "renewable" and they're trying to trick you into hearing "sustainable". And the two are very different.

JS: This audio clip from the CropLife conference was also presented to Eric Holt-Gimenez of Food First. In his response he refers to these energy balance figures that you heard JoAnn Buth reference. But before we hear from Eric, let's first look at what energy balance means given the industry uses it to promote the benefits of biofuels. And so here again is Darrin Qualman

DQ: The energy balance debate is a difficult one. It helps to frame the question this way: what sorts of energy sources are rich and abundant enough to power the civilization that we've created here, a civilization of megacities, and jets, and cars, and trains, and food transported around the world, and bringing in our manufactured goods from China by ship, and just a globalized mega-civilization? Fossil fuels can do it. They're rich and abundant—at least for now, although that's quickly changing and we're running up against the limits there. What we have to realize is biofuels are much less rich and abundant. The energy balances are half, or a third, or a tenth of what we get from petroleum. Often if you have ten barrels of petroleum you have to put one barrel back into the system to get your next ten; nine out of ten are surplus, and they can run things like cities and cars and jets. But with bioenergy, if you have ten barrels of ethanol or biodiesel—and I'll just lump those together for a minute—you have to put five or six or seven or eight or nine or ten back into the system to get your next ten. So you have very little surplus left over in that system for powering this civilization. And I think that's the take-home message: even if you ignore the critics that say the energy balance is very bad or that you're actually losing energy, and accept what the proponents say, you see that you've got an energy balance that's only a fraction of petroleum. So the question is, is bioenergy sufficient to run this civilization? And the answer is no; I think what you then have to do is start re-thinking civilization and it's energy requirements. I think the lie that they try and propagate here is that somehow we can keep this civilization with all its cars and planes and transport going on biofuel.

JS: And so now with a better understanding of what energy balance means, here's Eric Holt-Gimenez, commenting on JoAnn Buth's response to my question on the term renewable. I will note that Eric uses the term Peak Oil, and for any listeners who have not yet heard this term, it is used in reference to the point at which global supplies of oil reach their peak - a point that is said to have already occurred.

EH-G: What she says is, for the most part, technically correct. It's what she doesn't say which makes the difference, of course. The fact that canola has a two-and-a-half or three to one return on energy investment sounds good, actually it's terrible. Petroleum is twenty

to one right now; it started out as a hundred to one, the last century it's been going down but it's still twenty to one. So this isn't a good substitute by any means. So we're not gaining a tremendous amount in terms of energy; we're losing a tremendous amount, and what that tells us is that we will never be able to run our present fuel systems on agrofuels because the return on the energy investment is just so low to make those fuel systems in their entirety inoperable. You just can't do it. And so what this means, of course, is that agrofuels are not about some sort of transition into a renewable fuel economy, or sustainable fuel economy, at all. One, because they're not sustainable and two, because the fact that they're renewable doesn't mean that they're taking us anywhere, because they can only be additives at best, and they can only be an add-on at best, at a very small percentage by the way, to our present oil economy.

And so what's really happening here is that the oil industry and agro industry are combining and consolidating to transform our food and fuel systems under one huge corporate industrial roof, where they're going to have all this oligopolistic control over both systems; and this is about extending the period of Peak Oil. It's not about some transition beyond Peak Oil; it's about extending the period of Peak Oil, and if you think about it, it makes a lot of sense from an industrial point of view. Because if Peak Oil at one hundred dollars a barrel—we're almost there right now—and if it goes beyond that, you want to extend that period, stretch it out as much as possible, and agrofuels allows the industry to do that. So they'll be able to get the most on their return of investment from the Peak Oil period. Unfortunately this isn't taking us into any post-oil fuel economy. It's not taking us into the future of anything. It's just using up the resources that we have now under the benign term of renewables.

