

**Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
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**Title: Monsanto's Product Release Form / Mandatory Labeling of GE-Foods
(Bill C-517)**

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Jon Steinman: And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner – a syndicated weekly one hour radio show and Podcast produced in Nelson, British Columbia at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY. I'm Jon Steinman.

On the show today, and as promised, we hear a brief continuation of our analysis on the recent Percy Schmeiser versus Monsanto small-claims court case. I'll be sharing with you some more detailed information that came out of my dialogue with Monsanto's Trish Jordan.

And on a similar topic, and continuing on with our ongoing coverage on the controversial presence of genetically engineered foods among us, we'll listen in on segments of the April 3rd 2008, debate that took place in the House of Commons with respect to Bill C-517 – a bill to legislate the mandatory labeling of foods containing ingredients that have been genetically modified. We'll hear the voices of Members of Parliament Gilles-André Perron, Bruce Stanton, Robert Thibault, Nathan Cullen and Marcel Lussier. And we'll also hear clips from a phone conversation I had *with* Conservative MP Bruce Stanton on why *he* believes mandatory labeling is *not* necessary.

increase music and fade out

JS: First on the agenda for today's broadcast will be a brief revisiting of the recent story we covered here during our March 20th broadcast when we heard from Saskatchewan Farmer Percy Schmeiser. It was on March 19th 2008, when Schmeiser arrived at an out-of-court settlement with global seed giant Monsanto – the world's largest developer and supplier of genetically modified seeds. For frequent listeners of Deconstructing Dinner, it's likely become pretty clear that the genetic modification of life has, is and will continue to be a focused topic covered here on the show, partly because the mainstream media seems to be doing a pretty bang up job of ignoring this topic, and when they *do* choose to cover it, articles turn up to most often regurgitate press releases.

However, this is clearly an important topic to Canadians – we have farmers taking multi-national agribusiness to small claims court, we have organic farmers attempting to file class action law suits against these companies, and we have Members of Parliament debating the mandatory labeling of food containing such genetically engineered or GE ingredients.

Now in the case of the latter and according to up-to-date directories of print media in the country, it appears not one, not one Canadian publication has yet covered the debate that took place in the House of Commons on April 3rd. On the other hand, Canadians should not be so surprised with how most media seems to cover this topic. Following the recent case between Schmeiser and Monsanto, I entered into a dialogue over email and over the phone with Monsanto's Public Affairs Director Trish Jordan, and that dialogue provided a pretty enlightening exposure into the type of information journalists seem to be receiving from these multi-national seed companies.

soundbite

JS: For any listeners who have not yet heard of this most recent battle between Percy Schmeiser and Monsanto, here's a rather roundabout way to describe why this case is so important.

Imagine you walk out of your house one morning, only to find a rusty old car sitting on your lawn. The vehicle appears to also have arrived there by someone who chose to drive it in circles a few times on your lawn - digging up your entire front yard and leaving the unwanted vehicle sitting there in front of your house.

You walk outside, take a look at the damage, and lo and behold, the idiot who drove the car onto your lawn, left his wallet sitting on the front seat. You open the wallet, and there it is his identification, name, address, phone number, and even a pile of empty beer bottles on the passenger seat.

So, naturally, you call him up, and his name, is Michael Monsanto. You tell Michael, listen, your property is sitting on mine and given I run a home business, the damage you've caused to my front lawn is driving my customers away. Michael Monsanto embarrassed that he stupidly left his id in the car that fateful night driving home drunk, agrees to come over and assess the damage. An hour later he shows up on your doorstep, and you tell him, Mr. Monsanto, take the car, repair the damage and just get out of here. Mr. Monsanto agrees to the request because he fears a lawsuit may be on his hands, but first he pulls out a single sheet of paper. No problem, he says, I'll remove the car just so long as you sign this release document.

You look at the document, and two things stand out; number one the document indicates that *if* he takes the unwanted vehicle and repairs the damage to your property, *you* have to agree to never tell a soul about what happened and the

second clause that catches your eye, are a few paragraphs of very convoluted legal terminology that seems to suggest that *if* he cleans up the mess, you can never, at *any* future date, take any legal action against him. So in other words, if next year, Mr. Monsanto drives home drunk, yet again, destroys your lawn, scares away your customers from your home-based business, and leaves the rusty old vehicle sitting on your property, and *this* time, leaking gasoline into your soil, you would, if the release was signed, be unable to take any legal action.

Now needless to say, Mr. Monsanto would *likely* have received a fist in the face, and the release form shoved down his throat. Now it's this very same incident that happened to Percy Schmeiser in 2005, when Monsanto's genetically engineered Roundup Ready Canola, appeared growing on his farm, root, stalk and flower.

