

**Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
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Title: So You Want to Be a Farmer?

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Robin Tunnicliffe: We're in the process of writing a book about how to start farming. We had a conversation mid-summer, last year, and Heather had just come up from the field, she had just discovered she had mummy-berry in her blueberries, a devastating disease. And then our greenhouse manager came up and told us that we had blight – early blight – in the greenhouse. And Heather and I just had a fight that morning because we were so stressed out about not having enough time, and all these problems just hit us at once and we thought: “Gosh, is it ethical to tell people that it’s a good idea to start farming?”

[audience laughter]

Jon Steinman: And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly radio show and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. This program is heard on radio stations across the country and includes, among others, CJMP Powell-River B.C., and CKUW Winnipeg Manitoba. I’m Jon Steinmann, and I’ll be your host for the next hour. Having just returned from the 2008 Annual Conference of the Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia – the COABC – it’s safe to say that future broadcasts will certainly be incorporating much of dialogue and learning that took place there. The conference was held in the community of Sydney on Vancouver Island, and was host to predominantly organic farmers and processors from across the province. But of greatest excitement and certainly something that will play out into future shows, was the noticeable presence of a younger generation of conference delegates, all of whom were either in the process of setting up new farms, or eager to learn how they can go about becoming a farmer.

On today’s broadcast, we’ll listen in on an important workshop hosted by a more established farmer, Robin Tunnicliffe, who farms in Victoria, B.C, and who is a co-owner of the Saanich Organics Marketing Co-operative. Robin’s workshop titled, *Staring Your Organic Farm*, and I sat in to record the workshop for two reasons: firstly, I saw it as an opportunity for us non-farming eaters to learn what it takes for future farmers to get into the business of growing food for us to eat. And secondly, with the clear under-supply of small-scale farmers across the country, perhaps Robin’s presentation will inspire some listeners, hopefully many, to take up the noble and increasingly important occupation of farming. And rounding off the broadcast today will be a segment that testifies to one

community's efforts to show their appreciation for farmers. And that was an event hosted here in Nelson, B.C., and jointly organized by author Paul Edney and the Kootenay Country Store Co-operative. The event was themed around Valentine's Day and was titled: *Write to a Farmer*. Paul Edney was inspired to organize such an event upon recognizing just how under-appreciated farmers really are. Following which he created an opportunity for Nelson-area residents to show their appreciation to the all-important grower of food. I spent some time with Paul on the day of the event and we'll here some of those letters at the conclusion of today's show.

Jon Steinman: The hours of recordings compiled by Deconstructing Dinner at the Shades of Green Conference hosted by the COABC will certainly make their way onto future broadcasts and will encompass a pretty wide ranging list of topics. But what stood out most for my own experience there was the rather stark contrast between the two directions in which the term organic is heading. Most of the farmers attending the conference were all small-scale farmers who really embody what the term organic was meant to mean. And that was small-scale, local food production using methods that were the least taxing on ecosystems. Now there were also a number of organizations and groups who had set up information tables at the conference, one of whom was the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, representing the new Canada Organic Logo and National Standard that will come into effect in December 2008. Now while the new logo and standards may be a welcome addition to some producers across the country, I for one saw this logo as the end to the more appropriate definition of organic – one that dates back decades, to when farmers first chose to promote a system of farming that was biologically diverse and was not industrial in scale. But one of the principal reasons for implementing the new Canada Organic logo was to facilitate the export of foods to Canada's "trading partners."

Now clearly an important question arises that asks; how organic is a food after it's been shipped across continents and oceans, in planes, in boats and trains and in trucks? But what is clear is that such a definition of organic is in complete opposition to the values many small-scale farmers espouse. And what will indeed need to be a question for a future broadcast is whether this now-industrial and globalized definition of organic that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is launching in December 2008 will signal the need for a new word. One that will symbolize the more responsible food production and distribution that organic was supposed to mean. And you can stay tuned to a future episode that will explore the changing face of organic certification, and what organic certification means to you and I of the eating public.

But my presence at this Certified Organic conference was coincidentally on the heels of the recent launch of our Chemical Pesticides series here on the program. And it was this which sparked another important question while attending the conference. Why is it that we eaters are so insistent that those producing food organically must display a standard of certification on their product, while those foods being produced with the very chemical pesticides that sparked the organic boom following an increase in health and environmental concerns, are not required to display any form of certification? And this

question too will be posed on a future broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner, when we will also explore what systems are in place to certify that conventional food is not organic.

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When taking a closer look at the demographics of the Canadian workforce and dividing it up among trades, farmers represent the oldest demographic in the country at a median age of 52 years. With an agriculturally-dense province such as Saskatchewan, in 2007 the average farmer was 56 years of age, and only 12.3 percent of all farmers there were under the age of 35. Now this certainly represents one of the greatest threats to the future of Canada's food supply, this aging demographic among farmers. I would suggest that the two most worrisome outcomes of this are firstly, a loss of knowledge and skills, which mind you has already been the case, and two and perhaps a more obvious outcome is the decreasing availability of future farmers at a time when it has become quite clear how unsustainable the large-scale industrial farming model is, a model that does not require much human labour.

