

Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY
Nelson, B.C. Canada

April 9, 2009

Title: Organic AGRICULTURE AT GUELPH AXED ... ALMOST/MOUNTAIN VALLEY FARM

Producer/Host: Jon Steinman
Transcript: Pat Yama

University of Guelph Rally

“And I think more than anything, we’re here to remind this university that it’s not about the commercialization of research. It’s not about money for programs that are going to garner the most profit. That they don’t exist. These institutions exist to create employees for industry and for government. But it’s about the pursuit of knowledge. It’s about creating a more just society, not the other way around.”

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 show is heard on radio stations around the world including CFRU at the University of Guelph, Ontario. Those voices you heard were the dissenting opinions of students *at* the University of Guelph. In late March, the University announced that a number of programs *at* the school would be *cut* in response to budgetary challenges – among those cuts – Canada’s *only* organic agriculture degree program. While the number of enrolled students in the program is *small* in comparison to the *entire* agricultural college (the largest in the country), there is of course a rapidly growing interest in *organic* food production and the values and principles it espouses. Understandably, the proposed cancellation *of* the program touched *many* people beyond the organic program itself.

On today’s show we’ll hear from students Erin Carlson and Silvie Fojtik, and we’ll also visit an organic dairy farm located in the Creston Valley of British Columbia. The farm is owned and operated by Wayne and Denise Harris, and their daughter Erin Harris, is currently enrolled *in* the organic agriculture program at the university.

increase music and fade out

In spite of Deconstructing Dinner having now been on the air for over three years, the show continues to be one of the *only* sources of media that is solely focused on critically analyzing the state of our food system.

And what we’ve indeed been *able* to share here on the show are the many shortcomings (and as it *should* be stressed - *significant* shortcomings) of the food system currently serving the majority of North Americans. Unfortunately, the rest of Canadian media seems to only provide the occasional lip service to the subject.

And so here we are today, at a time filled with greater economic and ecological challenges than when this show first began airing, and how we individually *and* collectively choose to *respond* to these concerns, can shed quite a lot of insight into *what* our society values the most.

Over the past year, and in light of what the media spends *most* of its time covering, it's become *quite* clear, that what North Americans value the *most* is not food, but the automobile. The state of the automotive sector is up front and centre and understandably so. Our culture is firmly built upon the *presence* of the automobile and any breakdown in the industry signals a breakdown in our culture and our economy... well, at least as it exists today.

You see what *has not* received much attention is the *possibility* that the very crumbling of the sector *might* very well be a sign, that instead of simply *restructuring* the industry, perhaps more *fundamental* changes of how we live are the necessary response.

As it applies to *food*, those *same* fundamental changes might *also* be necessary. And while no *one* quick fix can be isolated as to *how* we might choose to shape the future of food, as far as the decades-long model of *industrial* agriculture and its supporting food system are concerned, the writing has been on the wall for *so* long that the shortfalls found *within* our agri-food system, now act more like a *stop-sign*. We know the writing's there, but we never quite acknowledge its presence and we simply roll through the intersection.

And while today's topic is *not* one to debate whether or not genetic engineering, chemical pesticides, organic or biodynamic agriculture will provide the answer to the future of food question, what is clear is that the *greatest* security can be found by ensuring that our approaches to these challenges are *diverse* and representative of what the people, in this case the people of Canada are ready to get behind and support. And so it would likely come as a surprise that in spite of *organic* food representing one of the *fastest* growing sectors of the food system, that we would find among Canadian universities only *one* organic agriculture degree program – just one.

Located at the University of Guelph is the *largest* agricultural college in the country, and existing in the shadows of research and studies that feed the industrial food system, are 15 students enrolled in the *Organic* program led by Dr. E. Ann Clark – someone whom we've heard from here on the show before.

And putting aside the industrialization and long-distance transportation of what some call "organic" food, the *foundational* principles of organic are nevertheless identified by so many as an *optimal* response to the health, environmental, social and economic challenges of today. And so, understandably, it came as a shock to many, when in late March 2009, it was learned that the organic program was going to be cut.

Now in spite of the announcement coming at the *beginning* of final exams, *many* students at the University mobilized themselves to *challenge* the proposal. One of those students was Sylvie Fojtik, a third year Water Resources Engineering student.

Sylvie spoke to us over the phone *from* Guelph and she explained why someone studying Water Resources Engineering was so concerned with the possible closure of the organic program.

SILVIE FOJTIK: Well as a student I was never really connected to the Organics major but I lived with ten people in one house last year and many of them were involved in some way or other in farming or taking Ann Clark's courses in organic farming. And there is an annual Organics Conference that happens at the University of Guelph in January and so that really sparked my interest. And I ended up actually doing an apprenticeship for a whole summer on Manitoulin Island with a couple that manages a CSA farm for over 40 members. So those were the first moments of me being really introduced to organic farm production and into permaculture and edible forest gardening. And then, this year I had the opportunity within my third year

Engineering Design project to design a water supply system for a new project that is affiliated with the University of Guelph Organic Agriculture major and it's called the Guelph Centre for Urban Organic Farming. And it's a new project that just started as of Fall 2008. They just filled the land and they're starting to put in the seedlings as we speak and they don't have water directly on site. They don't have access to municipal or to a well. So, as Engineering students it was our, we had the opportunity to give them proposals on rain water harvesting on site. And so that was really where my interests to the garden and my connection to Ann Clark, kind of grew.

