

**Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY
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The Birth of a Farmers' Market

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Transcript – Carol Elliott**

Jon Steinman: And this is Deconstructing Dinner, a weekly radio program and Podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia and syndicated on radio stations around the world, among which are CHLS Lillooet, BC and KRFP Moscow, Idaho. I'm Jon Steinman, your host for the next hour.

Today's broadcast will likely instill a sense of warmth during these cold winter days because today we'll look back to my October visit to Vancouver Island, and in particular the community of Nanaimo. It was during that visit that led to the October 25th broadcast featuring Brent Warner and the November 29th broadcast featuring the creation of the Heritage Foodservice Co-operative. But it was also during that visit when I attended what essentially was a trial farmers' market, as Nanaimo has not had a functioning farmers' market that is easily accessible to both farmers and the public. The city's so-called farmers' market located downtown is so inconvenient that it is instead known within the community as a craft market. So this market was a first whereby food was the focus.

And so on today's broadcast we will explore how successful the launch of a farmers' market can be in a community without one, and we'll meet a number of those who were involved with its creation, including many of the vendors who had their own interesting tales to tell as well. We'll hear from Dirk Becker of Compassion Farms; Arata Tanaka of Flour Water Salt Breads; Bob Handel of Happy Beef; Betty Benson of Cedar Valley Poultry; Maureen Drew of Artisan Edibles Fine Food Company; Stan Reist of Flying Dutchman Bee Supplies and Honey Products; Craig Evans of Providence Farm; Sharon Vansickle of Sharon's Kitchen Crafts; and Lorelei Andrew of the Mid-Island Co-op's Food Sustainability Sub-Committee.

increase music and fade out

Jon Steinman: A couple quick mentions before we embark on our visit to Nanaimo's 2007 Farmers' Showcase. I do always like to remind from time to time that Deconstructing Dinner *is* available as a Podcast for those of you wishing to take our weekly broadcasts in the car, to the gym or on a long walk. And

information on this is accessible on the Deconstructing Dinner website or can be accessed through Podcast directories such as iTunes. And our website is cjly.net/deconstructingdinner.

On another note, it's looking as though Deconstructing Dinner may be making its way to Vancouver Island once again to attend the annual conference of the Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia. The conference is taking place in Sidney between February 29th and March 2nd, and will be addressing the increasing dialogue surround organic food production as being good for the environment. The conference will ask the question, how well is the organic sector doing in this respect? and, what can they do to make their operations a "darker" shade of green and reduce their impact on our environment?

The conference will be attended by farmers, processors, distributors, retailers and eaters. And if you'd like to learn more about these issues, you're invited to join this conference titled "Shades of Green: Making Organics Even Greener," February 29th to March 2nd. For more information, you can visit their website at www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca or call 250-385-7974.

soundbite

Jon Steinman: Located directly across the Georgia Straight from the City of Vancouver is Nanaimo, the urban hub of the mid-island region of Vancouver Island. With a population of around 80,000 people, it serves as a considerably-sized centre for commercial activity. But Nanaimo is like many other North American cities of this size and has seen much of its commercial activity take the shape of big box stores located among the fringes of the city itself.

One store in particular that felt the crunch of the influx of these national and multi-national grocery retailers was the Mid-Island Co-op, a co-operative business affiliated with Federated Co-operatives Limited. The Mid-Island Co-op was launched in 1959 and today has 20,000 members, eight gas stations and convenience stores, and owns the property on which twelve years ago housed a Co-op grocery store. Now it was the grocery store that found itself unable to compete in the new era of big box stores, and today that space is now rented out to Liquidation World.

But a group of members within the Co-op recognized the rapidly increasing threats to the future of Vancouver Island agriculture, and, through the launch of a Food Sustainability Sub-Committee, chose to organize a Farmers' Showcase on October 20th, 2007. Now while the event was a one-off, it was also hosted to gauge the potential for a *weekly* farmers' market at the same location, which again was in the parking lot of the former grocery store, now Liquidation World.

And so leads to the title of today's broadcast, "The Birth of a Farmers' Market." And as we are about to hear, the market was *so* successful that most vendors

sold out of their products within a few hours, and the most popular question from residents was when the next market was going to be. On today's show we will meet with the many farmers and producers around Nanaimo who have been granted a new sign of hope, in a world where local food production is increasingly feeling the squeeze. I would certainly stress that the excitement on the faces of the many farmers and small-scale producers at the market was of an enthusiasm that has become a rare site among those pushing for more responsible local food systems. And in the end, this event was one of the most positive signs for the future of food.

soundbite

Jon Steinman: One farmer in particular who experienced the success of this farmers' market experiment, so to speak, was Dirk Becker. It was only a couple of hours into the market that Dirk's squashes and other vegetables had almost disappeared. And so, in the middle of the market, he chose to drive the thirty kilometer round trip to his farm in Lantzville in order to restock the table before the market wrapped up. Dirk was even more enthusiastic with the literally thousands of people who showed up to the market because Dirk is also on the Food Sustainability Sub-Committee of the Mid-Island Co-op, who organized the event.

Dirk Becker's organic farm is called Compassion Farm and is situated on two-and-a-half acres. Dirk took up farming later in life and his reason for doing so, as you're about to hear, is very unique. I spoke with Dirk as the market was winding down, and in this segment we also hear the music of Nanaimo musician Les Tibbo, one of the many musicians who performed throughout the day.

soundbite

Dirk Becker: My name is Dirk Becker and I am an activist. And in the last number of years I have used agriculture for my activism.

Dirk Becker: Five dollars. How much did I say?

Customer: I don't know.

Dirk Becker: I didn't say? Oh my goodness. I am dyslexic and adhd and I can't help it. Okay. Five dollars, thank you. Yeh. It would be five fifty but a discount for you.

Customer: Thank you.

Dirk Becker: You're welcome.