Now Schmeiser did *not* punch out Mr. Monsanto in this case and instead, demanded the company remove the plants and leave. Mr. Monsanto refused, and long story short, it took until March 19th 2008, for Monsanto to finally pay Percy the \$660 it cost him to remove the unwanted plants. As part of that settlement, it was ensured that Percy *could* take the company to court in the future, and *was* able to share the story about the incident.

And so here is where this story begins to get far more interesting, because in my follow-up with Monsanto's Public Affairs Director Trish Jordan, she stressed to me over the phone that, "we are not the instigator here." Now Schmeiser, of course, believes such a statement to be ridiculous because it was Monsanto's property that trespassed onto his.

Here's a quick clip of Percy Schmeiser last heard on our March 20th broadcast when he responded to the efforts of Monsanto, to dictate the terms of the removal of their patented plants from his fields.

Percy Schmeiser: And they want to dictate the orders, I said you people have done the damage to me I dictate to you want I want done, not you cause you've done the damage.

Jon Steinman: And this is Deconstructing Dinner. Now the reason why Monsanto's Trish Jordan was so comfortable telling me that it was Schmeiser who was the instigator in this latest small claims court battle, is because the company *does* actually employ a program that offers *to* farmers the option of the company removing the plants. It was Schmeiser's refusal *of* this program that leads Jordan to believe that Schmeiser was the instigator. Her position was made quite clear in the press release she issued immediately after the company paid Schmeiser the \$660. As mentioned during our March 20th broadcast, one sentence in particular from this press release, made its way into the few mainstream media sources in the country who chose to cover this story, and the sentence again was this, "Although we are pleased Mr. Schmeiser finally

approached us and agreed to settlement terms, it is frustrating that he essentially accepted the same offer we put before him in 2005 at the time we visited with him and offered him solutions to address the presence of unexpected Roundup Ready canola volunteers on his land.”

Now this is where the research that we put into this case continues from our last broadcast, because as was raised during that March 20th show, such a statement seemed patently false given the initial release form and the settlement terms seemed completely different. Now it was this that sparked some more in-depth research into whether such a seemingly misleading statement was an effort by Monsanto to protect themselves from something they appear to be rather fearful of.

I will first note that the actual release form presented to Schmeiser in 2005 *is* linked to from the Deconstructing Dinner website, and you can check it out there.

Now the first clause listed on that statement was the one that Schmeiser indicated, had he signed, would have prevented him from *ever* taking legal action against Monsanto in the future. When canola seeds can stay dormant in soil for in some cases up to ten years before germinating into a plant, such a restriction should not sit well with *any* farmer. And so, to confirm whether Schmeiser’s interpretation of this clause was correct, I contacted his lawyer Terry Zakreski who had also defended Schmeiser during the precedent-setting and internationally acclaimed case which ended in 2004.

In reference to my question, Zakreski’s response was as follows, “The release form is difficult to make sense out of as it appears to be a Release intended for situations where a farmer is settling a complaint about the performance of *products purchased* from Monsanto.” And he continues “The release was ill-suited for the purpose it was being used and raised *legitimate* concerns about whether it could cover *future* contamination events, particularly those occurring on the same field.”

Now to be quite honest, I know if *I* was Monsanto, I too would want to ensure that farmers don’t *continually* keep calling me up and asking me to remove my plants from their fields. As Monsanto or *any* company creating such technology, this would be especially concerning knowing that, and as just stated before, canola seeds can live in the soil for 7, 8 maybe 10 years before germinating. Percy Schmeiser, is the *first* farmer to take exception to this release form and raise this concern, and it appears that Monsanto’s unwillingness to clean up his fields in 2005 without him first signing the release form, does suggest that perhaps this clause is indeed designed for that purpose.

Now when I spoke over the phone with Monsanto’s Trish Jordan, I immediately asked her if this was true, did this clause prevent farmers from ever taking the company to court again in the future. While I was hoping for a yes or no

response, she instead insisted that Schmeiser had misinterpreted the form. In perhaps the most aggravated tone I have ever experienced in the over two years producing this show, Jordan told me, step-by-step, Monsanto's recollection of the events that had unfolded between 2005 and 2008. Now between that conversation and an email dialogue prior *to* that conversation, here is some of that dialogue.

