

**Show Transcript  
Deconstructing Dinner  
Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY  
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**Livestock Lost: Part I - Slaughterhouses and the Culture of Meat**

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*Jon Steinman:* And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner a syndicated weekly one hour radio show and Podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman and I'll be your host for the next hour.

On today's broadcast we launch a new series on the program titled, Livestock Lost, a series that will examine the farming and business of meat, dairy and egg production in far more depth than we have already done here on the show. It will examine the known and unknown dangers of meat production and what people can do to source alternatives to what many would refer to as a cultural staple of the North American diet.

Today's part I of the series is titled, Slaughterhouses and the Culture of Meat, and launching the show we'll hear from Toronto author, Susan Bourette, who after going undercover at the Maple Leaf Foods slaughterhouse and processing plant in Brandon Manitoba, later embarked on a journey to learn just how integral meat is to North American culture. Susan wrote a book to help tell the story and the title is, Carnivore Chic, that's c-h-i-c because as Susan suggests, meat eating is once again becoming cool.

Whether it be food safety, animal welfare, human health and environmental concerns, Canadians are no doubt being given every reason to rethink where our meat is coming from. But there's just one problem, the availability of meat that one may feel safer purchasing, meat that is healthier, that is more humanely produced and has less of an environmental impact, is not only hard to find but is seemingly becoming even harder to find as is exactly the case here in British Columbia. And we'll tackle this topic today and on future broadcasts by revisiting the controversial new British Columbia meat inspection regulations that have, since we last covered this topic, been in place since October of 2007. The regulations were and continue to be controversial as they have effectively put many small-scale farmers and processing plants out of business and have made locally produced food even harder to seek out than it already is.

In addressing the new regulations, one provincial politician in particular believes that the BC government has, "passed the worst implemented piece of legislation in the history of Canada." Those listening from other provinces where such legislation has not been passed should also be paying close attention to this as your province may be next in line. And for those who are not concerned with such a topic because, well you don't eat meat,

don't turn the radio or portable music player off just yet, because what's happening to small-scale meat production in BC, is a telling sign of what is happening in many other sectors of the food system and what may, very well become even more prevalent in other sectors as well.

Lending their voice to the show today will be Member of the Legislative Assembly for the Nelson-Creston riding, Corky Evans. We'll hear from Gabriola Island's Jenny Macleod who is the Secretary for the District A Farmers Institutes, we'll hear from the former CEO of the BC Food Processors Association, the late Tony Toth and we'll also hear clips from a 1946 film produced by the US Department of Agriculture around the time when meat inspection was being heavily promoted to the public as an assurance of food safety.

Again, the title of the series that we're launching today is, *Livestock Lost*, and I'd like to just quickly touch on the title and why it was chosen. We have now been observing for quite some time an ongoing stream of meat recalls due to listeria, salmonella or most often E. coli contamination. We hear of a continued occurrence of cases of mad cow disease both here in Canada and the United States and in 2007 an entire barn of 50,000 chickens was destroyed when bird flu was identified in the barn.

In terms of genetic diversity, the industrial forms of animal production are often reliant on only a handful of breeds and as a result we're rapidly losing the breeds of animals that have long ensured that disease and viruses are less likely to spread. Equally important, we're losing the breeds that had been bred to be suited to farming systems that were not industrial and not reliant on fossil-fuel dependent systems, systems that clearly are not sustainable nor responsible.

And as for local meat production, well, in the West Kootenay region of BC for example, farmers have, since October 2007, been turned into criminals if they sell their meat to their friends or neighbours and risk fines that are more costly than those for dealing most drugs.

And so, the title, *Livestock Lost* seemed quite appropriate for this series as we begin to discover what has led to such frightening conditions for foods that are so much a part of the North American diet.

What has also been lost as part of these large-scale changes to our food system is culture, the culture that has long existed for tens of thousands of years and in some cases still does, and it's a culture where the animals providing the food are treated humanely and are celebrated right at the dinner table for having given their life to those responsible for their death. It's a culture that was far more apparent before animals were turned into factory commodities and one that existed at a time when enjoying meat was a rarity and most often only took place on special occasions. Today, on the other hand, we're left with a culture that becomes squeamish to even think that the meat was once an animal, a culture where it's okay to eat the meat but not okay to slaughter the animal ourselves, let alone see the animals being slaughtered.

Now one person in particular recognized how much of shift this industrialization of meat really was and eventually she authored a book to capture this very transition, this shift from the culture of meat.

The author is Toronto's Susan Bourette, who prior to writing the book, *Carnivore Chic*, was working for The Globe and Mail. And as part of her job there she took on some solid investigative research to learn how cheap meat is made possible. She did something that is not so common in the world of commercial media and she went and applied for a job at the Maple Leaf Foods processing plant in Brandon, Manitoba. This is the company's largest facility producing a significant amount of the pork products found on Canadian grocery store shelves. In fact over 77,000 hogs enter into this facility each week, a staggering amount. And it was this experience working in the facility that led Susan to embark on a North American wide journey to seek out different meat cultures, so to speak, and in doing so, she discovered that there is a growing movement of conscientious eaters who are consuming meat in a way that is far more reminiscent of the culture of meat that existed before this dietary staple became so industrialized.