Dirk Becker: In 1900, 90 per cent of Canadians were involved in agriculture. Now it's 4.3. In 1960, 60 per cent of our food was grown on Vancouver Island. Now it's 6 per cent, which means 94 per cent of our food is imported. So after all the years of fighting clear cutting, and being a social activist, and running for council, and the many different forms of activism that I have engaged in, I realize that

after thinking that the most destructive force on the earth was humans, then the automobile, clear cutting and urban development, I'm realizing more and more it's food - how it's grown, where it's grown, who grows it, the chemicals and fertilizers. And then, of course, most of all, the fossil fuel used in the production of that food, the transport, storage, and the distribution of that food, etcetera, etcetera.

So the reason I am here today selling at this market, and the reason I was one of the main people to get this going, is I realize that for me to change the world, or to be the change that I want to see in the world, it's about practicing what I have been preaching, which is reducing our footprint, thinking globally, and acting locally. And I realize now that there is no better way for me to do that than to grow food locally and to reduce the transport of that food. And for people to get healthier food, whether you want to think in terms of obesity, or diabetes and heart disease; or whether you want to have more energy; or whether you want to live longer; or you are actually thinking about how people are treated in other parts of the planet and working themselves to death for three to five dollars a day, working with poisons, chemicals and fertilizers.

So in terms of this market, the way this happened is some people from the Mid-Island Co-op were interested in food sustainability. And so they called a meeting and they asked me to come. And they said they wanted to work on food sustainability in the region. And I said to them, I said, what does that mean? What does that mean? Because as activists, especially social environmental activists, we talk a lot about sustainability, sustainability. Well, what does that mean in your life? What does that mean on practically on how you live?

And I said, you want sustainability? No more studies, no more talking. I am just done talking. I am done with meetings. Not to mention Foodshare has done three years of studies about sustainability in this area and what we need to do and how we need to work as farmers and nothing has happened.

I said, you want sustainability? You need farmers. You need farmers to grow food so you can sustain farming, so you can sustain the food supply. And I said, you want to do that? No more studies, no more meetings. Have a farmers' market, have something. Well, it was already too late in the season to have a farmers' market. I said, how about we do a farmers' showcase? Where get all the farmers together after farmers' market season, when they are all tired and burnt out but they have time now because farmers' market season ends in British Columbia for almost all farmers' markets on Thanksgiving.

And so here we are today having the Farmers' Showcase, which as you may know was hugely successful. I was going to be happy with a hundred people if it was raining. Well it looked like.... And if it was showering and sprinkling, I was going to be happy with three hundred. And if it was sunny I was going to be happy with six hundred. It looked more like three thousand.

Jon Steinman: It was amazing. And when you talk about using this as a farmers' showcase to raise awareness I mean it really seemed that that's what this was. When I speak with the other vendors that were here - the farmers, the producers, the processors that were here - the common message they were saying is that people were here asking, you know, is this going to happen every week? You know, this is great, this tastes unlike anything I have ever tasted before. So coming to Nanaimo and seeing that this hasn't really existed yet or that there is a farmers' market that technically exists but has no farmers really (*DB:* craft market) it becomes a craft market exactly. Where have the people of Nanaimo been in kind of bringing something like this to where it is now?

Dirk Becker: (laughs) Well, the really short version, reflecting on my article in Small Farm Canada, the only magazine I get, there is a list of twelve reasons why people shop at farmers' markets and twelve reasons why farmers farm and sell at farmers' markets. The number one reason why people shop at farmers' markets, typically women between the age thirty and forty, is in order to get reasonably priced, nutritious food. The last reason, the twelfth reason why they shop at farmers' markets, is to change the world. The number one reason why farmers that farm and sell at farmers' markets is to change the world. So you can see there is a difference there.

So to answer your question, most people have been conditioned and brainwashed to the mega one-stop shopping experience, convenience and low price. This is a disease in this society which must be turned around. Because that low price is actually the most expensive price. Because when you buy a thirty-nine cent lettuce, when you buy bananas at thirty cents a pound, you are buying vegetables that have travelled between one and three thousand kilometers. And they have been grown by people who are living, breathing and drinking the poison that they are using, which is manufactured in this country, in the G8, shipped there, put on the bananas and put on the grapes, then those vegetables and fruits are shipped back here and we eat them. And I call that karma. So ...

Jon Steinman: So, where does the Co-op come into all of this?

Dirk Becker: Interesting enough, of course, and this is quite ironic when I think about it. The Co-op used to be, have, several grocery stores. And because we are the highest retail per capita in Canada and we have grocery stores that are huge mega chains, they just hammered the Co-op with their low prices and their glitzy beautiful lights and flyers and everything else which people are just addicted to. They don't even think about it, what they are doing. And eventually, the Co-op is losing, losing a million dollars a year, not making, not breaking even, losing a million dollars a year. So we had to, from a business perspective, we had to close the Co-op.

So ironically the Co-op also was started by farmers. A bunch of farmers in Saskatchewan were getting ripped off in their fuel. They said let's start making our own fuel. They were told they couldn't do that. They did it anyway. And then the refineries wouldn't reduce the price. The farmers finally made fuel. And then the other gas stations lowered their prices to hammer the farmer and so that's how this Co-op here in Nanaimo started. So it was originally about farmers and rural people trying to make a living. Because in 1900, the average farmer got forty cents on the dollar for his food, or her food as it were. Now the farmer gets seven cents on the dollar.

Jon Steinman: And this is Deconstructing Dinner where we've been listening to Dirk Becker of Compassion Farms in Lantzville, British Columbia and who also sits on the Food Sustainability Sub-Committee of Nanaimo's Mid-Island Co-op. While on the surface, a farmers' market may simply seem as a great place to purchase great tasting and fresh food, there is much more to the concept of a farmers' market that Dirk Becker recognizes as being even more important. Dirk believes that local farming and the local market helps heal the social and environmental connections that have been lost in an over-stimulated culture.