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JS: This is *Deconstructing Dinner*, a syndicated weekly one hour radio program and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman. Today marks part one of a two part series titled "Biofuel Boom: Greenwashing and Crimes Against Humanity". On today's part I we focus on the accusations that the push to convert agricultural crops around the world into fuel for our cars is camoflauged in greenwashing. Greenwashing refers to any positive environmental messages that are, with further analysis, not positive at all. Next week we will expand upon last week's announcement by the United Nations Jean Ziegler, that biofuels are a crime against humanity as they are driving up food prices around the world and accelerating hunger rates. There will also be a wealth of information on this topic that will appear on our web site at cjly.net/deconstructingdinner.

Now I do want to continue on this topic of the environmental impacts of biofuels. It is no debate that industrial forms of agriculture have led to widespread and negative environmental impacts and one would hope that such impacts are factored in to any environmental messages promoting the use of biofuels derived from such industrially grown crops. And so I asked Darrin Qualman of the National Farmers Union this very question as to how holistic of an approach does the industry and government use when assessing environmental impacts and energy balance figures.

DQ: The proponents of bioenergy take a best-case scenario when it comes to energy balances, and when it comes to economics around their product. They're not taking full account of all the various costs. When we look around the world at the current system that's just trying to produce food--and really the bioenergy component isn't very big yet--when we look around the world at what our food system is doing when it comes to water depletion, when it comes to water pollution, whether it be the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico or Lake Winnipeg or other water bodies, when we look at soil erosion and loss of crop land we see that we've got a system that's drawing down it's resources, and that needs to be taken into account. Also, focusing more directly on biodiesel and ethanol, you really have to carefully calculate the fossil fuel inputs that go into making these. And when you do that you find that estimates made by the proponents aren't very credible, and the truth is a little less positive than they purport. And often the energy balances are very borderline; certainly with ethanol, many people say that you put in more energy than you get out and biodiesel may or may not be any better.

JS: Now given the many environmental impacts of these forms of agriculture used to grow biofuel crops, it certainly raises the question of how the proponents of the industry address such environmental concerns. In this next clip we hear Canola Council of Canada President JoAnn Buth, again speaking at the CropLife Canada conference in September.

JB: In terms of greenhouse gas emissions, this is some work that was done by Hadi Dowlatabadi from the University of British Columbia on canola biodiesel and the greenhouse gas emissions, and the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. And you'll see with biodiesel from canola, when you add in the zero till aspect, you can also add in the benefits from soil carbon sequestration. So that's the benefits in terms of environment on the biodiesel side. We've all seen this; we've all seen what growers have adopted, and the rapid adoption that growers have done for Roundup, for Liberty and for Clearfield for the HT systems—clear benefits to growers, otherwise there wouldn't have been this rapid adoption. Well, what has it meant? From a 2000 study that we did, we took a look at what are the impacts of HT systems and GM systems on the environment. And one of the things that…

JS: Now I'll end the clip there because she continues on speaking about the benefits of these new hybrid and genetically modified crop varieties. But her efforts to make a connection between biofuels and crop varieties concerns Darrin Qualman. I did send Darrin the clip you just heard, and here's his response.

DQ: She's trying to connect together purported environmental benefits of zero till to biodiesel, and there's no real connection. Good or bad, zero till farming and the replacement of tillage with chemical herbicides and the introduction of genetically modified crops, that was a revolution that started in the mid-90s and really has nothing to do with biofuels. So if they're somehow trying to claim an environmental benefit from reduced tillage and connect that to biofuels, they're grasping.

JS: Such efforts to connect biofuels to environmental issues don't stop with the Canola Council of Canada. Representing the biofuel industry in Canada is the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association based in Toronto. I caught up with the Association's Director of Public Affairs Robin Speer. In our conversation I questioned the eco-friendly message the public is receiving when hearing such references to renewable fuels and green fuels. My efforts to present to him the many environmental impacts of industrial agriculture resulted in a swift response with a number of comments. Take a listen.