And as we begin to see the shortfalls of this agricultural paradigm more clearly, the need for greater diversity within and among farms becomes more pronounced. Agricultural biodiversity is suggested by many to be the key to creating responsible farming systems that can create protect crops and animals from unwanted insects and disease. A focus on biodiversity on farms runs in opposition to the spraying and injecting of fossil fuels onto plants and into soil. More bio-diverse farming will need more of a human presence in Canada's rural farming communities and young farmers increasingly important when viewing the future of farming in this way. So the information and advice that Robin Tunnicliffe shared the March 2008 COABC Conference in Sydney, B.C, was clearly of tremendous importance, as it was an audience of future farmers to whom she spoke. Robin has leant her voice to Deconstructing Dinner before, as part of the June 8th 2006 broadcast on the topic of B.C.'s Agricultural Land Reserve. Robin operates Feisty Field Organic Farm located in Victoria, and is a co-owner in Saanich Organics, a co-operatively-owned marketing business. She's currently completing a Master's degree at the University of Victoria on the value of local agriculture.

As Robin's workshop began, the predominantly young demographic of conference delegates introduced themselves. And one common theme among them was a sense of uncertainty, as to how to best go about becoming a small-scale farmer. As Canada's federal agricultural programs continue to pump billions of dollars into programs to support industrial agriculture, it's surprising to see how little support there is for those wishing to start more diverse and community-oriented farming operations. And this was the topic of discussion that we'll listen in on later on in today's broadcast.

So if you yourself wish to get into farming or simply want to learn more about how some of Canada's future farmers are getting involved in growing our food, Robin Tunnicliffe's first advice would be to decide what type of farming is best suited to you.

Robin Tunnicliffe: My name is Robin Tunnicliffe and I farm three-quarters of an acre with my partner in Saanich, and we started ten years ago. I actually started on my own, and I turned a horses' pasture over into a market garden. And so I've been making my living doing that ever since. I did an apprenticeship, and then right after my apprenticeship I went and just jumped in, I just started doing it. And I was lucky to have a community around me of other growers, other growers with similar interests and skill levels. And so we all teamed up and we marketed together. And we call our marketing business Saanich Organics. So what I try to tell people before they start their farm is to think about what kind of lifestyle you want to have. And that's not to say that you can lounge all day, but if you want to lounge all day, think about a type of farm that will suit you.

[audience laughter]

Like what? Well, there's all types of farming. Our life, it's twelve-hour days all summer. We're always there, we're always into it, and we love it! That's what we do to have fun. A lot of people want to have the farming lifestyle but they don't necessarily want to put those hours in all summer long. So there's options; there's mushrooms, there's orchards, there's bee-keeping, there's all sorts of types of agriculture and it's important to explore all those ways to make a living because they're different.

There's also different ways of marketing. When you were talking about your large-scale wholesaling operation it kind of twigged me, as I'm seeing a lot of farmers going into direct-farm marketing, and it's a lifestyle choice because it's a lot of hours. Do you guys know what direct-farm marketing is? It's the farmer retailing everything to the end consumer, and that's the way a lot of farming is going. And that's what we do on our farm; we sell directly to an end consumer. We've bonded together and formed a type of distributor. But essentially we're selling everything directly to the customer. So that's a different kind of lifestyle as well. So there's all these different permutations [on] how you can run your business, and it's important to think through them before you start or, you know, you can change your tack once you've started, but think about the amount of hours that you're going to spend – whether you want to go away in the winter, that'll determine whether you're going to do livestock. So there's all sorts of things to think about.

JS: According to Robin Tunnicliffe one step for anyone wishing to become a farmer is to apprentice with an already-existing one. There are some interesting apprenticeship programs set up across Canada, and this will be a topic worth exploring on a future show. But here's Robin sharing her experience and thoughts on apprenticing on a farm.

RT: There's lots of different types of apprenticing as well. When I apprenticed I spent six months at Tina Baynes' farm, just around the corner from where my farm is now, and it was just the most fun I ever had. It was long days but she cooked me great meals and we worked together and I learned all about how she does her everyday farming. Before I chose my farm, somebody told me 'choose a farm that makes money.' And at first I thought, gosh, that's kind of weird, but what they meant was not a farm with big tractors and big equipment, but actually a working farm. So a farm that makes money. You don't

want to be working for somebody's hobby farm, you want to be working on a functioning farm that you can emulate so that you can make your own living off it. And apprenticing is a lifelong relationship, I still call up Tina when I have trouble, and I have had apprentices, and I love to see how they're doing, I love it when they call me up and it's an exchange. So when you're thinking about an apprenticeship think long-term, you might be giving a lot in the beginning and sometime it's hard to be giving up your whole summer to be working for someone else and it really comes back to you. And you get to learn from their mistakes.