Again the title is *Carnivore Chic – From Pasture to Plate, A Search for the Perfect Meat*. The book was released by the Viking imprint of Penguin Books in March of this year and Susan spoke to me over the phone from Toronto. Our conversation began on the topic of why she chose to apply for a job at one of the largest slaughterhouses in the country.

*Susan Bourette:* Well at the time, I'd been seeing these little snippets in the Winnipeg Free Press about workers from one of the largest slaughterhouses in Canada, Maple Leaf Foods, in Brandon, Manitoba. I'd been seeing these little squibs about workers trying to escape across the boarder into the United States and these were workers that were brought in from Mexico and this is a few years ago, really before the Temporary Foreign Worker Program got underway. And in fact, Maple Leaf Foods was one of the architects, I believe, in that they were one of the first companies in Canada that was really using temporary foreign workers and I guess what really peaked my interest was, I wondered why they had to bring workers in from outside of the country from places like Mexico and China to do a job that they couldn't recruit anyone in Canada to do and so that was really how this all started. I was just so curious as to what was going on in the slaughterhouse.

*JS:* While working at the Maple Leaf Foods plant in Brandon, Susan learned first-hand exactly why it's so hard to recruit people to work there.

*SB:* So I went to work undercover at Maple Leaf Foods. You know it took me a couple of weeks. I actually had to go through quite a process to even get the job at Maple Leaf Foods. They did some coordination tests, and anyway, eventually I did get a job working in part of the plant called by-products and this is where most of the more junior workers go to start to learn the slaughterhouse trade. So it was my job to chop the cheeks out of hogs' heads. They were coming down the assembly line, dozens and dozens at a time, and it was my job to pick up the hog's head by the esophagus and to pull it over to my

workstation and then cut the cheeks out. So there I was in the slaughterhouse uniform, I had pig's blood seeping into my bra. It was just exhausting, horrible, horrible work. And there was an unexpected upshot, which was, that I walked off the factory floor vowing I was never going to eat meat again.

*JS:* While the details of her job were certainly graphic and warranted some more indepth questioning, I opted to instead first ask her the question that was begging to be asked, and that was, did Maple Leaf Foods have any idea that she was researching an article for The Globe and Mail.

*SB:* This book started as a magazine story for, Report on Business Magazine, and I guess the intent was, it was to find out really what goes on in a slaughterhouse and there's no way that Maple Leaf was ever going to agree to let me go and work on the slaughterhouse floor. So we had decided, the editors and I, that the best way to really sort of see it first-hand was to go undercover. So yes, they were not aware of what I was doing. I did come clean, so to speak, at the end of the week and told them I had done that. Let's just say they were not very happy with me. They did in fact try to get the story killed but luckily in their wisdom, Report on Business Magazine, stuck to their guns and decided we really should run this story, that it was important for people to know how we get cheap meat on our dinner plate.

*JS:* The article Susan was researching was again for, The Globe and Mail's November 2003 issue of Report on Business Magazine, and I do have an excerpt of that writing that I'll just quickly share with you to give you a taste of her experience. The wording is rather graphic but if you eat anything containing pork, from bacon all the way to jelly beans and marshmallows or the glue you just used to make some repairs, hearing such details are in many ways a responsibility so long as we're supporting such conditions.

And so here is what Susan wrote, "I worked on the kill floor of Maple Leaf Pork in Brandon, Manitoba, drenched in blood and guts, drowning in the nauseating stench. I was part of a new work force moving briskly through the carcasses. This is world class? We're deep in the shadows. In the bowels of a building with walls that sweat gristle and blood. A modern-day plant, more like Fritz Lang's Metropolis than Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory. We're standing in a semi-circle on the kill floor at Maple Leaf Pork in Brandon, Manitoba. Twenty-five fresh recruits, our mouths agape. Mike, a short, squat factory-floor veteran, stuffed into a bloody lab coat, is leading our tour. Hundreds of hogs swing by on a conveyer line; flayed and shackled up by their hind legs, their heads dangling by a flap of skin, they smack together like bowling pins. We stare at the blank faces of the men who thrust in and out of the hogs' bellies with knives, yanking out glistening tubes of red and grey entrails, bowels, hearts and livers that will eventually be chopped, packaged and shipped off for the dinner table."

Now coming back to the impetus for her decision to work at the plant, Susan Bourette's experience did indeed shed more light into answering her question of why migrant workers are so commonplace at Canada's major slaughterhouses.

*SB:* Well, I think what I really didn't understand and I think what most people don't know is that these used to be very good paying jobs. They are very difficult jobs, it is one of the most dangerous jobs in North America. The injury rate is very high. People suffer from repetitive strain and injury, which is one of the biggest injuries in the slaughterhouse but people get killed, they're maimed, they suffer from horrible psychological damage from working in these factories and they used to be very good paying jobs. They used to be the equivalent of working on the assembly line in a car plant and what has happened over the last twenty years, and it really started in the United States, was that union contracts began to disappear and Canada really followed the US in trying to compete to put cheap meat on the dinner plate. So workers starting in the slaughterhouse in Brandon, Manitoba earn the equivalent of what people make down the street at McDonald's. And the speeds on the assembly line have also been sped up and it makes the work that much more dangerous. It also means that the pathogens that get into the meat occur at a much higher frequency rate, the inspectors can't keep up with the pace of production either. So I think we should be horrified by what's happened in meat production.