JS: (interview clip): When looking at just the requirements of this system, of growing canola, or soy, or corn, that in order to really get this final biofuel product, they do require these non-renewable resources such as the fertilizers you mentioned. And so, yes, maybe the technology is allowing for a decreased usage of them, but right now they're very much reliant on such large-scale monocrop systems that require these non-renewable inputs. Do-

Robin Speer: Well, not if a canola farmer in Saskatchewan is powering his equipment with biodiesel, right? You know, let's talk traditional energy supplies. You don't take a lump of coal and jam it in the wall, and the lights come on. It's not how it works. That's not how it works in producing crude from the tar sands or even conventional crude, either. Or nuclear energy, for that matter, or hybrid cars. Mining nickel. Biofuels is a very positive step in the right direction and we can do it today. And you see significant overall life cycle greenhouse gas reductions, as well as reductions in all sorts of other air pollutants, and while you're doing that you're also developing your rural economies; you're seeing farmers get involved in these plants, not just selling crops but actually getting involved in them directly, in ownership capacities as well. And you're diversifying your energy supply; you're taking a step forward and moving in the right direction, as opposed to remaining where we are with hundred dollar oil, and that's just going to continue rising. So with this you're creating a clean-burning renewable fuel and you're bringing down fuel prices at the pump.

JS: And that was Robin Speer of the Toronto-based Canadian Renewable Fuels Association. Now Robin disagrees that any reference to biofuels as being green is in any way misleading. But he did introduce a number of comments that deserve to be addressed both now and on next week's part II of this Biofuel Boom series. For one, Robin Speer suggests that farmers are involved in the ownership of new ethanol and biodiesel plants. Next week we will hear comments from both Darrin Qualman and Eric Holt-Gimenez who challenge the use of such an argument and suggest that any farmer control of these plants won't last and current trends are suggestive of this. Robin Speer also refers to biofuels as being clean burning, yet another questionable comment. While biofuels may be cleaner burning, there are emissions being created from the burning of such fuels, and to refer to them as clean is simply not true. But let's take a quick look at his reference to biofuels leading to a reduction in air pollutants and in doing so; let's first take a listen to this radio advertisement created by the Association

(music in background)

Unidentified boy 1: Ethanol makes cars less stinky.

Unidentified girl 1: It makes city air clean like country air.

Unidentified girl 2: My dad says ethanol's good for the planet.

Unidentified boy 2: It looks a lot like corn, only bigger.

Unidentified girl 3: Ethanol helps the trees make good air.

Unidentified boy 3: My teacher said that ethanol reduces greenhouse emissions, and that's good.

Unidentified girl 4: Ethanol cleans up the nozone.

Male announcer: Ontario corn farmers and their kids understand the importance of renewable fuels like ethanol. Check it out at greenfuels.org.

Children's voices: I grow ethanol.

(music ends)

JS: Now again, the comment that stands out from this eco-focused advertisement is the young girls reference to ethanol helping trees make good air, similar to Robin Speer's suggestion that biofuels reduce air pollutants. Now I've just spent significant time looking into this issue over the past few weeks, and I can say with confidence that suggesting ethanol helps trees make good air is absurd, when in the global South forests are rapidly being destroyed as we speak to make way for the government-set mandates announced here in the global North. And so we will look into this on next week's part II, because the inability to address the rapid deforestation in Brazil, Malaysia, Indonesia and run an ad campaign suggesting biofuels help trees make good air, raises many questions. But most importantly, it introduces the tone in which the Canadian industry speaks when referring to Canadian biofuels. There is a very nationally-focused rhetoric that comes out of any dialogue on biofuels, one that seems to believe that what happens within our borders doesn't impact what happens elsewhere. Eric Holt-Gimenez of Food First also shares this concern and helps introduce what will be a focus for next week's show.