One of the biggest tips I can give you is to get to know your farming community. What you want to do, when you figure out what you want to farm, is go to the farmers' meetings or talk to farmers. And when I was starting there wasn't the Internet, but most of the famers are up on the Internet now. So you can do an Internet search, go to farms that look interesting, see what they're up to, and don't be afraid to ask questions, be open to learning and volunteer! That's a really great way to learn. One of my friends, Heather, when she first got here, she volunteered for the certification committee. She had no idea what she was doing, but she learned a lot on the run and that's an important thing to try.

JS: And this is Deconstructing Dinner. Another workshop that took place at the 2008 Certified Organic Associations of B.C. conference was hosted by Heather Pritchard, of Vancouver's Farm Folk/City Folk, and Ramona Scott of the Land Conservancy of B.C. Their workshop shared an expanding and innovative model of land ownership that is aiming to make otherwise expensive and out-of-reach farmland more easily accessible to willing farmers. And we'll hear more about that on a future episode. But Robin Tunnicliffe did raise this very question in her workshop titled, Starting Your Organic Farm.

RT: When I started apprenticing, I mean I didn't have any land, and at that time there was an organization here called Linking Land and Future Farmers. And they were set up as a database to hook up people who had land and people who wanted to grow. The group isn't as active anymore. But basically, you can create your own model for LLaFF, putting up posters, knocking on doors. People have had a lot of success around here by just knocking on doors, getting to know the neighbours and finding land that way. Another way to find land is to talk to a farmer. I have tons of people in my neighbourhood offer me more land than I can handle, so I often pass it along to other people. So if you're looking for a land, just really network and try to gather information.

JS: Well traditionally, famers in Canada have owned the land on which they farm. One option that is becoming more realistic for small-scale famers wishing to farm close to urban centres is to lease land, and Robin shared her thoughts on how future farmers can approach land owners.

RT: I signed a lease for five years, and then I renewed for five years again. Some of the issues that you want to let a landlord know is what your farm's going to look like. There's a lot of traffic that comes onto an organic farm, and landlords have to understand that you need people, you need work parties, you need friends to come and stay for a long

period of time, you need to have compost piles and sometimes they smell. Just let people know, paint them a picture of what your farm's going to look like, so that you can keep that communication open. The public doesn't always have a perception of what organic farming looks like; they often have an idealized notion of what a farm is, and the more information that you can give them about what your farm's going to look like, how it's going to work, that you're going to be on their front lawn for 12 hours a day...

JS: The average farm in Canada is of a size that most farmers of the world could never even imagine existed. And as a result, there is likely a tendency for new farmers to think too big when first getting into the world of agriculture. And Robin suggested to the room of future farmers that they start small.

RT: How much land to start with? This is a big point when I talk to farmers. A lot of them start out too big, and what ends up happening is that you just get overwhelmed, and the weeds take over and it's a nightmare. I opened it up $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre and I could have gone with a lot smaller. So when I started farming I invested ten thousand dollars to start up my market garden. I bought a truck, I put up a fence – we have a lot of deer in our region.

When you're first starting up you're obviously going to have a tight budget so you have to prioritize. But don't prioritize to the point where you're going to compromise your future production. A lot of people have tried to save money on fencing, but what happens is, the deer come in – at least in our region – they'll come in and they'll eat your whole production. So, that's not really saving money. So think that through, think about what your farm's going to look like, and again apprentice or just go to other farms as much as you can, and get information from other farmers.

JS: The conference where these were compiled was hosted by the Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia. The COABC is the umbrella organization for the many regional certification bodies set up around the province. As was expected, organic certification was a topic discussed among the future farmers attending Robin's workshop, and she outlined the pros and cons of certification and stressed the importance of the community of farmers that accompanies being certified.

RT: People talk about certifying. I didn't really think too hard about certifying when I first started. I apprenticed with a certified organic grower and I started going to the organic meetings and I really got to see that there was a wealth of knowledge in the room. I just love going to meetings of organic growers, of farmers of all kinds, but I feel I have a lot in common with certified organic growers. And I find that they're really open to helping and problem-solving, and they're really into sharing all their successes. So when you're certifying you're getting into this group of growers that is often really excited about what they're doing, they're really inspired to see other people doing what they love, and they're really into helping out. So that's the main advantage of being certified, I think. Another thing is getting an inspector to come out to your land, because I've never had a government extension agent come out to the farm, but I dream about that's what it's like because your inspector's an expert on all kinds of diseases and any kind of insect

problems, they know what you're talking about and you can tell them about your system and they really try to help you. And if they can't find a solution for you, often times they can bring it back to the certification committee and they can either modify the rules to help you deal with the pest that you have or come up with a better solution. So, it's not like the inspector and the regulations are these fixed outside things, it's a work in process of everybody working together to try to come up with solutions that work. So I really feel supported by my committee.

When you're a certified organic grower you're also involved in provincial and national issues, which I think is great because when you're farming you're often just, as somebody over here said, you're all alone in your field and you don't really see the outside world. And so, by being involved in the certification you're really involved in issues of national – mostly just national scope – but provincial and national scope, and I feel that's a really good advantage of being certified.