JON STEINMAN: Sylvie Fojtik's interest *in* the organic program acts as an ideal example of how the more labour-dependent principles *of* organic farming can not only help build community through cross-collaboration among disciplines, but can also act as a diverse *economic* stimulus to develop *new* trades and *new* jobs instead of relying and bailing out the models of decades past.

To learn of the evolution of events that transpired *at* the University, Silvie recounts how *she* became so *actively* involved in opposing the proposed cuts.

SILVIE FOJTIK: The Thursday before March 30th there was a rally mainly to save Women Studies. And it was a huge rally that took place at the centre of the University campus, gathered numbers of people and we all marched up to 4th floor UC administration to the President's office to demand an explanation about Women's Studies. And as we were standing there I asked – well what are the other programs that are being cut? And it just so happens that they let us know that Organic Agriculture major was also on the chopping board. And so I only found out about, I would say about a week and a half ago that this was even happening. So during the whole process of being involved with Ann Clark on this project we never knew anything about the threats to the major.

So that was on a Thursday and then, over the weekend I found out from an e-mail from Ann Clark. I emailed I asked her – is it true that Organic Agriculture is being cut? I haven't heard anything about it. I can't find any information anywhere about this. And so she confirmed it and sent me an e-mail she received from the University of Guelph Faculty Association, UGFA from the President saying that there's this meeting happening on Monday, March 30th by a subcommittee called BUGS which stands for Board of Undergraduates Studies. And they were having a meeting to make the final decision on a number of different majors within the University of Guelph.

So I frantically started calling up people that I knew. I was running around my neighbourhood visiting houses of people that I know that have been involved in the Women's Studies rally and just getting a sense – is there anything happening the Monday morning of this meeting. And so we kind of half-assed organized a rally, a callout for people to come out that morning. So really essentially, none of us had enough time to prepare for this rally that happened on March 30th and we all kind of came together - people that were worried about Women's Studies and people that were worried about Organic major. Erin Carlson, Erin Harris were two organic club members that were speaking on behalf of the Organics major and that precipitated all the other events that happened after that where at the meeting in particular, most people became really frustrated and just didn't know what to do anymore.

So this precipitated in me trying to do more research on what happens to this decision. Is it a final decision by BUGS and that was the real concern by most student and faculty because BUGS, as a subcommittee of the Senate was given the privilege to have final authority on the deletion and increasing of certain majors. And so I started talking to a number of faculty and many of them were really concerned and really frustrated with the process that happened at BUGS. And were

really concerned but many of them were intimidated by Alastair Summerlee, by Maureen Mancuso who's the Provost of the University and really, the couple that's been really spearheading these eliminations. And many of them were intimidated to stand up and state well the Senate should really be making this decision. So this then allowed for further discussion and we found out that Senate was meeting this Tuesday, last night April 7th and that BUGS was just bringing the set of motions as a point of information and not for recommendation to Senate.

JON STEINMAN: This is Deconstructing Dinner.

When Silvie Fojtik and other students began expressing *their* concerns over the possible cutting of the organic program among others on the chopping block, University president Alastair Summerlee issued a video statement on April 3rd through the University's internet presence.

Here's Alastair Summerlee requesting civility throughout the process.

Audio of Video

ALASTAIR SUMMERLEE: Hello. This video message is part of my commitment to make regular updates to members of the university community, because we are facing such significant financial challenges. The complexity and size of those challenges are unprecedented. And we will be taking the necessary steps to make sure we are on the path to recovery. It will involve some very tough decisions, some smart measures, and some creative solutions to some of the problems that we face. And that will mean significant change for the institution and of course, change is always difficult.

I have long believed that university should be the moral and social conscience of society and that means we need to engage in open debate. Open debate though means that we need to remain civil at all times as we openly discuss the many issues that we all face as we have to make some decisions about which programs and activities we are no longer going to support and which ones we will focus greater financial resources onto.

I hope that the University of Guelph will continue to maintain that openness and civility in all the discussions that we will be upcoming in the next few weeks. This is a time for change. It's a time where there will be a great deal of angst and concern but I hope it's a time where we will emerge as a stronger institution.

Guelph Rally

"Cut the bullshit, not the budget. (audience chanting) Yeah." (applause)

STUDENT: And I think more than anything, we're here to remind this university that it's not about the commercialization of research. It's not about funding programs that are going to garner the most profit. That they don't exist – these institutions don't just exist to create employees for industry and for government. But it's about a pursuit of knowledge. It's about creating a more just society, not the other way around (cheering and clapping).