Dirk Becker: We're creatures of habit and we're easily stimulated and we're even quite over-stimulated. I grew up with Mr. Dressup. And Mr. Dressup would say, 'Today we are going to learn to draw a duck.' The younger generation grew up with Sesame Street where you would say, 'And today we are going to learn the letter A.' And so we have a very over-stimulated, over TV'd society. We're looking at twenty-five hours a week minimum for Canadians, thirty-five hours a week minimum for Americans.

And so we are very over-stimulated and so we have become very disconnected. And so that is what my farming is really about. Because as long as we are as disconnected as we are society will keep going the way it is. And so for me, being here today and organizing this event, food and farming is really my sneaky, activist, Gandhian 'be the change you want to see in the world' way of getting people to think how disconnected they have become with themselves; with one another; from their families; from the land; from the earth; from the air; from the animals; from every living thing.

And so, those who can hear this, I what I actually say to them is, I don't really care about farming, food, nutrition and health, even though it's now fifty per cent of our budget is being eaten up by healthcare and almost fifty per cent of Canadians are now overweight. What I really care is about people reconnecting with their hearts and with the land and with things that really mean something. And that is what agri-culture is. We used to be an agriculture-based society.

So when I talk to people about why society has become the way it is, I don't want to talk about rap, or skateboarding, or drugs, or people not going to church. I want to talk about how they have become disconnected. How they can go to a

store like Walmart or Costco and have no thought about where that food came from, who grew it, what those people went through, what all the hidden costs are. So when they are buying that thirty-nine lettuce or that thirty-three cent a pound banana, that is actually the most expensive lettuce and bananas in the world, because everyone in the planet is paying for that and it is not being accounted for. So when you are buying the lettuce at the farmers' market for two bucks, that's actually the cheapest lettuce, because you are getting the vitamins, you are getting the nutrients, you are supporting local. And at that price I am still working for only a dollar an hour.

Jon Steinman: Now is your form of activism in that sense, I mean you introduced that you are only working for a dollar an hour. Is your form of activism sustainable when there is this disconnection that still exists? And I mean today was a great example of the potential for (DB: right) such sustainability. But (DB: right) where do you see it going?

Dirk Becker: Right, I agree. And even though maybe even only one per cent of people use farmers' markets, maybe even less than that, that one per cent can easily sustain a farmers' market in every community providing that it is located well, and that there is enough produce that people can do something akin to one-stop shopping at least when it comes to fresh food, as in vegetables and fruit. And if we had a farmers' market in every community and the consumers supported the farmers and the farmers were encouraged to farm then we would have that and we would keep going in that direction. What happens, for instance, with farmers' markets is - let's say if it is raining - half as many people show up, or on Mother's Day, or on Thanksgiving, depending on whether it is a Saturday or Sunday market. And so really I like to put it back to the consumer and say, stop, stop telling the farmers, stop telling anyone what they should do. And understand that if you want to keep seeing the odd cow at the side of the road; if you want to have more organic produce; or if you want to have animals treated better; or if you want to eat chicken where the chickens are running loose; or you want to eat less farmed salmon, you want to eat more fresh salmon; then you need to realize, that is the consumer needs to realize, you and I, all of us are consumers, we need to realize that the most powerful ballot, the most powerful vote you can make, is something called the dollar, or now we call it the loonie.

So every time you spend, every time you and I spend a dollar, that is in essence a ballot. So when you buy the cheapest coffee then you are saying, I don't care about the people that grow coffee, I just want the cheapest coffee. When you buy fair trade coffee you are saying, I care about people, I care about how it's grown, where it is grown, and the families and chemicals that are used on the earth.

And so when people don't see goldfinches at their birdfeeder, they need to realize the reason that are not seeing the goldfinches is because they are drinking cheap coffee. And cheap coffee is grown on plantations, where they

mow all the trees down and there is no place for the goldfinches to live. So, there again, that's the most expensive coffee - the cheaper coffee.

Jon Steinman: As my conversation with Dirk Becker approached its end, he ended with some final remarks, including information about the radio program that he finds time to co-host each week on Nanaimo's CHLY.

Dirk Becker: So my job is to help others become more aware of how the world works, how food works, and to help others connect with themselves and one another so we can actually change the way we live on this planet. Because right now we need four-and-a-half planets the way we are living. This is not working. So we need a shift in the paradigm as we say.

Jon Steinman: And on just one last note, when it comes to this you want to raise awareness and you seem to also find time for a radio show that you told me about. (*DB:* laughs) And maybe, just because this is out a lot on independent campus community radio stations, maybe you can just share with other listeners what it is that you are doing and when they can tune in, maybe online.

Dirk Becker: Absolutely, well thank you for that, and thank you for the work you do on Co-op Radio in the Kootenays. I listen to that and we play some of your work here and also on Vancouver Co-op Radio.

Nicole Shaw and I, we have a new radio show which is on Tuesdays from one until two called "Heart and Mind: Tools for Change," where we discuss matters of the heart and the mind and encourage others to use their hearts much more and their minds a little less. And minds is a little less, yes, thank you for that. Thank God for editing, eh, or the Goddess, for editing. Yes. You'll make me sound intelligent after this. (*JS:* this is live though) Yes. (laughs) Yes, fundamentally, all of us have x amount of breaths and heartbeats. And so how do I want to use my energy?

So, after all those years of being obsessive-compulsive, neurotic, vegan, self-righteous, unhappy, angry and bitter, I realize that, unless I am happy and healthy, and peaceful and harmonious, how can I make a positive change in the world? So farming and food for me is really about creating and recreating that connection and harmony that we all feel when we share a bowl of soup together.

soundbite

Dirk Becker: Five dollars. How much did I say?

Customer: I don't know.

Dirk Becker: I didn't say? Oh my goodness. I am dyslexic and adhd and I can't help it. Okay. Five dollars, thank you. Yeh. It would be five fifty but a discount for you. *Customer:* Thank you.