The cons are paperwork and more paperwork. Paperwork's no fun. But I find it's paperwork that you should be doing anyway. What it is they're trying to prove that you've grown everything that you've sold. So they'll look at your invoice book, and they say; okay, you sold ten pounds of radishes on July 1st. And so then they'll say, okay, where did you plant those radishes? So you'll look in your maps that you've submitted and say oh they came out of here. And then that's done with and you'll look at your compost records and say okay, I've put compost here. And so you follow it back through and then your seed receipts – do you have your seed receipts? So it's making sure that you have grown everything that you've sold, but keeping those records makes sure that you have a really tight operation; it makes sure that you know when you've put compost on, and gosh, how well those radishes worked. It really helps to have all those records. And I don't know if I would keep as good records if I didn't have to.

JS: This is Deconstructing Dinner, and we've been listening to Victoria, B.C. farmer Robin Tunnicliffe speaking in Sidney, BC in March 2008. I spent the weekend there at the Certified Organic Associations of B.C conference and recorded a number of interviews and workshops with one recording making its way into most of today's broadcast – the title of today's show is "So, You Want to Be a Farmer?" Now the answer for those in Robin's workshop was more of a "well, I think so." Farming is certainly not seen as an easy lifestyle to get into, however the success that has clearly come out of Robin's efforts did appear as a promising sign for those younger and considering future-farmers who attended her workshop. One of the keys to Robin's success has been her marketing efforts. She's the co-owner in a cooperatively-owned business known as Saanich Organics, and she shared some of her experiences as part of her workshop.

RT: Marketing. When I started, I actually got a grant from Lifecycles, have you guys heard about Lifecycles? It was a youth entrepreneurship program, and part of the program was, I had to take a business course. And at the time I thought, oh man, like, I'm going to hate it, I hate everything about business. It turned out that it was really good; doing all the accounting, learning marketing skills, learning all the places in town that support businesses, how business licenses work, how do you set up a business account, those kind

of things, I found really useful, and I wouldn't have had those skills if I hadn't done that. So I highly recommend taking a business course, because a farm is a business after all.

Later on I realized that it wasn't until I decided that I had to make money or I was going to break, that I actually started making money, and all those business skills really started coming in, all the marketing lessons that we learned, setting up the marketing table. Another important thing about marketing is networking with other growers in your community. So find out what they're selling, and how much they're charging, so that you can learn what the market can bear. At the Moss Street market we're very cooperative and we have – it's not a price list, it's a market analysis that we hand out to everyone, and it just gives us a price range of what other people are charging. A lot of farmers tend to go with the low end for their produce, but what we tell people is, you know, aim high because we all have to make a living. I know market prices in Victoria are a little higher than they are elsewhere, but it's a trend that we should really try to maintain.

I might tell you the story of my first day at the market. I had been apprenticed and been to the market, but I hadn't ever been to the Moss Street market on my own. Worked all spring, and I had my first load of produce for the market, and I washed it and I primped it, and I got it all set, and I set up my table as beautifully as I could, and I was so proud. And then I walked around the market, and I looked at everyone else's stands, and they all had the same thing, and it all looked way better than mine, and I thought, "Oh no, I'm not going to sell any of this, and I've harvested it!" So I thought, "hm, okay," and I went back to my stand, and I'm going to smile, I'm not going to cry, and I'm going to stand there for the whole time and I'm going to pack up and I'm going to go home and I'm never coming back again.

[audience laughter]

And so I stood there, and what do you know the bell rang, people started coming and buying and I was sold out in two hours. So it's really amazing what happens at the farmer's market. And I'll encourage you guys all to sell at a farmer's market. I can't even believe how much produce we sell. I used to do the farmer's market on my own, but now I hook up with Heather and Rachel, the other two farmers in our co-operative. We've had four truckloads of produce, just packed to the gills, the kind that you're scared that you're going to drop a bin of rutabaga out on the road and knock out some cyclist. Just totally full and then we sell it all in the four hours. It's amazing how much produce you can move at a market. And I've heard that all over the province, that the farmer's market is the way to go. And they're really fun.

JS: While Robin Tunnicliffe's farming strategy appears to be working well, she did stress to those interested in becoming farmers that her model works because it works for her, and that a cookie-cutter model is not necessarily the best direction. Her words stand in opposition to the conventional agricultural systems which are much more along the lines of a cookie-cutter model. And it's this suggestion among others that Robin will be including in a book that she is currently working on.

RT: We're in the process of writing a book about how to start farming. We had a conversation mid-summer last year, and Heather had just come up from the field, she had just discovered she had mummy-berry in her blueberries, a devastating disease. And then our greenhouse manager came up and told us that we had blight – early blight – in the greenhouse. And Heather and I just had a fight that morning because we were so stressed out about not having enough time, and all these problems just hit us at once and we thought, “Gosh, is it ethical to tell people that it's a good idea to start farming?”