Education is a right. We will not give up the fight! (audience chanting)
Education is under attack. What do you? Stand up, fight back.

STUDENT: Senators are coming through here today to make a decision about our education, about the educational quality here at the University of Guelph, about what is available to us. What do we want to tell them? Stop the cuts! Stop the cuts (chanting). Stop the bullshit (chanting).

ERIN CARLSON: I grew up in Summerland, B.C. and my family grows cherries there. We don't grow organic cherries but we do grow, I guess we call them responsible cherries. Last summer I decided that the local food movement and the organic food movement, the young farmer movement all needed to be addressed and so, I grew about an acre and a half of market garden vegetable and I took it all to market. And that sort of was my hands-on component so far to farming and organic farming. And then I came to Guelph, for agriculture and decided organic production was exactly what I needed to be doing.

JON STEINMAN: That's Erin Carlson – a 21 year old student finishing up her second year of organic agriculture studies.

Erin is a great example of the importance of maintaining *diverse* options at universities as it wasn't organic agriculture *itself* that brought her to the University of Guelph – but agriculture as a whole. As she mentioned, it was only *after* arriving at the school, and indentifying her *options*, that she chose to pursue an agricultural future based upon *organic* principles.

Erin is one of only fifteen students enrolled *in* the major, and while this year's enrollment had increased substantially from the *previous* year, the low numbers are a telling sign of so many concerns facing our food system today. For one, while the University places a *large* emphasis on promoting their *conventional* agricultural programs and research, there has been *little to no* money earmarked for promoting the Organic program.

Erin Carlson comments on the low enrollment in both the Organic program *and* the Ontario Agricultural College.

ERIN CARLSON: Well my first thought is this. People don't know it exists because it's not very well advertised and so that's, you know, a downfall and we need to be promoting that better. Agriculture enrollment in the entire OAC is down in the last few years and we're guessing it has something to do with the fact that people don't farm as much as they use to. Two percent of Canada's population are actually farmers and so you're drawing out of a very small bank of people that actually have a background in these farm kids that normally would come to Guelph to study agriculture so they can go back to the farm are becoming fewer and fewer. And so I guess the next step is to go find students who don't otherwise have a connection to the farms, that to maybe study agriculture and hopefully bring them over to Guelph to study organic agriculture.

JON STEINMAN: Erin Carlson was *also* present during the April 7th rally, which we heard segments from just earlier, and she recounts how the evening unfolded.

ERIN CARLSON: So we rallied and then we all went into one of the largest lectures rooms in Guelph and made noise in the lobby trying to be supportive, you know, let's make the Senators not feel like we're being abusive to them. Then we went into the meeting and there was a visitor's section and so we were handed cards and you get a purple card if you agree with what's being said at Senate. You get a white card if you disagree and we sat through about two and a half hours of other Senate business before they started talking about the majors that were on the table. And so then discussion on the floor and discussion, lots of discussion on the floor I guess and then they opened the floor to visitors as well and more speeches.

JON STEINMAN: Erin was one of the students who spoke during the Senate meeting, and because we *don't* have audio *from* the meeting itself, Erin Carlson recited her speech over the phone for Deconstructing Dinner listeners.

ERIN CARLSON: Good evening. My name is Erin Carlson. Two years ago, I came to Guelph from my home in B.C. to study organic agriculture. I'm speaking to you today on behalf of all the students enrolled in Organic major. My decision to come to Guelph was based upon this assumption that I would be getting the best agriculture degree available in Canada. I also liked the idea of specializing in organic production. This University offers the only organic major in Canada. Hence it has attracted students from across the country. Students from other countries can take specializations in organics. Examples include Falkenhagen in Holland and Washington State University. Why shouldn't this be possible in Canada?

Having an Organic major in Guelph is a huge asset to the University and to be promoted aggressively to incoming students. Recent news from the OAC has highlighted a new program dedicated to promoting agriculture and agri-business career opportunities to high school students. Eliminating the Organic major before it is given time to establish itself should be reconsidered if the intent is to attract bright, progressive students to agriculture at Guelph. If you terminate the Organic Agriculture major, our education will be less than what was originally promised because the sequence and timing of three of the six required organic courses for this degree are being modified so that can be completed in an abbreviated timeframe. It's a real shame.

Some students came specifically for this program while others took the introductory Organic course as an elective and gained so much from it that they will go on to graduate with an Organic degree. Others still are taking the offered courses to supplement their other field of interest. Imagine our surprise when the courses we needed weren't posted on WebAdvisor at the beginning of course selection last month. The fact remains that many people's energy, money, and time went into the creation of this majors and the outcome is a viable framework of courses. By abandoning the major these courses will be lost and students nationwide who are looking to get a degree in Organic Agriculture will have nowhere to go. By specializing in Organics, I plan to be able to build a career based upon sharing my knowledge with local and hopefully international farmers.