*JS:* And this is Deconstructing Dinner, where we're listening to clips from my conversation with the author of the recently released, *Carnivore Chic*. While Toronto's Susan Bourette learned first-hand of the questionable working conditions of the meat packing industry, she was also impacted by the conditions in which animals are being processed. While she wasn't working on the kill floor itself, her job as a by-product clerk did nevertheless get her reconsidering the role of meat within her diet.

*SB:* I think it got me thinking a lot more about what it is that we're doing when we try to get meat on our dinner plates. I wasn't in that part of the slaughterhouse where we actually killed the animals so I only know what I've read about how animals are treated but the whole experience really did get me thinking very deeply about how crazy it is what we do with meat. And not only in terms of animal welfare, well yes, I did start thinking I think for the very first time not just how people are treated but how the animals are treated in the great industrial meat complex and morally it wasn't something that I felt I could countenance.

*JS:* The plant in Brandon, Manitoba is the largest pork processing facility in the country and when you hear of the number of animals processed each day, it becomes somewhat possible to fathom just how big this slaughterhouse really is. This is nothing short of a factory and just as cheap meat is demanded everyday by Canadians at drive-thru windows, restaurant tables and grocery store checkout counters, this demand for cheap food is very much an influence on the speed at which these plants operate.

*SB:* At that time there were 10,000 hogs a day slaughtered and I know that they'd been pushing to, and I'm not sure if they've succeeded, they wanted to double production by now, by adding a second shift at the plant. Part of their problems was just finding enough workers to do this, but they also wanted some provincial funding for water treatment and that sort of stuff. So they had been waiting on that. It was heralded as a state-of-the-art

plant and having worked there and having seen actually how little training people get it's actually quite frightening.

*JS:* Since Susan worked at the plant, Maple Leaf Foods has added the second shift mentioned in that last clip and they have also shut down some of their other Canadian operations and consolidated them into the Brandon facility. Today, the plant is processing an average of 10,700 hogs per day and by 2009, they plan to expand to an average of 12,300 hogs per day.

Now while listening to these numbers and these conditions and perhaps realizing that these animals are making their way into countless products, it all may be rather traumatizing. Well for Susan Bourette, working in the facility itself was just that, traumatizing, and following her time at the plant, she refers to what she went through as PST, that is Post Slaughterhouse Trauma.

*SB:* Well, I guess I did experience some post-traumatic stress and to tell you the truth I think in my university days I flirted with vegetarianism. I had been a vegetarian for about a year although I wasn't eating a very healthy diet at the time and I think certainly a vegetarian diet is healthy but that's not what I was eating. I was eating muffins and 12 cups of coffee a day, that kind of thing and it was really just the absence of meat in my diet, it wasn't really a vegetarian diet. But I think I really started to grapple with the whole notion of what it was I was eating for the first time and it was a visceral experience. I really thought I never want to eat meat again, and it got me thinking, just removing meat from my diet again, it got me thinking very deeply again about what it is that we're consuming when we eat meat. Not just from a health point of view but from why it's so important to our culture. So it set me off on a journey and I really wanted to experience a bunch of different meat cultures and I went from whaling in Barrow, Alaska to a Texas cattle ranch, to a raw meat potluck. And essentially this book that I've written, it's really a love letter. It's a love letter to all of those chefs and the butchers and the hunters and farmers and ranchers who do bring meat to our dinner plates.

*JS:* Following her five weeks as a vegetarian, Susan did arrive at a point of wanting to explore if, as the subtitle of the book suggests, there was such a thing as "the perfect meat," that is a meat that did not originate from the industrial systems of raising and processing animals.

It was this journey throughout North America that led her to recognize that there is indeed a culture of meat eating, and that it's this culture that she suggests is so fundamental to what it is to be human.

*SB:* Pretty much every experience I'd had after the slaughterhouse was really in a small community participating in the culture of their meat eating. Whether it was in Barrow, Alaska, which we can't help to think in our culture, outside of the North, that whale hunting is wrong but I think I learned more about the culture of meat eating across North America by going whale hunting in Barrow, Alaska. I think it was there that I really learned that what we're really doing when we sit down for dinner whether it's around a

prime rib or around a steak or a roast chicken or around a celebration of muttuk, it's something so fundamental to what it is to be human.

*JS:* During one of our previous shows on the topic of dairy, we did spend quite a bit of time discussing the environmental impacts of dairy production. Referred to during that show was a report that was released by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (the FAO) titled, *Livestock's Long Shadow*. Now it's been quite shocking how little attention this report has received and I'm sure we could spend a few hours listing off the reasons why this report has gone so unnoticed, but Susan Bourette did come across this report while researching her book, *Carnivore Chic*, and it did have quite an impact on her own personal choices.