[audience laughter]

Some days things can really hit you and you just think, “Oh my God, what are we doing?” But then that same day you can be sitting there harvesting, and there's a tree-frog on a leaf, and then the kids come up and tell you what a great day they've had. There's all sorts of little things that make you realize, okay, if I'm going to quit farming what the heck else could I do and have such a great life? And so you think, okay well farming's not so good, but I can't think of anything else I'd rather do. Nothing would be as satisfying as this job. So, on one hand, there's a lot of challenges and I don't want to mislead anyone that it's all roses, because it's really not. But on the other hand, it's just such a real life to live, it's so interesting, there's so many things to learn, I just feel like the learning curve's always straight up and I love that.

You may need to make money in the off-season. You know you hope that won't happen and we're getting to the point where we don't need to do that as much, but in the early years we really had to do that. So it's important to think about a skill that you can do that doesn't tax you. Like in the early years I would farm all year and then Andrew and I would landscape all winter. And so then in the spring, you know, it was tough on our body and it was hard to get going in the spring again, because you were physically exhausted. So it's good to think in the early years what you're going to do to finance the farming until the farm pays off. We're getting the farm to the point where it is paying off. Last year on about a little over an acre, Andrew and I grossed sixty-two thousand dollars. We hired one person full-time for the summer and we figured that output is more a function of labour than it is land. So the more efficient that we can get, the more we can get our planting systems down, the more we can do our timing, and figure out which crops will bring in most, what crops are easiest to market.

There's so much learning involved, there's so much fine-tuning, there's so much room for capturing value through the direct-farm marketing and I think that small-scale farming is viable, you just have to be really engaged in it, you have to be really aware of what's going on, and you have to give it time. And I think that a lot of people don't do that, they want to make a living right away and they want to go in it large-scale right then, and maybe that can work for some people but for us we found that keeping it small for a while, doing a lot of experimentation, a lot of fine-tuning, doing work in the off-season, and then slowly building to a more sustainable level. We've made our farm pay for us. That said, there's no cookie-cutter model of how farming can work. I've heard so many diverse stories of how people have made it work. So that's the exciting part for you guys,

is you get to try everything new, and I'd love to hear about how things go for you, because it's very inspiring to hear how farms play out.

JS: And this is Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly-one hour radio program produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman and if you miss any of today's show, it will be archived on our website at [cjly.net/deconstructing dinner](http://cjly.net/deconstructing-dinner) and also located there are the previous eighty-eight shows that have aired since 2006.

Today's episode is titled "So, You Want to Be a Farmer?" and it was inspired by our recent workshop conducted by Robin Tunnicliffe of Victoria's Feisty Field Organic Farm. And that last segment concluded Robin's presentation, but there were a number of interesting questions posed by those in attendance, most of whom were of a younger demographic of future farmers. As mentioned earlier this was a promising sign when one of the greatest threats to the future of Canada's food supply is the aging demographic among farmers. Now as important as Robin's *Starting An Organic Farm* workshop was to help inspire a viable future for small-scale farming in Canada, it does stand as a concern that such support and resources do not seem to be accessible by Canada's federal and provincial governments. We often hear of the billions of dollars injected into the industrial food system through biofuel subsidies or through financial incentives to the construction of factory hog farms in Saskatchewan, as two examples. And so where are the public resources going that encourage small-scale community-focused food production?

RT: I tried to get a loan when I started and it made me realize, oh yeah, you have to have assets before they'll loan you money. I wish that there was some easy solution. There are federal farm programs. I applied for one of them basically just to go through the process, because you hear about them and they sound so great. It's a lot of red tape, and I found that it wasn't flexible enough to help me. There's a grant called the Canadian Agricultural Skills Services, and it was a grant to go back to school for farmers to retrain so you can get out of the agricultural sector.

[audience laughter]

You didn't have to sign anywhere that you weren't going to keep farming so I just thought, well good, I'll go to school in the winter and I'll get money. So I've gotten the money but it's been a vague process to get this money and you have to let them know eight weeks ahead if you want to take any courses and often times you just hear on the listserv a couple weeks ahead, oh yeah there's something going on up island that would be really useful. But by the time you get this big machine rolling to get funding, it's past. And I've just done a survey, actually part of my schooling, so I'm at UVic doing a Master's. So what I'm doing is a study on small farm viability. I did a survey of twenty-five farmers in this region just to talk about their economic survival strategies that they're employing, and what their farm picture is looking like. Two out of twenty-five farmers, and they were all very old established farmers, they had taken advantage of farm grants from the federal level, but everyone else just said no way, it's too uncertain, the process

for applying is too burdensome. So I wish there was a better answer for you but it seems like all that funding is tied up for administration of grants that don't work.

JS: Now the interest that government has more visibly had in affecting small-scale food producers has come in the form of regulations. Regulations that have in some cases limited the very existence of small-scale farms here in British Columbia in particular. This was a controversial topic of discussion at the conference and one we'll hear more on in the coming weeks. But as the industrial food system increasingly gets caught for its seeming lack of adequate safety controls, food recalls have seemingly become an accepted norm. Accompanying such food safety concerns are newly established and proposed regulations to ensure sector-wide standards are met by all producers, large or small. Now with most of these food safety concerns originating on factory-style farms and in factory-production facilities, small-scale producers interacting with their food more intimately do not see the importance of some of these food safety standards. Small-scale producers can easily cite what is often a very clean track record of safety. And this was a topic raised in Robin Tunnicliffe's workshop and she shares her thoughts on this form of government involvement.