I believe my goal is realistic because now, more than ever, Organic Agriculture is gaining interest and organic food is in demand by the general public. As both the environment and economy are facing difficult times, we need to be looking to things like organic agriculture as part of the solution. If organic food production continues to gain popularity, should Guelph as Canada's top agricultural schools not be in the lead in terms of educating and promoting this rapidly growing sector? A specialized Organic degree will put me and my peers in a position to bring about change in food production and sustainability.

In closing, why waste all the effort that has gone into the creation of this program. This program has potential. This program is relevant and this program is growing. The Organic Agriculture specialization represents much of what our world needs right now. Thank you for your time.

JON STEINMAN: Erin Carlson. Erin is a student at the University of Guelph enrolled in the Organic Agriculture program. On today's broadcast we're hearing from two students who *opposed* the proposal to cut the organic program from the Agricultural College. The organic program is the *only* degree of its kind in Canada.

Earlier on the show we heard from another student – Silvie Fojtik, and she too spoke during the Senate meeting when the proposed cuts were voted on.

Here's Silvie Fojtik reciting *her* speech.

SILVIE FOJTIK: As of Fall 2008, a new organic educational centre was opened in Arboretum. The Guelph Centre for Urban Organic Farming is a place for learning and research about local organic food production. This centre is threatened out of the proposed removal of the Organic Agriculture major. The Canadian Organic Growers, the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario and FarmStart are just a few organizations that are now taking part in this initiative.

You may be asking what is my connection to this project? This year, well over twenty engineering students, including myself dedicated their semester to designing a water supply system for the centre. Students that would otherwise not be exposed to organic farming were given the opportunity to converge disciplines. Landscape architecture students have also participated in this centre. The Organic Agriculture major is the backbone to this project. It is the foundation for the existence for the Guelph Centre for urban organic farming. And if the University hampers this program, it will impede on a truly innovative project that has and will attract so many.

There are also other initiatives around organic food production at the University. At Alfred College, an affiliate of the University, over a million dollars have been allocated to the new Centre for Organic Dairy Research. In April 2006, the Acting Director of the College stated, "Consumer demand for organically produced food including organic milk is growing by 15 to 20% a year in Canada but the Canadian supply is unable to meet the demand, so about 85% of the organics being sold here is currently imported." The University of Guelph has already invested in supporting a growing demand for skills in organic food production. By removing the Organics major all the time and money that has been invested into organic agriculture at Guelph will be forfeited.

The President of the Inaugurating Ceremony of the Guelph Centre for Organic Farming this past Fall with Mayor Karen Farbridge, the new Dean of the Ontario Agricultural College, Robert Gordon and among them, Alastair Summerlee, our President. Here is what he had to say about organic farming. (And, during this moment is when everyone in the Senate room just started laughing at Alastair and it took a minute to calm everyone down and we continued). "It's all about preparing younger generations for a different kind of future. This innovative centre will provide practical, experiential learning opportunities for our students which in the long run will help bring about changes and improvements to our food system." How can the President of this institution express support for organic farming at the University while at the same time allow the closure of the major? Initiatives such as the Guelph Centre for Urban Organic Farming and the Centre for Organic Dairy Research provide the public attention that with enough time, will attract students and funding to this major. The Organic Agriculture major provides students and professors with the vehicle to drive forward the very words President Summerlee so eloquently put.

As a student that has had the privilege to partake in the benefits of this program I strongly support the motion put forward by Andrea Specker?

JON STEINMAN: Silvie Fojtik reciting the speech that she delivered on April 7th to the Senators of the University of Guelph.

Also speaking in defense of the program was Associate Professor Dr. E. Ann Clark who we won't hear from today but whom we'll likely hear more from in the next few months following her *upcoming* visit to B.C.

Shortly *after* the speeches the Senate voted *against* the proposal to cut the program by a vote of 69-60.

According to Silvie Fojtik, President Alastair Summerlee did *not* appear very pleased with the outcome as he had been encouraging the cutting of the program.

SILVIE FOJTIK: One of the very interesting things that also was really surprising to me, President Alastair Summerlee chaired this meeting and he is, although he doesn't vote, he has the final say on everything. And so he really is able to manipulate the way the meeting is set up. And it was hilarious to see him completely up in arms and completely disrobed at the moment when he asked the Senators to raise their blue card in approval of the motion. It was a majority vote – immediately, everyone saw it and he didn't believe it. And he kind of went back and talked to one of his other members. It was like, okay, you could tell that he was whispering and completely up in arms and not knowing what to do at that moment. So then, he went again and recounted the vote and then went back again and whispered with his other teammates and just couldn't believe it. In all the previous motions, whenever there was a majority vote, visually he would just pass the motion and wouldn't go around counting over and over again. I think it came to a huge surprise to him that the Senators would actually vote in favour of something that essentially overturned a subcommittee's decision and his own recommendations.

JON STEINMAN: Now there were a number of *other* key figures who had also supported the cutting of the program including the Dean of the Agricultural College and plant biotechnology, Professor Peter Pauls. Here again is organic agriculture student Erin Carlson sharing *her* thoughts on the proposed cancellation of the program.