*SB:* I stumbled upon this UN report when I was doing my research and I think it was shocking to find out that the greenhouse gas emissions from livestock production contributes more to harmful emissions than planes, trains and automobiles all put together and I think we do have to think very seriously about the environmental footprint of what we're doing, especially knowing that the way things are going it's estimated that global meat production will double, I think by 2050 or by 2040, and I don't think we can continue consuming meat the way that we do. And so I have found a solution for myself and I don't think my book is a polemic as much as it is an adventure, a meditation and as I've said a love letter, but I've found a solution for myself, which is, I need to eat less meat and so not only do I go to a local butcher shop where I can feel comfortable knowing how the animal was raised and what's in it but I've also cut back my own meat consumption to a couple of times a week.

*JS:* And this is *Deconstructing Dinner*. A reminder that you can catch an archived version of today's broadcast by visiting our website at [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca) and located under the page for this Part I of the *Livestock Lost* series will be additional resources on today's topic should you wish to explore some of what's discussed today in more depth.

Now one thing we haven't yet gotten to is this word, *chic*, that makes up the title for Susan's book, *Carnivore Chic*, because *chic* of course refers to something that is trendy, something cool and really meat has only up until recent times been a pretty uncool food. The industrialization of animals has led us so astray from what meat really represents, starting of course with meat being the product of an animal, that it really has become so commonplace, so cheap and so benign as part of the North American diet that today, meat is branded and labeled with slogans, mascots, animated cartoon characters, it's packaged in boxes with labels of what your meat could look like if you cook it as part of a manipulated photo shoot. But Susan on the other hand, has come to observe that meat is now becoming cooler and receiving more attention in a cultural sense by those who are becoming more conscientious of where their meat is coming from.

*SB:* Well, I think that something fundamental has shifted in our culture and the fact that you can take knife skills courses in Vancouver and you can take butchering classes in Toronto and we've got, sort of, new meat temples cropping up everywhere. I think it does say something about a shift in our culture and I think what's happened is that the

vegetarian movement made carnivores feel guilty, maybe not all carnivores, but I know it made me feel guilty and I think what's happened is that we've actually learned a lot from the vegetarian movement. They were the first people to question, sort of the whole food industry and to question sourcing and traceability and I think in fact even though they might not like this, we as carnivores have learned a lot from them and I think now we feel that we can eat meat in good conscience.

*JS:* One of the most well-known authors on the topic of food, where our food is coming from and what's in our food is, Michael Pollan, and Susan quotes Michael in her book. And the quote she included was this, "More than any other institution, the American industrial farm offers a nightmarish glimpse of what capitalism can look like in the absence of moral or regulatory constraint." As Susan herself saw first-hand what the end product of this system looks like along with observing some of the alternatives to this system, I asked her if she also believes this to be true.

*SB:* Absolutely, from all that we know about how animals are raised in filthy, crowded conditions, how they are pumped full of just toxins, things that are toxins to their bodies, things that are toxins to our own bodies, how workers are exploited just so that we can have dinner. I think that it's horrifying and I think increasingly consumers don't want to participate in that industrial complex.

*JS:* And in closing out my conversation with author, Susan Bourette, I asked her to expand on a comment she writes in her book that reads this, "What we are really celebrating, when we gather for a meat meal, is our reconnection to the earth, to our communities and our collective history."

*SB:* What I learned in my year spent traveling across North America to witness and participate in different meat cultures was that really what we were all doing was the same thing, which was, celebrating around the kill and there are historians who have argued that North America was really settled because poor peasants in Europe wanted to have more meat on our dinner plates. There are anthropologists who have argued that there's something called meat hunger and that it's just a fundamental part of being human and I really believe that's true. I believe that no matter what culture you go into whether you're eating guinea pig or bush meat in Africa there's something that is so fundamental to all of us that can only be sated with a meat dinner.

*JS:* And that was, Susan Bourette, the author of the recently released book, *Carnivore Chic*, from Penguin Books. Susan spoke to me over the phone from Toronto.

### **soundbite**

And this is Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly one hour radio show and Podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia.

This show is broadcast on radio stations around the world including CJJJ Brandon, Manitoba and more information on the program including an online tool to become a monthly supporter of the program can be found on our website at [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca)

Today's broadcast is the first in a series titled, Livestock Lost, and it will be examining the known and unknown dangers of meat and animal products. But as part of this series, we'll also explore some of the alternatives being encouraged across the country that are working at providing animal products that are sourced using the most humane and socially and environmentally responsible practices possible.

One of these alternatives has been proposed in the West Kootenay region of the province where Deconstructing Dinner calls home, and it's an alternative that will open up some important questions on this and future episodes of this Livestock Lost series.

As a result of all of us being a part of a meat culture that is industrial, disconnected from the animals and the land and one that is in many ways socially and environmentally irresponsible, there is now a very entrenched association that anything that is referred to as a slaughterhouse or an abattoir must be producing horrible smells and be incredibly damaging to the environment. Well that is exactly the response that a newly proposed abattoir here in the interior of BC is up against. The proposed facility would look and be nothing like its industrial counterparts and would allow the many small-scale farmers who are raising their animals in far more responsible ways to take their small herds to be processed in a facility that is provincially licensed.