Dirk Becker: You're welcome.

Customer: I am going to take this.

Dirk Becker: Yes. Okay? Just this?

Customer: Yes, great, thank you.

Dirk Becker: Okay, nine dollars. And here is a recipe book for you because you are wearing a Mountain Equipment Co-op jacket. I find all kinds of reasons to give people discounts. I tell people that if they are single moms, or they're a struggling writer, poet, artist, activist, or gay, any of those, they get a discount.

Customer: Wow.

Dirk Becker: So if you are all of those I'll give it to you.

Customer: (laugh)

Dirk Becker: Exactly.

Customer: Can I have a bag, please?

Dirk Becker: Oh, A bag? Okay

Customer: That'll be great.

Dirk Becker: But no bag.

Customer: No bag. Just kill the no bag.

Dirk Becker: Discount, that's right. 'Cause if you are all of those things you should have a bag with you, right? You have a Mountain Equipment Co-op jacket. Come on, where is your reusable bag, lady? Come on! Come on.

Customer: I didn't bring it with me.

Dirk Becker: Oh, okay, next time. And you are drinking from a styrofoam coffee cup! Oh my goodness.

Customer: But I'm going to reuse it.

Dirk Becker: Oh good, you are going to reuse it. Did you know that Co-op has fair trade organic coffee?

Customer: And that is what I got.

Dirk Becker: Good, look it, it wasn't a Tim Hortons?

Customer: No, it wasn't.

Dirk Becker: We are going to have to get Tim Hortons to get a little more Canadian. Think about people that work so hard in those other countries.

Customer: That's right.

Dirk Becker: All right. Thank you. Bye.

Jon Steinman: And that was Dirk Becker of Compassion Farms in Lantzville, British Columbia and who also was involved in organizing the October Farmers' Showcase where that interview was recorded. And the music heard throughout those segments was again courtesy of Nanaimo's Les Tibbo. And you can tune in live to Dirk's radio program every Tuesday from 1:00 – 2:00pm on CHLY 101.7FM Nanaimo, or streaming through their website at chly.ca. And links to some articles by and about Dirk will also be linked to from the Deconstructing Dinner website at cjly.net/deconstructingdinner

soundbite

Jon Steinman: On today's broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner we are meeting with the many farmers and producers who during the October 2007 Farmers'

Showcase at the Mid-Island Co-op in Nanaimo were dealt a real sign of hope for the future of food on Vancouver Island. The showcase was organized as a trial farmers' market that, as a result of the thousands of people who attended, may very well lead to the creation of a weekly market on the same site. And hence the title of today's broadcast, "The Birth of a Farmers' Market."

Another vendor who felt the overwhelming success of Nanaimo's first *real* farmers' market in many years, was Arata Tanaka, a baker based in the community of Mill Bay and who operates Flour Water Salt Breads.

Arata sold out of his bread within twenty minutes of the market opening, and when we speak of the potential for *more* local food production, well here was the proof, that no doubt, that market could have likely sustained at least three more bakers.

Arata's approach to his work is similar to that of Dirk Becker, in that located on Arata's business card is a quote by artist Marc Chagall, and the quote reads this, "If I create from the heart, nearly everything works; if from the head, almost nothing."

Arata Tanaka: My name is Arata, Arata Tanaka. I baked this bread in Mill Bay, which is south of Duncan. There is an orchard called Merridale Cider. I know the owners and they are crazy and generous enough to let me build this brick oven outside and that is where I baked this sour bread.

Jon Steinman: So how does your bread differ from, say, the more conventional bread that can typically be found?

Arata Tanaka: It takes time. Sourdough, it is so much slower than commercial yeast. So, but again, like any food that tastes good, you have to take time to cook it. My oven also, it's a nightmare. It's a woodfire brick oven. It takes so much time to heat it up. But again, there is no other way to bake the kind of bread that I bake.

Jon Steinman: Does using an oven actually affect the flavour of the bread?

Arata Takata: Crust. Crust. You can't get this crust except you spend a lot of money to get amazing machinery but which I am not interested in.

Jon Steinman: So what happened here today. I mean, it's only a couple of hours into the market and you seem to have sold out of all your bread. Is that common?

Arata Takata: It happens pretty much every single market. So, which is, I'm fortunate. I guess there are so many commercial breads everywhere. But you don't get that kind of old style, traditional bread.

Jon Steinman: And here's yet another vendor with an interesting story, Betty Benson of Nanaimo's Cedar Valley Poultry.

Betty Benson: Well, I'm Betty Benson. I am a licensed practical nurse. I left nursing because I didn't feel that I could give the quality that was needed to give proper health care. I wasn't given the time. And so I thought, what am I going to do with the rest of my life? And then I thought about where we were located and what we could produce. And that we should produce healthy food. And this is what I decided to do in the end.

I had a government agency called Community Futures that helped me along the way. I also had Malaspina College that helped me look at what I was doing and assess if I had the right direction path in mind. I did both those things and then decided, yes, this is what I want to do with the rest of my life, and started a poultry farm.

I have egg layers. I have meat birds. And this year, my second year of business, I had turkeys.

Jon Steinman: You just came over to me and you also told me that you just sold out of your eggs. How many eggs did you actually bring?

Betty Benson: Forty dozen eggs. Sold out by eleven a.m. It opened at ten. I am absolutely thrilled with this success. But I am going to plan next year for more eggs.

Jon Steinman: This is a test market. Would you have expected this kind of demand and crowd?

Betty Benson: I was hopeful for this crowd. I didn't know about the rain, if it would hold off or not. And I'm thrilled to know that the people of Nanaimo are coming to their senses and are now going direct to the farmer, getting to know the farmer, getting to know their farm practices, getting to know what they are eating because you are what you eat.

Jon Steinman: Now one of the interesting models that Betty Benson has adopted for her farm has been in response to the increasing costs associated with small-scale poultry farming, so she introduced an adopt a turkey program, essentially, a model of community supported agriculture.