ERIN CARLSON: The Dean of the OAC, Robert Gordon was very much for cutting the organic program as well as Peter Pauls. They both feel that because of the low enrollment - last year this time there were five students enrolled. And this year there are now fifteen enrolled in the organic major, which means they've increased 400% or something like that over the last year. And so that was one of their biggest things. I guess their other biggest point to make was that Ann Clark will be retiring in two years from now and replacing her is going to be difficult. But we told them that we would work on getting funds and finding students and finding a new professor, so hopefully the next year we can do some of those things and they won't actually axe the program. They've given us another year to figure it out.

JON STEINMAN: The one year extension that was granted *to* the program requires the Ontario Agricultural College to spend the next twelve months looking at how to attract additional students to the major. The College was also asked to seek *new* commitments for industry funding and teaching support.

soundbite

You're tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner produced in Nelson, British Columbia at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY. I'm Jon Steinman. If you've missed any of today's broadcast it will be archived on-line at deconstructingdinner.ca and posted under the April 9th 2009 episode.

On today's broadcast we're examining the recent controversy surrounding the proposed cancellation of Canada's *only* organic agriculture degree program offered at the University of Guelph.

And so while the organic program now sits in *limbo* for the year-long extension it was granted, there are some rather critical and overarching questions that can be asked.

As student Silvie Fojtik highlighted in her speech, the demand for organic food has *skyrocketed* to the point that in the case of organic dairy as she outlined, demand is far outstripping supply. In light of the proposed cutting of the program being in response to “budgetary” concerns, it seems quite questionable as to *why* would it make *any* economic sense to cut a program that is clearly representative of one of the most promising futures within the food system.

Now while some people have already drawn conclusions suggestive that a conspiracy is afoot – and while such a proposition could very well be the case, there appears to be a much more *tangible* and likely scenario that *might* explain the *inability* for the University of Guelph led by its President Alastair Summerlee to recognize the economic, social and environmental opportunities that can be found from an organic agriculture program.

This more likely scenario that I speak of appears to be one of perspectives.

While *organic* principles of food production present themselves as a more *holistic* approach to producing food, perhaps this *alternative* approach to how most food is grown and produced is *also* representative of how some *individuals* might fail to more holistically observe the current *state* of the dominant conventional food system, the shortcomings of this system, and the many opportunities available to either fix or replace it.

When one observes the current agricultural research and programs being offered and supported *at* the University – any *limited* perspectives become more understandable. The University of Guelph’s food and agricultural programs are founded upon the models of industrial production and the genetic manipulation of life forms. And as we’ve highlighted here on the show before, this model for the food system generates *huge* profits - just not for farmers. Instead, those profits end up in the hands of the handful of corporations involved in the food system and into the hands of the many pharmaceutical companies who profit from poor animal and human health and into the major oil companies producing all the fuel to keep that system going.

And so what about Universities, where do they fall into the equation? Well being the largest agricultural college in Canada, the University of Guelph is heavily supported by the very *same* corporations raking in all those profits. You name the company, and there’s almost no question that they have offices and research facilities *in* Guelph, and close connections with the University. Also on the campus are research facilities for both the Provincial and Federal Departments of Agriculture and Food who are both heavy supporters of the industrial model. So it’s clear, that the University *might*, very well be living in the same bubble that has long failed to rectify the income farmers *could* be receiving. In other words, if success is only measured in dollars and budgets, the University of Guelph might very well think that the food system is functioning remarkably. And why wouldn’t they? They not only *feed* the companies profiting most heavily from the food system, they too by extension, become a huge recipient of that final food dollar and taxes expended by every Canadian.

Now while some might say... well, that can only be speculation – this speculation that the University is living in a bubble, well take a listen to this *telling* chronology of events.

On April 3rd, (and as we heard earlier) President Alastair Summerlee announced that some programs would be cut and that they would be forced to choose “which ones to focus greater financial resources onto.”

So the question becomes... where *will* those financial resources be allocated?

And to find the answer, anyone viewing the on-line video announcement from the President did not need go any further than a news release which the University published on the very same day, April 7th, when Senators were deliberating the future of the organic program.

The title of the release was this “MaRS Landing Mission Continues.” Now one might think that our Universities think landing on Mars is more important than alternative models of food production but MaRS Landing is actually one long acronym that stands for Medical and Related Sciences Links to Agricultural Network for Development and Innovation with Guelph. And the release reads this.

“Launched in 2002, MaRS Landing was created to connect Guelph to Toronto’s MaRS Discovery District – Ontario’s biotechnology centre.”

And it continues...