In one question I asked, is the use of the word land within the clause in reference to the *entire* farm or to a staked out area where plants were removed by the company. Jordan's response over email was this, "The land in question is clearly defined by coordinates and acres commonly referred to as the legal land description." Now taking a look at this release form, nowhere is there any space allocated for an indication of the legal land description as mentioned. And again, this form is linked to from the Deconstructing Dinner website.

soundbite

JS: Now another comment sent to me by Jordan throughout our *email* correspondence was this, "We have used what we call a product inquiry release since 1997 and Mr. Schmeiser, not surprisingly to us, is the only farmer who has raised an issue with it."

Now jumping back to the phone conversation just referred to during which Jordan laid out, step-by step, Monsanto's side of the story, I asked her the same question as before, however, more directly; "Does the release form that was given to Schmeiser by your company in 2005 contain a clause that would have restricted him from ever taking legal action against the company in the future."

And this is where the tone of the conversation changed, and it's *truly* unfortunate that this interview was *not* recorded, because it was asking this unexpectedly direct question, that caused Jordan to pause, and her response, "well, I don't know, I don't know what form he has, we issue many different forms to farmers."

Quite a surprising response, given it was her email to me the day prior, the one I just read, when she indicated that she knew very well which form he had, the standard "product inquiry release used since 1997." Now given how involved Jordan has been in this case since 2005, it was quite shocking to hear her insist that she *didn't* know what form he had, the *very* form that founded the 2.5 year dispute between Schmesier and her company.

soundbite

JS: And this is Deconstructing Dinner where we are wrapping up a story we first ran back on March 20th on the *most recent* battle between farmer Percy Schmeiser and multi-national seed giant Monsanto.

Now the discrepancies between the story that Monsanto and Schmeiser both say unfolded, does not stop at what appears to be a rather concerted effort by Monsanto to divert media and the public away from this case.

In her first email response to my questioning, Monsanto's Trish Jordan also expanded on her frustration with Schmeiser's persistence, by writing the following, "We had previously offered to amend the release to something that would be suitable for Mr. Schmeiser in 2005 and again at a mediated case management hearing over a year ago. Our offer was always open to rework our standard release."

I called up Schmeiser yet again and asked him if this was indeed true, had Monsanto offered to rework the release in 2005. He responded with an adamant NO!

And so, in my following phone conversation with Trish Jordan, I asked why the company dragged this on for so long instead of just settling with Schmeiser back in 2005, and her response was, "Schmeiser didn't tell us about his problem with the confidentiality clause." And so I asked Jordan this, "but you wrote in your email to me, that you had discussed reworking the statement with Percy in 2005." Jordan's response, "no, there was never any discussion in 2005." And again, here is a completely different story than what Jordan had told me in her email the day prior.

soundbite

JS: To wrap up this segment, the big question is of course why, why is there clearly an effort being made by Monsanto to cover this story up. Well the answer seems to lie in the February 2007 Mediated Case Management hearing presided over by a judge. This was the meeting between Monsanto and Schmeiser whereby the judge made attempts to have both parties settle the dispute without having to drag it into a courtroom. Trish Jordan shared with me what she observed in that room, "At the case management conference presided over by a judge in February 2007, we previously offered to amend the release for him in an attempt to rectify this matter. At the time, he said he would not sign any release. While the judge tried several times to get Mr. Schmeiser to accept reasonable terms, he was unsuccessful and a court date for the small claims hearing was set."

Now Schmeiser on the other hand, observed something else at a mediated case management hearing, when the judge asked Monsanto, why don't *you* [Monsanto] just settle this with Schmeiser, and their response was, "this case is too important to us, to settle."

soundbite

JS: And in closing out this segment, and as also mentioned on our March 20th broadcast, I'll end with this final quote from my conversation with Trish Jordan. As listeners might recall, it was in Jordan's press release that it was suggested Schmeiser essentially accepted the same offer on March 19th 2008 as was offered to him in 2005. When I suggested to Jordan over the phone that it seems as though the first settlement offer and the one agreed upon this week are not *anywhere* close to being the same, her aggravated response was, "I never said anything like that. Why Don't you Read my Press Release!"

And her press release again, "it is frustrating that he essentially accepted the same offer we put before him in 2005."

And again, a link to the actual release form offered to Schmeiser in 2005 will be linked to from the Deconstructing Dinner website, including a selection of quotes from my dialogue with Monsanto's Trish Jordan. And you can expect more in the near future on this story, when we will hear what other farmers, farmers unions, legal professionals and academics think about the opportunities to farmers now that it is becoming clearer, that Monsanto is beginning to publicly accept liability for the damage that their technology is causing farmers around the world.

soundbite

Jon Steinman: And this is Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly one hour radio show and Podcast produced in Nelson, British Columbia at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY. I'm Jon Steinman. You can learn more about this show and listen to our archives at cjly.net/deconstructingdinner.