Now the reason for this facility having been proposed in the first place tracks back to a broadcast that we aired here on the show in May of 2006 titled, Slaughterhouses on the Butcher Block. That show represented one of the first instances of the new BC Meat Inspection Regulations receiving any media attention. And I point this out because as is now readily apparent, these new meat inspection regulations which have now been in effect since October of 2007 have put many farmers out of business. In fact, I was just on the phone last night with a farmer in Meadow Creek, BC who just recently sold his farm and has given up on farming all together. Clearly, these regulation changes should have received far more media attention than they did given such repercussions.

Now for those unaware of this issue here is quick rundown. In 2004, British Columbia's provincial government announced that because of increased food safety concerns such as, mad cow disease, avian influenza, all animals processed in the province for consumption must pass through a provincially or federally licensed facility. Now while most animals already were, there were some locations throughout the province where no such facility existed. Now just as once existed in BC, this is the case in most provinces where some meat available for sale is done at the farm gate and therefore does not require such licensed facilities. Well that's all changed because the BC government chose to streamline the entire sector and prohibit any sale of meat even if you or I were to walk right up to the farm and purchase meat there.

As part of the changes the province gave those areas without a proper facility two years to build one. Now most farmers I've spoken with thought the whole thing was a joke when it was first announced in 2004 and they didn't take the announcement very seriously at all. But when it became clear that the regulation changes were real, farmers scrambled and the province responded by announcing five million dollars in funding to help get such slaughterhouses built in time. The deadline for compliance was even extended by a year to 2007 but even that was not enough. In the grand scheme of things five million dollars wasn't adequate to satisfy the entire province and the September 30<sup>th</sup> 2007 deadline did not provide adequate time.

And so, in areas such as in the West Kootenay region of the province, in places like Powell River, on many of the Gulf Islands and Vancouver Island, there are either no facilities or not enough processing capacity to meet demand.

Long story short, what was meant as legislation to address a supposed health and food safety concern, has instead taken what was a sector with a flawless record of safety and has instead made it dangerous, because now, there is an illegal trade of meat taking place across the province because many farmers are refusing to give up the production of food for their friends and for their neighbours and communities. These farmers are now liable for damages upwards to \$50,000 if convicted. In other words, farmers have been turned into criminals punishable with even greater severity than drug dealers.

Those farmers who have chosen to not become a criminal have instead opted out of the business of raising animals and the supply of locally produced food in the province has gone down. And the most disturbing part of the story is found when observing the recent efforts by the Province to promote and encourage the consumption of local BC food.

### **soundbite**

A familiar voice here on the show is Corky Evans. Corky is the elected representative of the Nelson-Creston riding of the province and has been very involved in this issue as he is also the Opposition Critic on Agriculture and Lands.

In March 2008, Corky spoke on agricultural issues to an audience in Nelson and here is a clip from his presentation as he addressed the implementation of these new meat inspection regulations.

*Corky Evans:* And of course I know thousands of people, we have two hundred of them in this room, who think that the meat regulation law is a hostile act by some external, "they," intended to bankrupt them or maybe even worst intended to see to it that they make no money so they can't be farmers, so they pull their land out of the ALR, and so they destroy farming. What I believe in a political sense, is this, the government has passed the worst implemented piece of legislation in the history of Canada, except the federal gun law of ten years ago. Because people who raise meat said to them, okay if it needs to be an inspector let our local veterinarian be the inspector, they went to school, they know a sick animal, and they live here and they will come on Saturday afternoon.

And we didn't allow that and people said, okay if there needs to be an inspector than let us have a university train a brand new lot of inspectors and we'll send one of our workers to be certified just like a first-aid attendant, right or whatever, a massage therapist. You get a piece of paper and then our own workers will be at work and that was ignored. And then people said, and I think there is great wisdom in this, if we are going to move from a free-market, behave like we want situation to a controlled situation, it will take ten years, so do what Saskatchewan does and say you can have farm gate sales but you can't put that meat in a store or in a refrigerator truck or haul it across a provincial line or an international line. That way, it's contained to your community and it's against the law for it to enter the commercial food stream. That's the way Nova Scotia does it and that was ignored. I could go on and on but I don't want to waste too much time in answering Jon's question. The law is not wrong, it's not wrong to say meat should be healthy. The implementation is either absolutely derelict by virtue of laziness or it's actually a conscience attempt to put a bunch of people out of business.

Our position, the opposition's position, is that the law should be fully engaged anywhere that there is an abattoir for your species of animal within 30 miles of your house and where there isn't, until there is, farm gate sales should be allowed that can't cross a provincial line or enter a commercial food stream. That way, the onus would be on the crown if we want an abattoir in your community, to help get it built.

I want to finish this by saying it does us no good to think there's some conscience 'they' out there that wants rid of you. The people who have done nothing to create a condition opposite to this, is us. The age group I belong to, in the province I run for office in, are the people and the peer group that have abandoned this sector. All that's happening is that somebody else is filling the vacuum that we left for them.