“U of G will now work directly with the MaRS Discovery District to link agri-food innovations with medical sciences and health advances. Guelph's agri-food cluster will continue to forge connections and to turn scientific discoveries into new innovative foods and other health and environmental products. So will the Agri-Technology Commercialization Centre, which opened in 2008 in the University’s Research Park to commercialize new agricultural products. We want to let people know that when it comes to the life sciences, Guelph is the place to invest in. Along with the City of Guelph, U of G and local biotech companies have launched a new marketing slogan – "Grow Guelph" – and are developing marketing strategies to strengthen brand recognition for life sciences and agri-food opportunities in Guelph and Wellington County. U of G also continues to explore connections through its formal research agreement with Ontario’s Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Through this partnership, the University delivers vital research, agri-food and *veterinary* education, and laboratory services programs.”

Again, this was the news release published on the very same day that the future of the organic program was being deliberated by the University’s Senators. As for President Summerlee’s suggestion that some programs would need to be cut and others would receive more attention, it’s quite clear by that release, *which models* of food production are receiving that increased attention. Clearly, ‘organic’ models are not one of them.

soundbite

Now this analysis of the situation does not end there and we can focus some *more* attention on the individuals who were the key decision makers in the process of choosing to *not* support the future of organic agriculture at the University.

Again, the University seems to be keen to place *more* emphasis on this MaRS Landing project, which clearly supports the life sciences paradigm of resource intensive industrial food production. But there are some more connections to be found between the MaRS Landing project and University president Alastair Summerlee’s *obvious* interest to quash the University’s interest in organic agriculture.

And again, I should stress that this analysis is in no way intended to suggest any conspiracy theories, but is merely examining which philosophies, individuals and economic interests are influencing the University's and its President's "windows of perception."

And so who is Alastair Summerlee? What are his personal and academic interests? Well, he joined the University of Guelph faculty in 1988 as a professor in the Department of... Biomedical Sciences. In 1992, he was named an Associate Dean of... the Ontario Veterinary College and is a member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. And when the MaRS Landing project is brought into the picture, again, the convergence of interests and philosophies is quite clear. Again, MaRS Landing was launched in 2002 to provide "a connection between agriculture and food, ...*veterinary*... and rural-related discoveries with *medical, scientific* and health advances in Ontario."

And who *else* does Alastair Summerlee spend time with and who is it at the helm of the University of Guelph. Well, let's look at the Board of Governors made up of people who of course maintain close relationships with the President and a heavy influence on the direction of the school.

Sitting on the board are people like Brian Barrington – the President of Barrington & Associates, an investment banking firm that, among other sectors, specializes in food and beverage. They maintain close relations with General Mills, Nestlé and Kraft Foods.

Also on the board is Kevin Golding, President of Rothsay a division of Maple Leaf Foods Inc. – the company most recently known for its responsibility for the largest recall of food in Canadian history. Maple Leaf is a pillar of industrial food production.

Also on the board is Karen Kuwahara, President of Nestlé Purina. Karen also sits on the Board of Governors of Food and Consumer Products of Canada (FCPC) - the most notable trade association representing the food industry. Members of FCPC include *all* major conventional food corporations along with many agricultural ones like Dow Agrosiences, Monsanto, Bayer, ConAgra Foods and Cargill.

Certainly a Board of Governors in support of the status quo.

But perhaps of greatest interest when trying to figure out just *why* the University of Guelph and its President would fail to see the future economic potential and *role* of organic agriculture is the presence of University Board member, Lyle Vanclief. Vanclief was Canada's Minister of Agriculture between 1997-2003 and is likely *most* well-known for developing the Agricultural Policy Framework, the APF, which he introduced shortly *before* he left his Ministerial position. The APF became a foundational set of visions/goals and is representative of *current* agricultural policies in Canada since it was introduced in 2003. The five-year \$9.5 billion dollar bilateral agreement between federal and provincial governments was labelled as a way to "make Canada a world leader in food safety, innovation and environmentally responsible agricultural production." And while the *wording* may sound good to those who support more organic and ecological principles, the concepts were nevertheless rooted in the same models of production that had already proven to not work very well at all.

There's a link on the Deconstructing Dinner website to *one* document that outlines how the APF was to *encourage* an increased focus on the genetic engineering of lifeforms, the corporate ownership of life, and by extension, our food.

Indeed Lyle Vanclief is an *avid* supporter of this experimental food and pharmaceutical application of biotechnology. So much so, that appearing in the December 14th 2000 issue of Canada's largest agricultural publication - The Western Producer, was an article titled "Vanclief touts biotechnology." The article starts like this, "Federal agriculture minister Lyle Vanclief says the biotechnology revolution *could* be the agricultural breakthrough of the 21st Century." The article was referring to his talk at a biotechnology conference in Ottawa.

According *to* the Producer, Vanclief told delegates that farmers in the future will produce as much *medicine* and industrial products as they do food. The article continues, "Since last summer, the minister had been preaching the gospel of biotechnology as an answer to farmers' prayers and a new lifeline for the agricultural sector. He said the government's decision to invest \$2.4 billion in the *Canada Foundation for Innovation* and \$900 million to fund 2,000 university research chairs will help encourage the biotech industry to grow in Canada and so will a system of generous tax breaks to companies investing in the new technology."