In the next segment of today's broadcast, we remain on this heated topic of genetically engineered food, but move from Saskatchewan to Ottawa, where on April 3rd 2008, an important debate took place in the House of Commons among Members of Parliament of all political parties. This segment may be familiar to those of you who access our show through the Internet, as it was last week, when we released an unedited audio recording of that debate through our Podcast and website. The debate was in regards to Bill C-517, which was first introduced in the House on February of this year. The bill is, like many that have come before it, calling for the mandatory labeling of foods containing genetically modified ingredients. Now this is an extremely controversial issue, as it was in Europe, when following the legislating of such labeling requirements, that processed food manufacturers there, chose to instead of label their products, *remove* genetically engineered ingredients altogether. It seems that those companies, many of whom produce the very same products here in North America, recognized that by instituting such labeling consumers would then refrain from purchasing such products. So needless to say, this is an important bill to pay attention to. On the other hand, it does not yet seem important enough to Canada's mainstream print media, who have to this date, not mentioned a word about the debate that took place on April 3rd.

Bill C-517 was tabled by Bloc Québécois Member of Gilles-André Perron. Perron represents the riding of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles. Bill C-517 is similar to others that have been introduced by the Bloc in 1993-94, and 1999, by the Liberal party in 2001, and by the NDP in 2001-2002 and 2007. Weighing in on the one hour debate was Conservative Party of Canada's MP Bruce Stanton and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health Steven Fletcher, the Liberal Party's Robert Thibault, the NDP's Nathan Cullen, and the Bloc Québécois Marcel Lussier.

The full one-hour unedited debate *is* again, available on our website, but let's listen in on some segments from that debate, and you can also stay tuned for a follow-up interview with Conservative MP Bruce Stanton who opposes this bill. But first, here's Bloc Québécois MP, Gilles-André Perron.

Gilles-André Perron: Orders of the day. Private members business, first time debating, a second reading Bill C-517 Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act mandatory labeling for genetically modified foods, in the name of Mr. Perron.

Marcel Lussier: Seconded by Mr. Lussier, moves that Bill C-517 the Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act mandatory labeling for genetically modified foods, be now read a second time and referred to the standing committee on health.

Gilles-André Perron: Mr. Speaker, good evening. I am somewhat moved and somewhat pleased to speak with you and to my colleagues here in the house to discuss and to express my viewpoint on genetically modified food or GM food. To begin with Mr. Speaker, I would like you to indulge me, I have a little aside before my speech. I would like to salute to young people from my riding, Claire and Norbert, who on December 11th sent an email to me encouraging me to make genetically modified foods or GM foods labeled. And this will probably surprise you too, Mr. Speaker, I went to Coeur à Coeur alternative school in Saint Eustache, and these two young people, Claire and Norbert, who I met they were around twelve years old. I was really struck to see young people that age concerned about food that we eat.

JS: The actual text of Bill C-517 is linked to from the Deconstructing Dinner website, and providing he details of the bill, here again is MP Gilles-André Perron.

Gilles-André Perron: Mr. Speaker the summary of this Bill says this enactment amends the Food and Drugs Act to make the Minister of Health responsible for establishing that a food, or one or more of its components, has been genetically modified. If it has been established that a food or one or more of its components has been genetically modified, the Minister shall cause the name of the food to be published in the Canada Gazette. The Minister shall also prepare a list of all

such foods and cause a copy to be sent at no cost to anyone who requests it. Third, no one may sell this food or product containing this food in a package unless a label is affixed to the package containing the following notice: *This product or one or more of its components has been genetically modified*. In addition, no one may sell this food or a food product containing this food in a package unless a poster in the prescribed form has been placed near the food containing the following notice: *Genetically Modified*.

JS: Now one of the important distinctions that must be made when engaging in such debates over the mandatory labeling of genetically engineered foods, is between the role of MPs to represent the interests of their constituents versus attempting to debate the pros and cons of GE-foods. The fact of the matter is that, and according to polls, the majority of Canadians *are* demanding that foods containing such ingredients be labeled, and regardless of what *kind* of information Canadians are receiving, the information that *is* available, appears to be leading Canadians to make such a demand. It's this that Bloc Québécois Gilles-André Perron stresses, that GE-foods are not so much on trial with this bill, but instead, democracy is.