Betty Benson: My feed bill for three tonnes of food went up one hundred and forty-eight twenty-five in two months. That is a substantial amount that the farmer, in my stage, it is very hard to reclaim that. And so I decided what I could do to sustain my farm is to try growing turkeys and have people adopt them, put the money up front, and then figure out what it would be for feed, the cost of the chick, the transport of the animal to my farm and then to the processor. And then

average that out times the amount of turkeys that I grew and then give a fair price, plus including the care of the birds and my services as well.

Jon Steinman: And that was Betty Benson of Cedar Valley Poultry in Nanaimo. And you can learn more about her operation at cedarvalleypoultry.com. And we also heard from Arata Tanaka of Flour Water Salt Breads located in Mill Bay, and more information on his business can be found at web.mac.com/redsmart

soundbite

Jon Steinman: Another farmer who was taken aback by the overwhelming success of the October Farmers' Showcase test market in Nanaimo was Bob Handel of Happy Beef, a small operation just outside of Nanaimo. Bob and his wife Gerry sold out of their beef within a few hours.

Bob Handel: My name is Bob Handel. We have six-and-a-half acres out of the Yellow Point area south of Nanaimo. We run a small, a very small beef operation with, ah, ... like last time we had three cattle, Hereford and Angus. And we sell it locally to mostly our friends. But, today we are at this market and it seems to be very successful at that, too.

So it's grown very organically. We don't use anything other than hay and barley supplement that I feed them every day. I can't tell you how much because it is secret. So anybody that has ever tried this has been really, really pleased with it. It's very tender. We let it age for twenty-one days.

Jon Steinman: Now selling your product here at a farmers' market. Has this typically been how you get the product to the consumer or?

Bob Handel: No, actually this is the first time we've ever done this. We just happened to see this advertisement in local newspapers, so, or sorry, local radio. And it's just been a real amazing thing to see how many people are out for this. So it's ...

Jon Steinman: Well, and this is a test market, too. Is this a promising venue for your product?

Bob Handel: I think the way I see this is developing is that, uh, eventually we will build up enough, or a client base big enough, that we get just call backs from people that have had it before. I think that the philosophy of this here is partially, too, to get the public aware that, you know, that there are things being produced locally and grown locally. But it's turned out well for us and for everybody around us here. They're just selling stuff like crazy.

Jon Steinman: Also at the market was Maureen Drew of Artisan Edibles Fine Food Company based in the city of Parksville. Maureen produces a line of gourmet preserves using many local ingredients.

Maureen Drew: I didn't even want to pick the rest of them from Black Creek but Judy had them held for her.

... Mirabelle plum jelly. And the wild Mirabelle plums are indigenous to the south of France but we actually have access to our own grove of trees. This year they didn't bear fruit because of the weather. But we do have customers. We find them that have them. So these were picked near Shawnigan Lake. We only could get four hundred and fifty pounds this year.

Jon Steinman: What does four hundred and fifty pounds turn into? How many jars of this size - two hundred milliliters?

Maureen Drew: We might have about eight hundred jars. Normally we get two thousand. So this very much a seasonal, limited and quantity product. Plus we can only make ten jars at a time.

This is our champagne and wild rose petal jelly. So we hand pick the wild rose petals. They grow wild on the island. So we pick them up near Parksville-Qualicum area-Nanoose. And we have a three week window to pick. So we handpick the rose petals. Then we infuse champagne with them. That makes the juice for the jelly. And then we have rose petals that we tip and then those rose petals go into the preserving process. So it's a delicacy. Again you can only produce thirteen jars at a time so far.

Jon Steinman: And then this next one here is a little darker.

Maureen Drew: This is the summer berry confiture. This is a French jam so it's loose or more like a dessert sauce. So we use wild blackberries, blueberries. The juice of fresh crabapples, which we juice ourselves and get locally. And then the juice of kumquats and limes. And so this is a very pure product - .07 per cent sugar. And it's wonderful on ice cream and yoghurt and cheesecake. And we actually get customers that don't want their children to have jam with sugar. They are buying confiture.

And we have of course the Meyer lemon chutney is the only one that the Meyer lemons come from California because we can't grow them here. And we get these from an artisanal farm. And that's what we try to do is source locally and the globe for the best. But we do very well just local. So the Meyer lemon chutney is great with seafood and roasted meats, curry dishes. It's a big seller. And it has toasted pine nuts and fruits in it, with white wine of course.

And then the rhubarb-sour cherry chutney. We source the rhubarb locally and we get our sour cherries from an orchard in Aldergrove. And so we do the rhubarb-sour cherry together with the ginger and the toasted walnuts. Rhubarb-sour cherry chutney is fabulous with everything.

And our other product is the quince mostarda. That's an Italian condiment. And this mostarda recipe is actually from a house in Italy that my business partner got the recipe from her when she visited Italy. And there was a celebration of the quince.

And we get all local quinces. They primarily come from Europeans. And people are getting to know that we make this mostarda so they phone us. And we get to sell their quinces, they sell us their quinces or we go and pick them. But the quince is such a great fragrant, beautiful and exotic fruit. And the mostarda is great with everything. It's just like a mustard relish or a chutney. And it goes beautiful with any white meats, cheeses as well as pork or ham. It's just a lovely condiment.

Jon Steinman: And you were saying you have about two thousand pounds of...

Maureen Drew: This year we secured two thousand pounds, which is awesome.

Jon Steinman: You actually store them yourself?

Maureen Drew: No, we bring them in. And then we ship them up to our co-production house. And they get them all chopped. Like they have to be frozen first so that when they do chop them they're soft because they are very hard.

And so then they make them into a puree. And then they go in the freezer. And what we have to do is secure all our fruit when it is in season to have it available to us for next season's production. So we always have to be ahead on everything we are doing to secure the fruit.