And so it should come as no surprise, that the University's MaRS Landing project – one that espouses genetic engineering and the corporate control of lifeforms, was, according to the bottom of every page of the project's website – funded by "Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs under the Agricultural Policy Framework – Lyle Vanclief's ministerial legacy.

soundbite

And if this convergence of biotechnology interests is not *quite* captured by this example, there was *one other* press release in addition to the MaRS Landing one published on April 7th and again, the same day the future of the Organic Agriculture program was being deliberated by the Senate and it *too* relates to those comments made back in 2000 by Vanclief. The release was titled "Canada Foundation for Innovation invests in University of Guelph Research."

Some of the 1.1 million received has already been earmarked for "novel equipment at U of G's Bioproducts and Development Centre." The centre is focused on converting agricultural crops into everything from car parts and furniture to fuel. Of course genetic engineering is a part of that research.

soundbite

JON STEINMAN: This is Deconstructing Dinner where we're analyzing recent developments at the University of Guelph in light of the University's proposal to *cancel* the Organic Agriculture program, the only degree program of it's kind in Canada. Likely because of the vocal opposition from students to the proposed cuts, the University Senate voted 69-60 to hang on to the organic program for at least one more year so long as the program restructures and expands.

Because the University's President Alastair Summerlee was a vocal supporter *of cutting* the program, and in light of the *clear* economic opportunities that the organic sector is now providing alongside the *ecological* principles it espouses, we're currently examining *some* of the University's key decision-makers and seeking to deduce just *why* these opportunities have clearly not been identified.

As mentioned, current University Board member Lyle Vanclief had introduced Canada's Agricultural Policy Framework shortly before leaving his position as Canada's Minister of Agriculture. And clearly, the University has benefited heavily *from* this framework and its

associated funding. And so, how *has* the framework fared since it was introduced, and by extension, is the University of Guelph's financial support *from* this framework relying on a sound and measureable set of policies.

Well, one needn't look much further than a report released on May 31st 2006 titled, "Assessing Progress – Agricultural Policy Framework Review, Overview and Conclusions." The report was published by the Agricultural Policy Framework Review Panel and within the panel's conclusion was this, "The panel had difficulty in quantifying the accomplishments of the APF. *Insufficient* benchmarks and supporting information is available to *adequately* measure the success of APF pillars and programs."

Also critical of the APF even *before* the framework was introduced was the National Farmers Union. In April 2002, the NFU sent a letter to Vanclief warning that the APF would *not* address the concerns facing farming in Canada. A link *to* that letter is on the Deconstructing Dinner website at deconstructingdinner.ca and posted under today's April 9th 2009 episode.

And to close out this analysis of just *some* of the government, corporate and academic connections lending insight into the direction that the University of Guelph seems to *prefer* to want to take, we'll end at the Senate committee who put the very idea before the Senate on April 7th to *cut* the Organic Agriculture program at the University. Known as the Board of Undergraduate Studies or "BUGS," the committee is made up of faculty, students, and university staff.

And of those sitting on the committee, of greatest interest is the committee *Chair* – Neil MacLusky. And if the convergence of interests *already* outlined has not already been adequately suggestive of the University's agricultural and food agenda, the *academic* similarities between MacLusky and President Summerlee are quite telling.

Both MacLusky and Summerlee are faculty members of the Ontario Veterinary College, and both, in the Department of Biomedical Sciences.

soundbite

This is Deconstructing Dinner, to bring us to the end of today's broadcast, we can leave Ontario and arrive at Mountain Valley Farm in the Creston Valley of British Columbia. And the *connection between* Guelph's organic program and Mountain Valley Farm is nothing short of perfect, because *one* of the 15 students currently enrolled *in* the program, is Erin Harris. Erin's family owns and operates Mountain Valley Farm and Erin might very well choose to return to the farm with a degree in hand – a promising sign in an industry threatened by an aging farming population.

Now we'll be learning much more about the farm on *next* week's show, and what is perhaps the *strongest* message that we'll learn next week and will be introduced right now, is that organic farming *is* indeed alive and well and *proving* itself not only as a *successful* model through which a small farm can be viable, but is proving just as was said earlier on the show, that demand, is far exceeding supply. Just last year, Mountain Valley Farm launched the Kootenay Alpine Cheese Co. – a strategic venture designed to keep *more* of their milk within the local food system. As we'll *learn* next week, due to political, bureaucratic and economic reasons, Mountain Valley Farm sends *most* of their milk everywhere *but* the local area. In some cases, their milk travels 1,067 kilometres or 663 miles where it's pooled with other and most often *non-organic* milk. But the unexpected and tremendous success to date of their newly released organic cheese which

they're currently sold out of has suggested *to* the Harris family that the prospects of processing *all* of their milk as both cheese and *fluid* is a more realistic vision than previously thought.