Gilles-André Perron: The purpose of this Bill, first and foremost, is not to put genetically modified foods on trial, the main goal is inform consumers, to let them know what they are eating what they are consuming, and to give consumers the choice "yes, I am okay with eating genetically modified foods" or "no," it's a democratic choice. This Bill is a Bill that will be very popular and I would encourage all members from all parties here in the House, to read their local newspapers in their region to see what is going on. To see what people in their ridings want because between 73 and 93% of Canadians, this is an average, 83% of Canadians want GM foods to be labeled. In Quebec, it's 86% of the nation that want this mandatory labeling and 80% of farmers support mandatory labeling. Mr. Speaker, when I was young, there was an old saying "what the people want, God wants." That's what I like to say now, what the people want, we, members of parliament want. We want that, we want what the people want.

JS: And that was Bloc Québécois Member of Parliament Gilles-André Perron, who on April 3rd 2008, was recorded debating Bill-C-517 in the House of Commons. The Bill is calling for the mandatory labeling of foods containing genetically engineered ingredients. Weighing in on the debate from the Conservative Party was Member of Parliament Bruce Stanton. Stanton represents the riding of Simcoe North, which comprises the areas in and around Orillia and Midland Ontario. We also hear a response to Stanton's comments from Gilles-André Perron.

Bruce Stanton: Mr. Speaker and I enjoyed the Members presentation here this afternoon. I must say Mr. Speaker that I fully admit with him that consumers and Canadians are very interested in fact, in food labeling and the importance of food labeling as it relates to information that helps them make their choices about

food. Mr. Speaker I really question and I ask the member in consideration that there are some fifty products that have been approved by Health Canada in respect, and have gone through rigorous assessments in terms of these products health safety and it is only when these assessments have been completed that these products go on the market, why should he be concerned that GM products need some additional labeling?

Gilles-André Perron: I'd like to thank my colleague for the first question. In fact, he attended the Veterans Affairs Committee I believe this afternoon, it was the first time he was there and he did a good job. Mr. Speaker, it's like burying your head in the sand because how can we rely on something when a department, when others have shown that the government does not have the means or does not have methods to assess these products they simply rely on the companies like Monsanto for example. They take a look at the tests and they say "well that looks good," it makes no sense. There is no second opinion or they don't seek out expertise elsewhere. It is like closing your eyes and relying on the industry, can we do that? Remember Monsanto, and I am not the one who is saying this, it's the former American Secretary for Agriculture who said that he had been subjected to a great deal of pressure to approve GM products, in fact President Bush Senior had been pressured to accept this. I am sorry Mr. Speaker; I get really carried away when this subject is raised.

JS: And this is Deconstructing Dinner. Now I did catch up with MP Bruce Stanton over the phone shortly before today's broadcast went to air, and you can stay tuned to hear segments from that conversation during which I probed into his assurances that labeling is unnecessary thanks to Health Canada's "rigorous assessments." Following Stanton's comments in the house, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health Steven Fletcher spent some time expanding on Stanton's comments, and you can listen to those comments on our website where the unedited debate has been archived. But next, we hear yet another Member of Parliament weighing in on the debate – The Liberal Party of Canada's Robert Thibault – representing the riding of West Nova which comprises the communities of Digby and Yarmouth Nova Scotia.

Robert Thibault: Thank you Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise and take part in this important debate, but I do take exception in some cases with what he said. I agree with him that Health Canada does quite a good job, I would say even a very good job, to ensure that foods on the Canadian Market are safe according to the best international scientific standards. Of course there could always be errors. Some will say none-the-less, that after these evaluations GM organisms could have negative effects on Canadians, especially because we don't know what can occur especially among growing children. We should find someone who is better versed in organic biology or chemistry than I am. However, we have a responsibility in this regard, I agree with the Member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles that if the consumer can be better informed he can make better decisions as he deems appropriate according to whatever they see on the

label. Today we see young people take an interest in these issues and they discuss them.

But it does present some difficulties; I think the Parliamentary Secretary raised a few valid points. On the market in Canada we already have about fifty genetically modified products that are accepted, that are in circulation that can be consumed individually or as an ingredient in a processed food. That can have some consequences when it comes to marketing or for parents and consumers who want to know the level of risk. Now the fact remains we have to find solutions. I agree with the Member's Bill because I agree with the intent of the Bill. I think there could be some amendments; I recognize the need for the Member to present certain positions in a Bill before the House. With regard to the actions taken by the Member I plead the same rule as the Parliamentary Secretary and explaining some provisions and some actions taken by the government and why we don't proceed with labeling. That's not a reason to not consider it in the future.