*JS:* MLA Corky Evans speaking in March 2008 in Nelson, BC.

Now one of the greatest failures of the regulation changes was the media. As mentioned earlier, our May 2006 broadcast was the first concentrated coverage of this issue by any media source in the province. And while better late than never, it wasn't until one month prior to the changes coming into effect, that the nationwide radio program, *The Current*, which airs on the CBC, ran a segment on the topic. The host of the segment was, Connie Watson, and she asked some critical questions of, Tony Toth, who was at the time the CEO of the BC Food Processors Association. Tony Toth made a number of statements that infuriated farmers across the province and one of those statements was that, "uninspected meat is unsafe meat." And here's a clip of that segment.

*Tony Toth:* I think such a thing but at the same time which would you rather have, people keeling over from bad food or having a proper system that minimizes that prospect?

*Connie Watson:* Do you have any evidence that anyone has keeled over from bad food from a small farm? I think most of the big scares have all come from large-scale factory farms.

*TT:* Most of the tested findings come from large-scale farms, but look, let's be real, if I get sick and I go to the hospital and I have a sick stomach and I say I ate something bad I'm not going to say I ate farmer Jones' bad steak am I? So that is not reported and it is scientifically speaking, as I said, a bug doesn't care whether it's infecting your local farm cow or a big dairy herd cow. It's one in the same thing and uninspected food, uninspected meat, is unsafe meat.

*JS:* Now of course the problem with that statement is that it blankets all farmers and processors as being ignorant and unable to identify a sick animal or a contaminated animal. This of course infuriated farmers because as indicated in the clip, there are not cases of anyone getting sick from meat coming from a small-scale farm selling locally.

But what this statement fails to address is the freedom that has now been taken away from the public to choose what we put into our body. And it's this, among other aspects to this story, that makes this particular case so important, because regardless of whether or not you eat meat, this is the same approach that has already affected the foods available to us now, and it's predicted, such choices will continue to be taken away as food safety concerns continue to increase. In this second and last segment from that interview on, CBC's, *The Current*, here is another probing question by host, Connie Waton that addresses this concern.

*CW:* Do you really think, let's say, when you were talking about farmer Jones that I'm a willing participant, I want to keep farmer Jones in business, I head out there to buy his eggs or his cows or anything and maybe I don't want this kind of protection that might drive farmer Jones out of business. So is there a point, that you think all these regulations are really necessary? Do you have the public clamoring for this when it comes to small farms?

*TT:* No, but it's just commonsense, isn't it? Look if I feel like driving on the left-hand side of the road, can I? Nope.

*CW:* But you may risk other people by driving on the other side of the road.

*TT:* Exactly.

*CW:* This is not the same thing.

*TT:* And if you have an uninspected food system you not only risk but you will hurt people.

*JS:* Now again, to recapture the response from Tony Toth the then CEO of the BC Food Processors Association, when asked by host, Connie Watson, if someone should be allowed to support a farmer if they want to, his answer was again, a clear no. And there are a couple of words that come to mind that capture this response, this response of no, that they should not have the freedom to choose. And one word that comes to mind is, fascism, which is a political theory advocating an authoritarian hierarchical government

as opposed to democracy or liberalism. Another word that comes to mind is, totalitarianism, and that is of relating to, being, or imposing a form of government in which the political authority exercises absolute and centralized control over all aspects of life. The individual is subordinated to the State and opposing political and cultural expression is suppressed.

### **soundbite**

Now one person in particular who was infuriated by the comments made by Tony Toth was Jenny Macleod. Jenny is the Secretary of the District A Farmers Institutes, a group that represents all farmers institutes on Vancouver Island, The Gulf Islands and Powell River and I sat down with Jenny in October 2007 while visiting Nanaimo and she commented on the CBC interview.

*Jenny Macleod:* First of all, I thought it was very unfortunate that Tony Toth, who is the CEO of the BC Food Processors Association, the only organization that supposedly represents food processors in British Columbia, had such terrible, hurtful things to say about our local farmers and the way they do business, especially the way they grow and produce and process local meat. The first thing that he said that absolutely shocked and stunned me was when he said, that food produced by small-scale farmers was not safer than factory farmed produced meat and the only thing I could think of was, that is an outright lie, because the only illness related recalls of meat in this province are always associated with the large factory farms and moreover when there is a huge meat recall these particular plants do not necessarily shut down, whereas, if you have a small-scale farmer and there is a problem you can bet they would have been shut down overnight.

*JS:* Jenny Macleod's comments address the topic of traceability, which was touched on on previous broadcasts of covering this topic, in that the poor traceability within the industrial food system occurs during province-wide, country-wide or even continent-wide food recalls. If food was ever to be contaminated by a farmer, who sold directly to the public, well, traceability is pretty easy and pretty quick. Not only is traceability a going concern among the industrial food system, but even when a concern is discovered the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the CFIA, fails to disclose any of this information to the public. On June 23<sup>rd</sup> it was announced by the CFIA, that yet another cow in British Columbia was identified to be infected with BSE, Mad Cow Disease. And so, I called up the CFIA media line that day to discover where in the province it was found and I was told that they were unable to disclose that information yet. I was told that the information would be released shortly. And so, on June 27<sup>th</sup> they issued yet another release confirming the age of the animal and next steps in the investigation, yet nowhere, was there any mention of where the animals was from and where it was identified to have been infected with BSE. All the public has been told is that it was from BC. Now you can stay tuned for future broadcasts of this series to learn more details of where the animal was from and what it was being fed.