RT: I want the right to choose. Sure, inform me that this hasn't been graded, that this hasn't been put through some kind of process, but I want the right to choose. If I want to buy something from a small slaughter house, I should be allowed. If I want to smoke, I can smoke. Why can't I buy meat that hasn't been inspected? That's my right, I'm not stupid, I make my choice, if I die, well big loss.

[audience laughter]

I'm not against labeling. I love putting on the eggs at the market: "Ungraded, dangerous!"

[audience laughter]

But I have had a capital region health inspector come to the farm market, open up the cooler, take out a carton of eggs, take an egg out and take a thermometer and put it right on the surface of the egg, and I had been diligent. I'd put the empty cooler in the freezer overnight, and then it had icepacks in it and the eggs were cool, and it was fine. But it was a big marching-in, gonna get your eggs! And I understand that we have to be diligent. You know, I feel bonded to my customers. I've had the same customers for ten years that are just – I love those people, they're so great! Especially our box customers, I feel really bonded to them. And I think that's part of the direct-farm marketing, I would just feel terrible if anything happened to their children, I couldn't even stand it. So I think that's the place where a lot of people, a lot of small famers are coming from anyway. I understand the food safety need for people, but I hate it. That's my stand.

JS: And in closing out this portion of our episode featuring Robin Tunnicliffe, this last segment from her workshop was in response to a question from a future farmer, as to how the price for product should be determined. As Robin suggests, the price charged to the public is a function of education. She believes that if the media increases its exposure of

the short-falls of the industrial food system and presents the benefits and opportunities of a more locally-focused one, the price paid to farmers will only increase, and the future for farming in Canada will look much brighter.

RT: I think the price you can charge is a function of how educated your population is. I think that our population here is highly educated and the more events in the media about the industrial food system gone wrong, the more people are bonded to us. And I think we're going to see events like that happening more and more. Every time there's a spinach scare, every time there's an avian flu outbreak, people realize, oh my goodness, it's these small-scale farmers that are keeping everything in balance. I want to see small-scale farmers around me, so I'm going to support these guys. That said, you were saying about the US economy. I think it was three years ago, there was a bad tourism year here, I don't know why that happened, but we sell tons to the restaurants and they just weren't buying that year, and it actually affected us. We could see that that sent shockwaves through our bottom line. So, what Kelly was saying; just diversify. Our marketing system's very diverse; we do the farmer's market, we do a CSA, does everyone know what a CSA is? Well we do a home-delivery service, but it's boxes for families at a set price each week, and people sign on for the season. So we have sixty-eight members in our CSA, we do restaurants, we do grocery stores, and then we have people that just stop by at the farm gate. So that's a lot of output for marketing.

But at the same token, I feel very confident that if one of those markets stops for some reason, if the tourists don't come well we've got the locals, so that's a key.

JS: And that was Robin Tunnicliffe speaking in March 2008 in Sidney B.C. Robin hosted a workshop titled *Starting Your Organic Farm*. And that was at the annual Conference of the Certified Organic Associations of BC. She farms at Feisty Field Organic Farm and is a co-owner in Saanich Organics, a co-operative marketing business of three Victoria-area farmers. You can learn about Saanich Organics at saanichorganics.com, and that's spelled s-a-a-n-i-c-h. Or you can link to more information on the Deconstructing Dinner website, at cjly.net/deconstructingdinner.

soundbite

JS: As Canada's population increasingly becomes concentrated within cities, Canada's urban populations have become far more removed from the source of their food than ever before. One symptom of this change in population distribution has been a seeming loss of appreciation for the all-important grower and producer of your food – the farmer. Well, recognition of this didn't sit well with Nelson-area resident Paul Edney who was inspired to inspire farmers. Paul is the director of *We Are What We Do*, a new movement inspiring people to use their everyday actions to change the world. As part of this goal, Paul authored the book *Change the World for Ten Bucks*, which outlines fifty easy things everyone can do to affect positive change. Action thirty-five in the book reads: "Write to someone who inspired you." And Paul was inspired to not only write to a farmer, but organize an event with a local grocery store around Valentine's Day and encourage others to do the same. Paul partnered up with Nelson's Kootenay Country Store Co-

operative and he set up a table in front of the store in front of a full-size pink mailbox that read: "Write to a farmer that inspires you." The store provided a list of local farmers who supply the store year-round. Co-op members and customers were given the opportunity to write a farmer of their choice and deposit it in the custom-designed pink mailbox. And a photo of the mailbox will be posted on the Deconstructing Dinner website and I certainly encourage you to check it out. Now I did drop in on the February 8th event and asked some of those writing to farmers to share their words with Deconstructing Dinner. But before I did that, I spoke with Paul Edney.