"We have to recognize that there is in the four chains some problems. If we say that all products that have genetically modified components in it that we must label, we will be labeling so much on the shelves of our stores that the labeling will become meaningless. Canola oil is a GMO it's omnipresent in the production of other foods. You can have it in the instance of agriculture, you may have to feed the entrance part of the feed being an animal or plant that was partly produced using some GMO that might be 1000th of 1% but if you don't define that in your regulations then that can become a problem so that you over label and you end up not labeling enough and that is not defined in the Bill as presented by the Member so I think it is subject for debate and subject for questioning. What is it, is it a product that is 100% GMO is it a product that is at a certain percentage? How do you define that, how do you do it? I think at the Health Committee we can hear from experts who perhaps can help us. The ideal (this isn't the ideal), the ideal would be that you would do this through regulation rather than through the Bill, that you would do some minor amendment through the Act so that it forces or compels the Minister to create the regulations and the regulations can be modified as market conditions change or scientific conditions change, and that is faster than bringing it back as a Bill into this House and modifying it. So I think that is a problem but I recognize the point of the Member, that if we don't do it through a private member's Bill we may not do it at all. So that would be a question that I think will have to be debated at the Committee to see if there is a way to do it within the current regulations that would meet the desired effects of this Bill without creating stand alone legislation to do that during the regulatory process."

JS: And that was Liberal Party MP Robert Thibault, who represents the riding of West Nova. We're listening to segments from the April 3rd debate that took place in the House of Commons in Ottawa with respect to Bill C-517, which is calling for the mandatory labeling of foods containing genetically engineered ingredients. Entering into the debate following Thibault was the NDP's Nathan Cullen – who

represents the riding of Skeena-Bulkley Valley, which comprises the communities of Prince Rupert, Terrace and Smithers BC. Nathan Cullen and the NDP support this bill.

Nathan Cullen: To recount the history of how this Bill has been making its way through this place steadily, parliament after parliament. It seems clear to me and to many others that it is a response from politicians representing different parties, of a need expressed by Canadians. And I think if we take a fundamental view of what this is attempting to do, is to allow people a greater certainty of the products that they are buying for their families, the food that they are consuming, with as much information as possible because there are many that approach me, and I am sure approach many of our colleagues in this house, confused and concerned about what it is they are buying in the stores, what it is that the chemicals that they read the ingredients that they read on the back of products actually mean because most folks are not organic chemists, most folks do not spend a great deal of time researching through the internet what each chemical additive added to the products that they are buying actually mean. And certainly there are very few even of the specialty class, those in organic chemistry and that interaction with humans can understand about what all these chemicals come together mean for the consumer for the human form, for our environment in general. And it seems that when we step into the realm of genetically modified foods and products, we step into an entirely new conversation, a conversation that has not been properly had in this Parliament and in many of our legislatures and in the homes of Canadians as to what the consequences are Mr. Speaker; the ability to understand the ethical, moral, and environmental implications of what it is to genetically modify foods.

JS: Nathan Cullen introduced a number of important points, many of which have been shared by other guests here on previous episodes of Deconstructing Dinner. But one point in particular that I'll play for you here was with respect to the powerful influence that industry has on the approval of genetically engineered foods.

Nathan Cullen: There is another topic here that is very important, and that is a reverse onus. It should fall on the industry that profits from genetically modified foods. It is up to them to prove that their products are safe before they are introduced on the market, not the opposite. The onus of responsibility somehow is reliant upon government to prove a thing safe, to run the tests. And we know that in Health Canada and we know that in Environment Canada, and it is not only this administration but with the previous administration as well, have brought forward concerns about genetically modified products. They have said that in certain circumstances they have had some scientific concerns. We know a number of things have happened to them, and promotion has not been one of them. They have been terminated. They have been threatened. They have been muzzled.

This goes beyond the ideology of one party or another. This goes to the safety of Canadians and the freedom of science to conduct itself in a rational way, to provide advice and guidance to the government of the day.

We know in recent magazines the government has been noted as a so-called enemy of science, fearful of the science. That was in relation to issues around climate change and the resistance to meet the preponderance of evidence saying the climate science was in and that we needed to conduct ourselves in a different way.

JS: And that was the NDP's Nathan Cullen, the MP for Skeena-Bulkley Valley, speaking during the April 3rd debate on Bill C-517 in the House of Commons. Now Cullen referred to instances when Health Canada scientists were either muzzled or aggressively encouraged to approve genetically engineered products and so I did follow up over the phone with Conservative MP Bruce Stanton to hear *his* thoughts on these comments. We did hear Stanton assure the House that Health Canada undergoes rigorous assessments of such products. His Conservative Party colleague Steven Fletcher expanded on these comments insisting that labeling foods containing GE-foods is therefore not necessary. Bruce Stanton spoke to me over the phone from Ottawa.