Now also following the comments made on the CBC interview, Jenny Macleod was involved in helping put together a letter dated, September 5<sup>th</sup> 2007, and it was addressed

to the Minister of Agriculture and Lands, Pat Bell. The letter came from, Wayne Osborne, the president of a group calling themselves, Feathers Canada. The group represents the interests of the small-hold poultry community and they chose to examine the legal nature of the regulation changes themselves. Feathers Canada believes that the province has illegally acted by legislating, such changes, based upon unfounded fears.

Part of that letter reads this, “Canada's Charter of Rights also protects the right of the small-holder to process and sell food from the farm. It is illegal for any government, or regulator, to restrict this freedom when there is no demonstrated need to do so. The good done by any such restriction must outweigh the harm done by the restriction and this is not the case here.”

We'll explore this letter in more depth on future broadcasts of this series.

*JM:* But what we're looking at here is a way of life, of a quality of a product, of dedication to producing that kind of thing, because in farmers' minds it's not the buck at the end of the day, it's the food that they are selling their friends and neighbours and their clients, that are building their bodies and no one knows this better than a farmer who has his feet firmly planted in the earth and his head firmly lodged in the weather and knows how these things go. I can tell you I have boundless admiration for these people and even a sense of awe because if I had been dealing with the issues that they have been dealing with for years, it breaks your heart. I couldn't do it.

*JS:* And in closing out my conversation with Jenny Macleod, she ended with the following comment for BC Premier, Gordon Campbell.

*JM:* If Gordon Campbell expects his Olympics to shine, if he expects to showcase BC cuisine and if he expects all of this wonderful BC food to be presented to all of these tourists what I want to know is, where is it coming from, because if this continues, there won't be any lamb or pork or chicken, there won't.

*JS:* And that was Jenny Macleod, the Secretary of the District A Farmers Institutes, a group that represents all farmers institutes on Vancouver Island, The Gulf Islands and Powell River and I sat down with Jenny in October 2007, while visiting Nanaimo.

### **soundbite**

*JS:* And this is Deconstructing Dinner and Part I of the new, Livestock Lost, series here on the show. On next week's broadcast you can expect an indepth exploration of one community's response to these regulation changes and this response presents an exciting alternative to the industrial slaughterhouse models currently dominating the North American food supply.

But in helping bring us to the end of the hour, we should explore the supposed safety found within the industrial food system, which for some British Columbians, is the only

available option now unless meat eating is given up entirely or if meat is purchased from criminal farmers.

Taking us back to where this culture of food safety and meat inspection first began, we arrive at one of the most well known books ever written on meat production and that was, Upton Sinclairs', *The Jungle*, written over one-hundred years ago in 1906. It was a scathing investigation into the conditions found in the American meat packing houses of the time and in 1946, the US Department of Agriculture released an educational film that used the fears created by that book as a segue into announcing the benefits of a federally inspected meat system.

This full video will be linked to the Deconstructing Dinner website, but here is one clip from the film titled, *Meats with Approval*. You'll find the message not so different from the one heard during the CBC interview with Tony Toth.

*(music, knocking on a door)*

*Female Voice:* Oh doctor, I'm so glad you've gotten here. Jimmy's terribly sick.

*Doctor:* Now, now don't you worry. Let's have a look at him.

*Female Voice:* He's in the front bedroom upstairs. It started tonight right after dinner.

*(music)*

*Doctor:* This is the third case of this kind I've had this week.

*Female Voice:* Is it serious doctor?

*Doctor:* No, but it could've been. He'll be alright in a few days if you give him his medicine regularly but there should be some kind of law to keep people from selling bad food, especially meat.

*Announcer:* Yes, near the turn of the century episodes like this were common. Frequent illness, sometimes even dead, followed the eating of food which was tainted, unfit for human consumption. There were of course many who realized the need for some kind of adequate control over the preparation and marketing of food that would protect the average family from the dangers of contracting disease and yet most of them were powerless to do anything about it, but one of those who felt he could do something about it was an author, he wrote a novel. It was not a pleasant novel, it was a bitter, overdrawn indictment of conditions which the writer, Upton Sinclair, insisted existed in most of the packing houses in the nation. It told conditions of filth and carelessness in the handling of meat, which were exposing the people of the United States to all manner of deadly disease. It was widely read, that novel, and those who read became concerned and aroused.

*Male voice 1:* It's an outrage.

*Male voice 2:* A man isn't safe even at his own dinner table.

*Male voice 3:* Something ought to be done about it.

*Male voice 4:* Why doesn't the government step in?