JS: We're standing here outside the Kootenay Co-op, standing beside a pink mailbox designed for this event, maybe you could describe what this mailbox is all about.

Paul Edney: So, the mailbox has on the top of it, it says Write to a Farmer Who Inspires You. And basically the idea is to get people to connect to the farmers and the people behind the food that we eat, and obviously the Co-op's a fantastic supporter of local farmers, and it's in relation to a book that I co-wrote called *Change the World for Ten Bucks*. Action number thirty-five in the book is "Write to someone who inspired you," and I got this idea after being at the Future of Food Conference to combine the book's action thirty-five and the Co-op's passion for local produce.

JS: What sparked my interest when speaking with Paul was his mention that it was the Future of Food in the Kootenay's Conference that inspired the idea for the Write to a Farmer event. Frequent listeners of Deconstructing Dinner might recall the many recordings that we've now featured from this November 2007 food security conference, held here in Nelson. Now while we haven't yet aired any segments on what outcomes have followed the Future of Food Conference, Paul clearly represents one example of how local and regional food security conferences can inspire such important actions within a community. I asked Paul to share more on how the conference helped inspire his event.

PE: The conference was absolutely fantastic, I mean it was attended by something like two hundred people, and many of them were farmers, or connected to local produce, and I was just so inspired listening to these people talk and the passion behind what they do, and how difficult it is to farm locally and that you just really have to be committed to the ideal – you know this isn't about making lots of money, it's about being committed to an ideal of creating local produce. I just wanted to think of something that I could do and I knew there had to be a connection between the book and perhaps there was a way in which I could work it, and then it just came to me, to write to someone who inspired you, and how it linked. I spoke to Freya at the Co-op, and they've obviously been supporting for thirty-two years local produce, it's not a new thing for them, but they were totally supportive, and in fact they built the mailbox that's right in front of us.

JS: Again an image of the custom-built mailbox will be posted on the Deconstructing Dinner website at cjly.net/deconstructingdinner and listed under today's show "So, You Want to Be a Farmer?" Now what stood out from this event in particular was the support that the Kootenay Co-op Store put behind the event, a level of support for local farming

that is almost non-existent sight among conventional chain retailers. Adding to the custom pink mailbox created by a staff member of the store, the Kootenay Co-op also offered baskets of food as a draw prize to those who wrote letters to farmers. Paul shared with me his thoughts on the store support and what other messages in his book can be applied to food and farming.

PE: Originally, I had conceived of it as just a kind of one-day event type thing, but the Co-op in their fantastic way, they're doing gift baskets, twenty-five bucks, and they're going to do it for the whole month of February that people can enter the draw to win local produce. And what I'm amazed at, actually, is that here's a basket that I figured oh, well we wouldn't be able to have a basket of local produce until, April or May or something and the amount of produce that's in that basket right now and is local to here – and we're at the beginning of February – is absolutely amazing.

JS: And it was likely grown by some of the farmers that people are writing to.

PE: Absolutely, yeah, it's all local produce.

JS: Is there anything else in your book that you maybe looked since the Future of Food in the Kootenay's Conference decided well maybe I can apply this step within the book to something food or farming related?

PE: Actually, one of the actions in the book is shop locally, and I mean it's not only in terms of the produce that we eat that we should be shopping locally, but also all the other aspects of the consumer behaviour. Whatever we're buying we should really be thinking about "can we purchase this locally?" And you know, even if it costs a little bit more, just recognizing that that money goes right back into the local economy and goes to building a sustainable and vibrant community.

JS: And of course before we wrap up today's broadcast, we do have to take a listen to some of the dozens of letters offered by residents authored by residents of Nelson and area that were sent to local farmers. Many of the farms that had letters addressed to them have been featured here on Deconstructing Dinner, including Soil Matters Farm, Mad Dog Farm, and Meadowbrook Farm among others. Take a listen.

Female voice #1: Hey, I'm Sue, and I've lived in Nelson longer than I haven't and I'm soon to move away, so here's my letter. Dear farmers, I love what you do and I think I want to learn to do what you do because none can us can live without you.

Female voice #2: This is to Soil Matters Farm. Your carrots are crunchy, your cherries are sweet, visiting your farm was such a treat. Your love for your land, your family, your town, you inspire those around you, your passions are profound. Thank you for working and loving your land, you've made the right choice it seems, we're all nourished and filled with gratitude each time we eat your greens.

Female voice #3: Dear Vince MacIntyre, thank you for all the amazing work you do. Your beautiful gigantic carrots have kept me well-fed and happy all winter. I truly believe that local organic farmers and their families carry the weight of the world on their shoulders. Keep on keeping it on, farmers really do feed cities. Love, Heather Kazan, Nelson BC, Co-op employee and carrot advocate.

Male voice #1: Vince, I asked you at the farmer's market last year what you do to grow your parsnips so big. Your answer was love. No wonder they taste so sweet. Keep on lovin.' Thanks, Paul Edney.