Phone conversation with Mr. Stanton

JS: Now in the case of maybe some of the comments that came from NDP Member of Parliament Nathan Cullen, he had made one comment that does sort of illustrate some of the fears that Canadians have and that is in regards to the sort of influence that some corporate bodies as well as industry has some of these decisions on some of these approvals. In one case he referred to Health Canada scientists being muzzled. What's your response to these fears because you know I mean these are the fears that really a lot of Canadians have had for quite some time.

Bruce Stanton: Well again, I would say again, you know product testing is really the core of this and we will not allow any products to go on Canadian shelves unless they've met the most rigorous of tests and the public - this is a transparent process. When products are before the Canadian Food Inspection Agency for example, those types of products that are under review are even right on the CFIA website. I mean the public can go on there, they have an opportunity to input and provide comment and even from the scientific community, there's opportunities to input into that so people have the ability to express those concerns. And you know, Health Canada I know is striving to do the very best they can to make sure that these are products that are safe for Canadians. And you know people will raise these kinds of concerns from time to time but at the end of the day, we've got to put our stock in the science on this and when it has gone through that scientific examination and come up with high marks and we

know that it's safe for Canadians, then and only then can it be put on store shelves.

JS: Now MP Bruce Stanton insists that the process of approvals in Canada is transparent, however Nathan Cullen was not lying when he made reference to the muzzling of and influence on Health Canada scientists. It was after all in 1998 when Veterinary scientists from Health Canada's Human Safety Division testified before the Senate Standing Committee on Agriculture and Forestry that they had been pressured to approve the genetically engineered rBST growth hormone that was designed by Monsanto to boost milk production in dairy cattle. Dr. Shiv Chopra who was terminated from his job in 2004, said in that meeting that, "We have been pressured and coerced to pass drugs of questionable safety, including rBST." Also in the room was Dr. Margaret Haydon, also terminated in 2004 and who shared with the committee an incident when officials from Monsanto offered her and her team between one and two million dollars, which she could only interpret as a bribe. Haydon also shared yet another incident when a locked filing cabinet in her office was broken into. Stolen from it were notes and files that were critical of scientific data provided by Monsanto. Senator Eugene Whelan was quoted responding to this information, "What the hell kind of a system have we got here?" The hormone continues to be unapproved in Canada.

Now examples such as these propelled Lucy Sharrat of the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network to insist that much of the arguments made against Bill C-517 during that debate were "the same tired old arguments." – CBAN is one of a handful of organizations closely monitoring this bill. Sharrat also pointed out the "misleading" information presented by the Conservative Party and Liberal Party that 50 crops have been approved. She states that, "While it is true that over 50 Plants with Novel Traits and Novel Foods have been approved, not all of these are GE and there are only 12 GE crops approved for eating or growing and only 4 of these are grown in Canada. I referred to Sharrat's first comment in my conversation with Conservative MP Bruce Stanton.

Phone conversation with Mr. Stanton

JS: Now maybe just take in a comment from the Canadian Biotechnology Action's Network Lucy Sharrat. She also listened in on this debate and she sort of recognized some of the sort of arguments that well the testing is there and we should confident in that testing. She sort of referred to those as being somewhat dated. And this is something I think a lot of Canadians have heard is that yeah, testing is rigorous and there should be trust within this testing. However what we're seeing, we're seeing Bill after Bill after Bill, I think it was almost six Bills cited within that debate that have kept reintroducing this topic as well as we now have these polls. What's your suggestion then to Canadians who still remain concerned and not convinced that there should be faith within these tests. And regardless of whether there's faith or not it seems as though Canadians at least just want to know whether or not these ingredients are in their food or not. What

sort of alternatives do you think are out there for Canadians if labelling is not going to be something that's legislated.

Bruce Stanton: Well I think they should be welcome to examine all of the information that is out there and information from reliable sources and I would point them even to our own website to Health Canada website which has a very thorough, a very complete and comprehensive description of the process that's involved in the evaluation of Novel Foods. As I mentioned in my remarks there's been numerous products that have already been approved and others continue to come before Health Canada for that kind of evaluation and I'm sure that's going to continue. We owe it to ourselves to understand that in the world where food is in our ability to make sure that we're going to feed people from across the world and get the very best use out of our agricultural land in a sustainable way, developments in biotechnology can be a great assistance. And just because we look at some of these food products and process them differently, in no way makes them unsafe, provided again that they meet the highest of standards as they do here in Canada.