*Announcer:* Yes, the people of the United States violently exercised their constitutional right to demand the government to do something about the proper handling of meat for their tables. As a result the president himself, Theodore Roosevelt, gave his personal endorsement to legislation that would create federal supervision of meat-handling in the major packing plants of the nation. And so it was in July 1906, a law requiring government control of meat inspection, reinspection and supervision of processing and labeling was passed. From that time, right up to the present, that law has had a profound effect upon the health and well-being of every American citizen.

*JS:* And this is Deconstructing Dinner.

So let's take a look at how true this is, this suggestion, that federal meat inspection has had a profound impact on the health and well-being of, in this case, we'll say of every North American citizen.

Here is just a sampling of some of the major meat recalls in recent times here in North America. And remember, these represent only a few of those incidents and cases that get reported and tracked.

Dating back to 1997, Hudson Foods Company, which was one of Burger King's major suppliers at the time, recalled 25 million pounds of ground beef due to contamination from listeria, 20 illnesses were reported.

In 1998 and 1999, two of the largest recalls in history at the time, of both 35 million pounds, came one month apart, again listeria, 24 people died and 100 fell ill.

In the year 2000, Safeway hamburger meat was recalled from stores throughout Canada and the United States due to E. coli. The meat originated at a XL Foods facility in Canada and also of interest, is that since one of our recent shows featuring information on the Brooks Alberta slaughterhouse, on June 26<sup>th</sup>, XL Foods became the owner of that plant, which again, up until that date was owned by American based Tyson Foods.

In 2002, Pilgrim's Pride, one of the largest poultry producers in the United States and Wampler Foods, recalled 27.4 million pounds of poultry, again listeria. 52 illnesses were reported and 7 deaths.

In 2002 again, ConAgra Foods, recalled 18.6 million pounds of beef. E. coli was the contamination there, 34 illnesses.

In 2005, here in Canada, Safeway ground beef was recalled, yet again, from stores in British Columbia and Alberta. Again this was E. coli, 16 cases of illness were reported.

In March 2007, salmonella contamination was feared in turkey products from the Lilydale plant in Alberta and those products were sold at Costcos throughout Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

In September 2007, 50,000 birds were destroyed at a commercial barn in Saskatchewan after bird flu was identified in the population.

Down in the United States in 2007, the USDA issued 20 meat recalls. And one of those was from the American based brand of Topps Meat, when they recalled 21.7 million pounds of ground beef, due again to E. coli. 30 people got sick and this was also linked to a Canadian company that produced the meat, Ranchers Beef Ltd. of Balzac Alberta and the company no longer exists. There were also recalls of that meat in British Columbia.

In January 2008, the Rochester Meat Company recalled 188,000 pounds of ground beef due to E. coli concerns

Then of course one of the most recognized just happened, February 2008, when the largest recall in history was 143 million pounds of beef, which was the entire production of one plant over two years. And the reason for the recall was because the company did not prevent sick and injured animals from entering the U.S. food supply. The recall was sparked when video footage of workers at, Westland Meat, which was a subsidiary of, Hallmark Meat Packing, in Chino, California were seen using electric shocks and high-intensity water sprays on cows who were too weak to stand on their own. Regulations prohibit slaughtering for food, cattle that cannot stand or walk on their own and hence the recall was enforced.

In order to reassure the public, the Food and Drug Administration assured the American public that there was not too much to be worried about because, “most of the meat was eaten long ago.” 37 million pounds of that meat went to school lunch and public nutrition programs across the country.

In May 2008, more E. coli concerns lead to a recall of ground beef products sold through M&M meat shops across Canada, and Belmont Meat Products sold through Costco store in Ontario.

Again in May 2008, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, issued a recall for possible E. coli of bison, prime rib and chuck patties and burgers from retailers selling products from, Trimpac Meat Distributors, based here in British Columbia, who get much of their beef from Alberta. One of those retailers was right here in the Kootenay Region of the province.

And most recently, and as of, July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008, 40 cases of E. coli have been associated with two American companies, Kroger Ground Beef and Nebraska Beef Ltd. On June 25<sup>th</sup> Kroger recalled 532,000 pounds and Nebraska recalled the same amount.

And again on the next episode of this, Livestock Lost series, you can expect an indepth examination of a group here, in the Kootenay region, who are working hard at creating a local abattoir to process animals from small-scale family farms operating in the region.

*Meat with Approval, Announcer:* The Federal Inspection Service exercises close control over the labeling of all meat products to see that nothing misleading is allowed on a label and that an exact description of the product tells the housewife what she is getting. True your government goes to great lengths to see that the meat we eat is good and pure but bare in mind that not all meat is government inspected. The health of every citizen is important to the continued greatness of America. That is why today the vast resources of a great government agency and the skill and intelligence of highly trained experts, is constantly devoted to the task of seeing that Americans have meat that is disease free and wholesome. That is why today we can all be certain of complete protection by the little purple circle of purity that we find on the meat we eat. (*background, music*)

### **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.

This radio program is provided free of charge to campus and 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 [deconstructingdinner.ca](http://deconstructingdinner.ca) or by dialing 250-352-9600.