Female voice #4: An Irish limerick, for Vince MacIntyre. An Irish farmer called Vince MacIntyre, not one who yearns to retire, harnessed his horses and farmed with Earth's forces, and grew food food purists desire. He grew beets and carrots and onions and cabbage; beautiful specimens that bugs would not ravage. But potatoes are king, said Vince with a grin; eat three more than you can comfortably manage.

Female voice #5: Dear Spicer Farms, I truly can't believe how wonderful your carrots taste. I moved to B.C. from Ontario a year and a half ago, and have never tasted such amazing vegetables. Your hard work and dedication to providing our community with such amazing food doesn't go unnoticed. Thank you for the wonderful food and you make our world a better place. Keep them coming.

Male voice #2: My name's Shamus, I live in Krestova, and this letter is to the people at Canyon City Farms, because I used to live in Creston. Dear friends, thank you so much for all your hard work and loving care. Every time I eat a carrot, I think of Canyon and how lovely it is there with the skimmer horns in the background. Takes me back to when I was living in Canyon picking apples. Thank you again, keep it up. Love, Shamus.

Male voice #3: Hi, I'm Terry Nelson, I'm from Fernie BC, visiting Nelson passing through. Fortunate enough to stop at the Co-op and get some produce. I've wrote to Noel. Noel lives in Glade. Maybe Noël? It says your work, and others of a similar cloth, makes all of our lives better. We, the world, appreciate the efforts of local farmers who work to sustain us. You are to be commended and all others who assist in this essential provision are praised. Hasha Kawa.

JS: And again, those were just some of the many letters that Nelson, British Columbia residents wrote as part of the Write a Letter to a Farmer event hosted by We Are What We Do and the Kootenay Country Store Co-operative. The event was held just before Valentine's Day of this year and photos of the event are posted on the Deconstructing Dinner website. And you can learn more about the Canadian operation of We Are What We Do and Paul Edney's book How To Change the World for Ten Bucks by visiting wearewhatwedo.ca. And with a few minutes left on today's broadcast, I thought I'd read through some of my favourite letters that were submitted in the weeks following the one-day Write To a Farmer event. I didn't get a chance to everyone, so here's a few samplings of the ones that stand out.

This one was addressed to Jeremy and Nette Lack of Mad Dog Farm in Tarrys, BC: “Dear Jeremy and Nette, I so very much appreciate all of your efforts from planning to planting, weeding and watering through to harvest and delivery. Thank you so much, you are superstars who warm my heart and nourish my soul and body. Cindy.”

And this one here was written to Janet Spicer, Judy and Dennis Stanley of Spicer Farms located in the community of Nakusp. “Dear Janet, Judy, and Dennis, my family has been enjoying your fall harvests for years all over the Kootenays. Every year I plant my garden in the hope I will grow carrots as big and beautiful as yours. Thank you, Alice.”

And this letter was addressed to Laura Sachs and Craig Smith of Soil Matters Farm, located in Tarrys: “Dear Soil Matters, thank you so much for supplying spinach locally. I love spinach and will buy local whenever possible, and that means you. Our local producers and farms are so important to us. Thank you, Louise.”

And here’s another letter addressed to Soil Matters Farm: “Craig and Laura, all life can be art, and what greater craft than bringing forth Earth’s bounty. May we continue to be sustained by, and celebrate with you, your natural foods. We thank you, poets of the soil. Freya.”

And this one was addressed to Noël at Glade Mountain Farm, located just across the Kootenay River from Soil Matters Farm: “Dear Noël, thanks for the most yummy sunflower sprouts. Your effort to grow food for us here locally really inspires me. If everyone grew a little food like this, but different things, imagine the local potluck we could have. Thanks again, keep up the good work.”

And here’s one more addressed to Noël: “Dear Noël, roses are red, violets are blue, no one can sprout as good as you do. From Scott.”

Now this one here’s to Meadowbrook Farms, located in Salmo. Dear George and Margot, thanks so much for all your hard work year-round in supplying this part of the Kootenays with fresh sprouts and mixed greens. Lots of love, Paul.”

And this one is to Teepee Land, in Argenta. “Hi Gary, Anne, and Nana. Thanks you all for all you do to keep our community fed with fantastic food.”

And these ones here are to MacIntyre Farm, also located in Argenta. “Dear Vince MacIntyre, we brought in a pile of your root vegetables in the fall, and they’re keeping me through the winter. It’s wonderful to feel the sense of connection between land, farmer, and my tummy. I really believe that farmers like you are doing the most important work of all in this society. I also know that it isn’t made easy for you and only hope that you keep on. We all need you to.”

And here’s another to Vince MacIntyre. “Vince, just wanted to let you know that you are an important part of the hope for humanity and for the earth. Thanks for keeping me fed, my friend, I’ve always admired how you live.”

And here's another to Vince: "Vince, I'm so grateful that food is still being grown here with thought and consciousness. It's a pleasure having your food on our table and knowing I can trust what I'm putting in my children's mouths. You inspire me."

And here's the last one to Vince: "Hi Vince. When I grow up I want to be a farmer, just like you. Love, Collette, age forty-five."

ending theme

JS: 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.

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