Jon Steinman: And this is Deconstructing Dinner. There is quite the presence of inefficient politics that plays into the world of the small scale food processor and that topic will be best addressed on a future broadcast, but my conversation with Maureen Drew introduced *one* of the odd hurdles that small scale processors must often overcome, and she explains.

Jon Steinman: Can I just quickly jump into the co-production house? When you say co-production house, what is it that? Are you co-producing with other producers there?

Maureen Drew: Yes, what we do is, we produce our jellies in our own commercial kitchen. And then those are in small batch. We produce them. But the other

products - that we use two co-packers. And we go there and produce our product with them.

So we are not we are phoning and saying, will you make our recipe? We are totally involved in our production. But they have the large kettles. They have the pressure canners. And also they have federally inspected plants. And for us to sell outside of BC, we have to have federal inspected plants to produce our product.

Jon Steinman: Is it because they are more concerned about their health in Ottawa than they are about the health of those in BC?

Maureen Drew: No, and it's quite interesting because by changing the name of some of our products we don't fall under their regulations at all and we can sell nationally. So none of it really makes sense. It's a bit bogus.

Jon Steinman: And maybe coming into the politics I guess of trying to produce a product like this. One issue that I guess has been raised with me has been the politics around the jars. Maybe you can provide a little background on these jars and what sort of stir they caused.

Maureen Drew: Well, the federal government, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, they want everyone to use standard jars, okay? And where that's driven is by the food processors of Canada and the big box stores because it fits better on their shelves. Well, small producers, like a specialty niche. We don't want to have a grocery store-looking product.

To be competitive today you need, in a high end niche of the market - and with local products and organic, which are more expensive to make and secure - you need to set yourself apart. Because we are competing with eighty per cent imports who do not comply with our regulations at all. And they are not monitored. So it means that, we need in our end of the market, in our niche, we have to compete with those people. They don't have their products in English and French. They don't follow what our rules. So we do not want to go with a standard jar. So the only way that we could get out of those rules was to change the name of our products so that they didn't fit under their regulations. And they actually helped us do that.

So you know and our jars are imported from Italy. They are a much better quality glass to begin with. And they are actually bringing them in pallets from Italy. We are paying less money than a North American jar. So it doesn't make sense for us to be in a standard container. And in the US you don't have to.

Jon Steinman: And that was Maureen Drew, a partner in Artisan Edibles Fine Food Company based in Parksville, British Columbia. And you can learn more about her business at artisanedibles.com.

listener support message

Jon Steinman: Moving on to yet another unique vendor and further illustrating the sheer diversity of people and products that can be found at a well-organized farmers' market, we arrive at the Flying Dutchman, a business based in Nanaimo that sells bee supplies, pollination services and honey products. I spoke with co-owner Stan Reist.

Stan Reist: The name of our business is Flying Dutchman and we operate approximately four hundred bee hives. And we harvest the honey off of that and we sell it. The honey actually comes from the Buckley Bay – Denman West area up towards Courtenay, so it's out of the Comox Valley. Probably one of the biggest challenges that faces us is having access to the bush so that we can collect our product.

Jon Steinman: What do you mean by access to the bush? What prevents you from accessing it?

Stan Reist: We operate under the auspices of the forest companies, so Island Timber and the other forest companies, we have to get permission from them to go on their land and set up the hives. So it's a working relationship that we have to protect.

We basically have two different kinds of honey. We have whatever you call wildflower and fireweed. Wildflower is sourced basically from all the different flowers. So you have salal, you have mountain dandelion, you have pearly everlasting, and you have the small berries that grow up there that produce flowers. And that's a darker honey, and it's got different flavour characteristics than what the fireweed does. The fireweed is predominantly the purple flower that you see growing in the slashes. And it's lighter in colour and it's just the two differences.

So if you put your hives near the abundance of fireweed when they log then that is the type of nectar you are going to get. If there is not that much of a flow on from the fireweed then you are going to get the wildflower where the bees forage on whatever they can forage on.

Jon Steinman: And are you often selling your product strictly at farmers' markets, or how do you get your product out to the consumer?

Stan Reist: Ah, we have farmers' markets. We have the local house where we sell out of and we have a small group of stores that we sell to. So we have probably about twelve stores that we service. And we are not huge. So we just keep it down to that. And it's a mom and pop operation.

Jon Steinman: Now, I am obviously not from this area but from what I understand there aren't many farmers' markets at least in Nanaimo. There is the one that does not really seem that accessible to the public. Yet this here is on a Saturday in the middle of a huge parking lot and there are certainly a large number of people here. Is this a promising farmers' market for you or is this a usual turnout for the farmers' markets that you come to?

Stan Reist: This is a test market that is just taking off. The standard farmers' market here has been in downtown Nanaimo, which is hard to access and for us it is not a good venue. This venue here looks like it will prove to be a better venue. The farmers' markets I am used to are from back in Ontario and this goes back pre-'sixties.

The accessibility is to be able to have your booth, to be able to have access to your vehicle so that you can dispense your product. And it's a Saturday morning, Wednesday morning deal. And, yeh, this is direct to the customer. The customer knows who is producing the product and that makes all the difference.

Jon Steinman: Of interest during my conversation with Stan Reist was his comparison between the farmers' markets of 1960s Ontario versus the first-time Nanaimo market where we spoke. And Stan expands on this and also shares his thoughts on the economics of the bee business, also known as apiculture.

Stan Reist: Ah, BC is probably still learning whereas Ontario has got it perfected. So it's a major difference. One of my uncles was in the farm market business for many, many, many years. And that's exactly how he made his living, along with my grandfather. So in the fifties, sixties and seventies in Ontario, that was how they made their living.

There is a couple of ways that you are going to make your living as a beekeeper. And the ways you are going to do that is you are going to raise stock early in the spring. And you are going to sell either nukes or packages to the Prairies or to the Interior so that they can rekindle hives and get them going. The other one that is very big on the coast out here is pollination of crops. Actually pollination of crops is very big in the States and in Canada both.