EH-G: And what's particularly disturbing is that in the US and in Canada so much of the discussion is just about what's happening nationally, without seeing how the industry and these renewable fuel standards and mandatory targets are fuelling deforestation and landlessness abroad. As if we're somehow disconnected or divorced from that; it's just about our national farmers and our national industry, and should we protect it or not, and what are the targets going to be. In fact, it's directly connected to this destruction happening in the global South, and we have to bring that into the conversation.

JS: And this is *Deconstructing Dinner* and that was Eric Holt-Gimenez - the Executive Director of Food First, a food and development policy organization based in Oakland California. We will certainly be hearing more from Eric on next week's part II, and in the meantime you can check out their web site at foodfirst.org.

Now let's also take a quick look at another comment made by Robin Speer of the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association. He did swiftly dismiss my questioning of the countless non-renewable resources required to grow these biofuels, by indicating that a canola grower could very well be fuelling their tractor with biofuels. Now given the energy balances referred to earlier, such as the one barrel of energy rich petroleum being required to produce 1.5 barrels of ethanol, it seems like quite the stretch to suggest that replacing that barrel of petroleum with a biofuel is going to result in any leftover fuel to use in cars, buses or planes. Darrin Qualman of the National Farmers Union comments on such an idea.

DQ: Imagine running a biodiesel system on only biodiesel, that you use that sort of energy to make your fertilizers, and to run your tractors and run your trucks, and all of that. And if you did that you would have a really renewable system, if you took everything into account. But you'd also have a system that ran around and around and around and used up a lot of energy producing energy, and really generated very, very little surplus but generated a lot of CO2 along the way. So I think one way to actually sort this out would be to sit down and figure out what a biodiesel-fuelled biodiesel system would look like, how much CO2 it would produce, and whether it would actually produce any usable surplus energy in the end or not. A lot of the surpluses in terms of energy that come out the other end of the pipe in terms of biodiesel are actually just a reflection of the amount of petroleum fossil fuels put in the other end.

JS: And that was Darrin Qualman, Director of Research for the Saskatoon-based National Farmers' Union. Darrin will lend his voice to the show yet again on next week's part II of this Biofuel Boom series.

But if today's part I of the series hasn't been enough to convince you that the environmental messages coming out of the agriculture and biofuel industries shouldn't be critically questioned, the next few clips you are about to hear should do an adequate job. With the biofuel industry being as young as it is here in Canada, Canadians can expect some increasing publicity coming out of the industry. When I was recording the Canola Council of Canada's JoAnn Buth back in September, she announced a new web site and promotional campaign to promote canola biodiesel. As her presentation proceeded, an image appeared on the screen of a vehicle with the word Canola plastered along the side of the car. The car was obviously fuelled by canola biodiesel and was decorated with images of canola fields. But this wasn't any car; this was what is known as a "funny car", also known as a high-performance drag racing vehicle. And so not only is the image of the so-called environmentally friendly canola biodiesel going to be portrayed through a drag racing car, the car is actually jet-powered. And so here's a clip of the President of the Canola Council of Canada sharing some information on this new campaign.

JB: Okay, let's switch to biodiesel. Normally I wouldn't use this as the example of biodiesel's benefits to the environment; (laughter in background) I could have put my 2000 Jetta TDI up here, where I do use a biodiesel additive, but it would have been pretty boring. This car has just been absolutely amazing in terms of generating excitement. The biggest hits on grower's websites has been looking for where the jet funny car is going to be. And so we're going to try and capitalize on this, and we'll be launching a canolabiodiesel.org website where we hope to essentially have the schedule for the funny car up front and centre, where we can draw people in and then educate them more on canola biodiesel.

JS: An image of this canola biodiesel jet car will be up on the *Deconstructing Dinner* web site for you to check out. But we also have something else here to share with you. This is a recording from August of this year, of the canola biodiesel jet car showing off it's power at a test farm just south of Winnipeg, Manitoba. And so here is the sound of the so-called environmentally friendly canola biodiesel campaign.