JS: And so, I did what Stanton suggested, and took a trip to the Health Canada website. I selected the page titled "Genetically Modified Foods and Other Novel Foods," and from that page I selected "Approved Products" where there was a listing of all approved GE and Novel foods in Canada. And so here is what Canadians will find. On the top of that page are *four* links to "examples of how past safety assessments proceeded." One of the products was the Flavr Savr™ Tomato, which was approved for the Canadian market in 1997. Mentioned within the conclusion of Health Canada's safety assessment was this, "Health Canada has determined that there are no health or safety concerns that would warrant special labeling of the Flavr Savr™ tomato."

Now here's the part that should perplex any Canadian who is looking to find trust in Health Canada's process of approvals, because the Flavr Savr™ tomato was one of the first approved genetically engineered foods, yet it only lasted on the market for a few years – why, because it proved to be an absolute failure in its purpose – which was to extend shelf life. Yet Health Canada uses this as an example on their website as a successful evaluation. What Health Canada does *not* mention on the site, is some other vital information regarding the Flavr Savr™ tomato. Author and opponent of genetically engineered foods Jeffrey Smith has lent his voice to Deconstructing Dinner on many occasions, and he refers to this tomato on an ongoing basis. Among the many failures surrounding this transgenic tomato, Smith often refers to the comment from the then Chief Executive Officer of Calgene (creator of the Flavr Savr™) who said, that even if you were Chef Boyardee, the rats we tested the tomatoes on were *not* going to eat their GM tomatoes. The company instead force-fed the rats the tomatoes and several of them developed stomach lesions and seven of twenty died within two weeks. Documents now available to the public show clearly that the United States Food and Drug Administration (the FDA) was willing to let that product

onto the market as is, and it was *Calgene* who voluntarily chose to release a *different* line of this tomato. Smith uses this example frequently because it captures quite well how ready the FDA was to turn a blind eye to these results. Smith also refers to the comments by one of Calgene's scientists who told Smith that her team had been asked to evaluate the results of the rat experiment, and she admitted that the study was totally out of their field and they could easily have overlooked the appendix and its implications. Yet, Health Canada stands by their approval of the Flavr Savr™ tomato, so much so, that this product which doesn't even exist in Canada's food supply, is used as the example on their website to stress, as Bruce Stanton puts it, "rigorous assessments" of such products. It's also important to note that Canada's Conservative government is, through the Security and Prosperity Partnership, seeking to better harmonize the approval process of such foods here in Canada with that of the United States.

soundbite

JS: In closing out today's broadcast, I do want to leave you with one more segment from the April 3rd 2008 debate. Again, in the latter half of today's show we've been listening to a debate on Bill C-517, tabled by Bloc Québécois MP Gilles-André Perron. The bill calls for the mandatory labeling of foods containing genetically engineered ingredients, and the impacts of such a bill can be huge, as it was in Europe, when following a number of countries there implementing such labeling, that virtually all of the major food manufacturers removed GE foods from their products altogether. The companies clearly feared lost revenues due to such labeling requirements. And I will also mention that the entire unedited debate *is* available on the Deconstructing Dinner website alongside the actual text of the bill, the transcript of the debate and a short video of the press conference hosted by the Bloc Québécois. That website again is cjly.net/deconstructingdinner.

And so this last segment from the debate is of the comments made by Marcel Lussier, also of the Bloc Québécois. Lussier is the MP for the riding of Brossard-La Prairie. Lussier added to comments made by both Nathan Cullen and Gilles-André Perron, that *children* are now concerned with the presence of genetically engineered ingredients in their food. Listeners might also recall a recent guest on Deconstructing Dinner – ten year old Kodiak Morasky, who has too become worried about the risks of GE-food. And here, is Marcel Lussier.

Marcel Lussier: And I'm really surprised to see how interested young people are in primary schools. It is a very important period in their lives, before high school and they're getting interested in these health issues. I think we should pay close attention to these young people and tell them yes, we're going to hear your request, we're going to listen to you when you talk about GMOs and that's what C-517 is. It's a bill that's forward looking. It looks to the future for future generations so that these young people can have so that they have the right to healthy food to give them the right to consult labels to find out what's in what they

are about to eat. When you're 12 years old I think you can make choices and the young people from Notre-Dame-de-Saint-Joseph school in La Prairie want to make that very enlightened choice. Some might say that you can consult government websites where the 50 products are listed but when you're shopping or when you're eating a chocolate bar, it's very important to know what's in it. And if it says right on the chocolate bar that there are genetically modified organisms in the chocolate bar, well then the young person will be in the position to make a free choice about what kind of food he or she wants to eat.

ending theme

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

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

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