We ourselves pollinate apples. Cranberries is our major source, which is up in the Courtenay-Campbell River area and Qualicum. And then the other one there is selling the actual produce which comes from the hives. So it's not that you are going to make your living on honey, you're not going to make your living on pollination, or you're not going to make your living on stock sales. But using all three, that is how you are going to make your living.

Jon Steinman: And that was Stan Reist of Flying Dutchman bee supplies and honey products based in Nanaimo, and more information on his business can be found at flyingdutchman.ca

Just a few market stands away from Stan Reist was yet another farm stand that within a few hours was cleaned out by the swarm of Nanaimo-area residents, who left Craig Evans and Providence Farm with only a few buckets of peppers left to sell. Providence Farm presents yet another example of the many community-focused projects and organizations that a farmers' market can help support. Located in the community of Duncan, Providence Farm is known as a Therapeutic Community, whereby farming is recognized for its healing properties. And here's Craig Evans.

Craig Evans: Providence Farm is a therapeutic farming community down in Duncan. And what we do is we work with people who have challenges or disabilities. And we teach them life skills and employment skills using agriculture as a sort of a resource. And we grow all our food using organic methods. And we work with people who could be blind, deaf, have cerebral palsy, might have a mental illness. These sorts of disabilities. And just everyone working together produces our, the crops that we grow.

Jon Steinman: The connection between the farm and the market, is the market the outlet for most of the revenue that is coming into the farm?

Craig Evans: Well, no, we have a variety of revenues to run the farm so we have a woodworking shop, a small engine shop, a welding shop. We have a general store. We, ah, also on the property there is an alternate school that runs there. There is a senior's club. People, seniors who come down.

And so we get a lot of our funding through the Provincial government. Some funding from the Federal government. We do a rehabilitation for people, workers who have been injured, say. So we get funding from the Worker's Compensation Board. Also the Insurance Corporation of BC funds us to do assessments on people to see, see what they are capable of doing. And so a lot of the participants, especially if they are working through a recovery or rehab program, they'll work either learning new skills or developing the skills to either get part-time or full-time employment, or working with, in volunteer organizations. But we also have a variety of participants who actually end up working with us and becoming full-time employees at our farm.

Jon Steinman: And Craig describes how successful the Mid-Island Co-op Farmers' Showcase was for Providence Farm.

Craig Evans: Yeh, well we showed up today with basil, salad greens, broccoli, cauliflower, plums. We had a wide variety of produce. And we sold out everything within the first three hours and except for the few peppers that we have left here.

We, I actually brought probably about fifty per cent more than I expected to sell, and not knowing how the day would go. But I am extremely pleased with the way

this has worked. I would say this is a great example of the public need in this area, in the Nanaimo area.

Jon Steinman: There seem to be a lot people here who have never been really to a farmers' market and this was the first experience for them. Did you have any of those who came up that you could visibly notice were first timers when it came to buying farmers' food?

Craig Evans: Oh, definitely, yep. And we had many people say, 'Is this going to be a weekly event?' So I must have had at least fifteen people ask me that today. So I figured if they are asking me, one vendor among fifty, just think how many people here probably got their answers at the other vendors. But ah, yep, I think it was quite a diversified clientele that came down to the market today. It's nice to have the support here for farmers.

Jon Steinman: And that was Craig Evans of Providence Farm located in Duncan British Columbia. More information on the farm and its therapeutic community can be found at providence.bc.ca

On today's broadcast we've been meeting the many vendors who had set up at the October 2007 Farmers' Showcase in Nanaimo British Columbia. Organized by the Food Sustainability Sub-Committee of the Mid-Island Co-op, the event acted as a trial farmers' market to help determine the feasibility of hosting such an event on a weekly basis. With a population of 80,000 people, the city of Nanaimo surprisingly has not had a successful farmers' market that focuses on food. Now the success of the event was entirely unexpected and it's estimated that over three thousand people passed through throughout the day.

And as we approach the end of today's broadcast, we'll meet with one more vendor, Sharon Vansickle, who had the largest array of preserves at the market and easily had a couple dozen different varieties of jarred foods. Sharon's business is called Sharon's Kitchen Crafts, and similar to the comments from Craig Evans, Sharon too, was consistently asked from marketgoers whether the market would become an ongoing staple of the community.

Sharon Vansickle: ... green tomato pickles, green tomato mincemeat, vegetarian mincemeat, pickled vegetables, curried zucchini vegetables, rum cranberry conserve, rum sauce, antipasto, garlic jelly, pickled watermelon rind. You're not going to find that in the store anymore. You'll find mango chutney, but you won't find it as good mine or as fresh as mine.

Jon Steinman: Now you say pickled watermelon rinds. And you say that you can't find that in the store any more. Did that actually exist, because I have never seen it?

Sharon Vansickle: I've never seen it in the store but grandma used to make it, great-grandma used to make it. I am the only one that I know that still makes it.

Jon Steinman: So this is the part of the watermelon that people are typically throwing out?

Sharon Vansickle: The white part.

Jon Steinman: The white part?

Sharon Vansickle: The white part.

Jon Steinman: Not the green, just the white?

Sharon Vansickle: You can use the green if you want but it just makes it a little tough. So I peel the green off and just use the white. So you are not wasting anything.

Jon Steinman: Has that been a big seller today?

Sharon Vansickle: Ah... fair to middling. You have got to get them to taste it. The thought of it is, 'I don't want to try that.' They taste it – 'I'll take a jar.'

Jon Steinman: What's been the biggest seller so far?

Sharon Vansickle: Oh... that's a good one. Green tomato pickles, mango chutney, and my relishes.

Jon Steinman: Now you are sourcing most of your ingredients, from what I understand, from the Island. Where do you typically find most of the vegetables that are going in here?

Sharon Vansickle: My garden and farmers' gardens and farmers' markets. Yeh, I ... Providence Farm, Compassion Farms. Whatever that's grown on the island.