Unidentified female: Erica, keep your hands on your ears.

sound of jet engine revving up

JS: And again, if this hasn't convinced you of the absurdity of the environmental messages being attached to agricultural biofuels, take a listen to this. This is the radio ad we heard just earlier produced by the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association of which the Canola Council of Canada is a member. But this time, the ad has been altered just a bit.

music in background

Unidentified boy 1: Ethanol makes cars less stinky.

Unidentified girl 1: It makes city air clean like country air.

sound of jet engine revving up over music

Unidentified girl 2: My dad says ethanol's good for the planet.

Unidentified boy 2: It looks a lot like corn, only bigger.

Unidentified girl 3: Ethanol helps the trees make good air.

Unidentified boy 2: My teacher said that ethanol reduces greenhouse emissions, and that's good.

Unidentified girl 4: Ethanol cleans up the nozone.

Male announcer: Ontario corn farmers and their kids understand the importance of renewable fuels like ethanol. Check it out at greenfuels.org.

Children's voices: I grow ethanol.

Music, jet engine noise ends

JS: Now for anyone who missed the first segment of today's broadcast, we did play the announcement by Prime Minister Stephen Harper that the federal government has promised $1.5 billion dollars of public money to fund this industry and more "environmentally friendly fuels". And again here's a clip of Stephen Harper and what he would sound like if he was standing beside the Canola biodiesel jet car.

SH: **jet noise in background** Canada is uniquely positioned to become a world leader in the production of biofuels. The global appetite for more environmentally friendly sources of energy is growing by the day. The world is waking up to the fact that what and how we consume today will determine the quality of life for the generations of tomorrow. This is a grave responsibility, one that Canada takes very seriously…

JS: Prime Minister Stephen Harper speaking in July 2007 in Strongfield Saskatchewan, and what he would sound like standing beside the canola biodiesel jet car. The touring schedule for the car is planned to be incorporated into the upcoming Canola Council of Canada biodiesel campaign and it's, yes, as absurd as it sounds, green, renewable and eco-friendly fuel.

soundbite

JS: Again, you've heard some segments today that were compiled at the CropLife Canada conference I attended back in September 2007. On next week's part II, you can expect to hear more of this inside information into Canada's agricultural industry including comments and responses from Cargill Canada President Len Penner and Canola Council of Canada's JoAnn Buth. And we will hear more from the critics, Darrin Qualman, Eric Holt-Gimenez and more.

I do want to stress, though, that biofuels refer to many different technologies and this Biofuel Boom series here on *Deconstructing Dinner* is only focusing on the biofuels derived from industrial agricultural crops. It is for these crops that global attention and global financing is currently directed, such as ethanol and biodiesel products being derived from corn, soy, canola, palm, sugarcane and wheat among others.

The focus for next week will be on the food vs. fuel debate, especially in light of the October 25th demand at the United Nations for a moratorium on biofuels. UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Jean Ziegler referred to biofuels' impact on food prices around the world as a crime against humanity. You will hear the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association calling this UN representative ill-informed, and you can tune in and find out why. We will also look into the promise that biofuels will support farmers both

here and abroad, and we will quickly explore the murders and violence that Columbian paramilitaries are carrying out in the name of biofuel production. We will learn more about the $500 million biofuel research funding given to
the University of California at Berkeley by British Petroleum (BP). And most importantly, we will question the $1.5 billion federal biofuel incentive program and the mandates that have been set by the Canadian government. These mandates would be the first to go if any moratorium were announced by the UN, and such mandates should concern all Canadians, because with these mandates, by 2012, it is being suggested that all fuel-based systems will be forced to include a specified percentage of biofuels. We will have no choice but to support the impacts that the agrofuel push is having around the world.

sponsorship announcement

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 web site at cjly.net/deconstructingdinner or by dialling 250-352-9600.