Jon Steinman: What is your opinion of the actual farmers' market here today? Because from what I have been learning, Nanaimo hasn't really had a very successful farmers' market, at least not one with farmers and food producers. So what's this been to you?

Sharon Vansickle: This has been fantabulous. Everybody is just loving it. The remarks that I have been getting is, are you going to be here next Saturday? Well, we're not, but we are hoping to be here next summer. And it's been really great. Everybody just loves it.

Yeh, because we've got all the farmers from all the areas coming in. From all the way from what? From Comox to Courtenay. And that's what we want, yeh. We have got to get the people growing food here and selling their food here instead of shipping it in from five hundred miles away.

Jon Steinman: Has your access to your raw ingredients changed at all in the past few years or are you still finding it pretty easy to access this food?

Sharon Vansickle: Well, I grow a lot of my own stuff so it's not been too hard to get it. I am finding it's harder to get the black plums for my black plum chutney. And my cucumbers, I used to get a lot of them from Providence Farm and I can't get as many as I want any more because they are starting to sell a lot of stuff there now.

Jon Steinman: What are some of the main difficulties you have in trying to operate this kind of business in this part of Canada?

Sharon Vansickle: Finding places to sell. You know, people will come in and they will look at it and they'll say, oh it's either too high priced and she can buy it at the store. Or finding a good venue to sell. I have been for five years looking. And the best venue I have found so far has been Cedar's Farmers' Market out by the Crown Gate Pub. And, of course, today.

Jon Steinman: But getting access to any stores within the area. Is that do-able, or even restaurants?

Sharon Vansickle: I haven't looked at any. Mind you, I have had two come in and approach me today, so we'll see what happens. One was a restaurant in downtown Nanaimo and one was a store on Gabriola Island. Yeh, a little specialty store.

Jon Steinman: Was that a first, a store presenting some interest?

Sharon Vansickle: That's the first I've had. Yeh. Because I don't have the high end labels. What you see is what you get. And that's what it's going to be in the store. It's going to be down home. It's going to be country.

Jon Steinman: And maybe just one other thing that you do is I guess canning workshops, right?

Sharon Vansickle: Yes, we teach. My husband and I both teach canning. Ah, we started teaching at Foodshare, oh, what? Five, six years ago now as a volunteer through the community gardens and then through Foodshare and now we will go to people's homes and teach. And I have taught twice now at the First Nations Nanoose. I've taught at a few private parties for people. You know, the kids are having a sleep over. And they're all ten or twelve, and you know how kids get.

We'll come in and teach them how to make salsa. Mom's having a new baby. So let's teach her how to make applesauce for the baby, apple pie filling for dad. New skills.

Jon Steinman: How busy, how much demand is there for that?

Sharon Vansickle: Not as much as I want. I'm always open so, ah, I'd like to see more of it because it is a skill that is being lost.

Jon Steinman: And that was Sharon Vansickle of Sharon's Kitchen Crafts, based in Nanaimo, BC. And for more information on Sharon's business and classes you can contact 250-729-7530.

And my last guest on today's broadcast will be Lorelei Andrew, who sits on the Committee of the Mid-Island Co-op that conceived and organized the Farmers' Showcase. During the market Lorelei was responsible for surveying members of the community as they passed through. And here's a brief segment of some of the information gathered.

Lorelei Andrew: I have been asking what people are looking for to buy, and whether they found it or not? And whether they knew about the farmers here, and are learning things about who is available to sell things to them? Ah, how often do you attend farmers' markets? Would you be interested in coming back for a spring market or weekly one? And what food or farmers did you come to look for?

Jon Steinman: Were there any comments from anybody that kind of stand out as being humorous or worth noting?

Lorelei Andrew: Some people came here especially for this, all the way from Victoria, so that was interesting. One person was surprised that we still have farmers around with all the (laughs) conglomeration and big business.

Jon Steinman: They honestly believed there weren't any more farmers?

Lorelei Andrew: I suppose so. They were extinct.

Jon Steinman: So what's going to happen with these surveys? What's the intention with them?

Lorelei Andrew: We're going to compile the data and see if it's going to be worthwhile to do a farmers' market, or feasible to do a farmers' market, next spring weekly.

Jon Steinman: And what is your take on this right now since the farmers' market has now happened and still is happening but certainly there were a lot more

people here earlier. Do you see it as being something that is going to be successful?

Lorelei Andrew: Definitely. I think there is a lot of interest out there.

Jon Steinman: And that was Lorelei Andrew, one of the organizers of the Mid-Island Co-op Farmers' Showcase that took place in October 2007 in Nanaimo.

Now I will wrap up today's broadcast with a quick news brief, as I believe it's stories such as this one that further emphasize how, among other community-driven actions, farmers' markets are vital to the future of North American communities and local food security.

And it involves the Association Kokopelli, a long-standing organization based in France and is known throughout Europe as one of the most important sources of heritage varieties of seed. The group has long stood for the preservation of biodiversity through the saving and distribution of thousands of varieties of seeds, and had technically been trading some seeds that were not federally registered.

And so in 2004, Kokopelli's President Dominique Guillet was accused of having sold non-compliant varieties of seeds and seed packages that did not conform to labelling laws. The court case was brought forward by two industry associations, which, as you can be assured, are the trade associations representing the major seed manufacturers in France and the world.

On January 29th, Kokopelli lost the case and has been ordered to pay out the equivalent of \$52,000 dollars Canadian for their attempt to preserve diversity. And you can stay tuned for an upcoming broadcast of our Heritage Foods series, when we will speak with heritage seed savers in *Canada* and hear their take on this latest blow to the preservation of global agricultural diversity.

And in the meantime, and as became clear during my visit to Nanaimo's October Farmers' Showcase, the diversity that can be found within a bustling farmers' market is indeed a place where such diversity can still be protected.

ending theme

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

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

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