The success of Kootenay Alpine Cheese was even introduced at the annual policy conference of the Dairy Farmers of Canada, when back in February, I was invited to speak on some of the changing perceptions of food and farming by Canada's urban populations. We'll hear some recordings *from* that talk on next week's broadcast. But what acted as the introduction to my talk was identifying the declining trust that eaters have towards the industrial food system. In the case of *dairy* production, urban eaters are learning how the large-scale and industrial models of milk production carry with them animal health and welfare concerns and can leave many farmers with pretty *high* veterinary bills. From an *economic* perspective, the industrial model therefore seems *great* for the corporations supplying the industry with pharmaceuticals and off-farm inputs such as the animals' grain-heavy diets - said to be a primary cause of poor animal health. And so again, we can start to see just *why* the University of Guelph sees such potential in industrial agriculture. Because people like President Alastair Summerlee and Ontario Veterinary College of which he's a part, would need much *less* funding for their research if there were more small-scale organic farms like that of the Harris Family.

Similar to our feature on Jerseyland Organics two years ago, another B.C. dairy, *smaller* farms raising their animals organically on pasture tend to require *less* of a need for care from a veterinarian and their supporting pharmaceutical companies. The same animal bill of health goes for the *Harris* family's farm.

To help introduce *next* week's show, let's take a walk through Mountain Valley Farm – and introduce ourselves to the operation.

Here's farmer Wayne Harris.

WAYNE HARRIS: This is basically just winter housing for all the cows. The lactating herd is on this side. These cows here are cows that are going to calve within the next three weeks now. They get moved up into this area and they are on a little different ration.

JON STEINMAN: So what's your herd size.

WAYNE HARRIS: We're generally milking about eighty cows. And then we'll have another, oh we've got a lot of Heifers right now. The total herd will be about 160 heads, something like that. So they can move in and out of their stalls as they like. It's certainly up to them, that way. We're, as far as the bed, we're unfortunately in the winter here, they're on concrete most of the time. We're on really heavy clay land and if we let them out when it's wet or that ground is, they absolutely tear it apart and destroy the grass out there. But they'll spend probably five months for a winter steady in here and then probably six or six and a half they're strictly on grass and then there's a bit of a transition at both ends of the season.

JON STEINMAN: Last time I interviewed a dairy farmer who's also raising his animals organically and this is Jerseyland Organics, they were saying how the health of their animals is great. Like they hardly ever have to get veterinarians in, their vet bill's pretty low. What's the health of your animals here?

WAYNE HARRIS: Yeah well that's... that Heifer over there had a C-section the other day. That was the first time we had the vet here in about a year and a half.

JON STEINMAN: Wow.

WAYNE HARRIS: So, typically they're pretty healthy. And a lot of it is... like we're really keen on nutrition in terms of the rations and the cows probably aren't pushed as hard - like we probably don't get as much milk per cow as a lot of conventional herds would. But it's a friendlier ration for the cow.

And this is our cow dog.

JON STEINMAN: Okay.

Think you can get it out now? But things that conventional wisdom would say won't work, in fact work quite well. And there's a norm for the industry and I don't know what percentage of the conventional industry would dry-cow treat but I'm thinking 90%. When you dry a cow off every quarter gets infused with some antibiotic. And the idea is that it is suppose to prevent mastitis.

JON STEINMAN: Right.

WAYNE HARRIS: Or help kind of drain anything that's there. Well, and as I say we use to be conventional farming, we dry-cowed. When we quit, our somatic cell count, which really monitors the udder health of the cow just kind of stayed the same and then it started to drop. And so now it's the slowest we've ever had and we haven't dry-cow treated here in I'd say it's seven or eight years. And if you listen to the industry law well, we should be out of the business by now or certainly if you listen to the pharmaceutical guys, because you just can't do that.

They built it as a dairy in 1973, I think. And we're been here for about 15 years now. We're originally from Creston and my grandparents dairied here and that's what's kind of gotten me interested in dairying. But we came back and started here 15 years ago. And my dad and step-mother had been for about eight years prior to that, something like that.

So, this is the milk house in here. And there is the milking parlour. So this is fairly normal in the industry now is free stalls. So the cows have these stalls and come and go as they like.

JON STEINMAN: So access to the pasture out behind there.

WAYNE HARRIS: Well in the winter here they are not actually going into pasture. They're going into an outside area.

JON STEINMAN: Okay.

WAYNE HARRIS: In the summer, of course they just mill basically back onto grass right away.

JON STEINMAN: Yes and in terms of size. How does this compare to dairies that you've been around.

WAYNE HARRIS: Well we're getting to be on the smaller size in the dairy business, that's for sure.

JON STEINMAN: Getting to be as in the rest of the industry is getting bigger?

WAYNE HARRIS: Much bigger. So, 15 years ago we were probably, we would have been above average in terms of size. Well it just really hasn't been where we're going in terms of growing the size of the herd but I think in the last 15 years it's probably half the number of dairy farms there is in B.C. now and basically the same cow numbers. Like we're producing the same amount of milk but the farms are just concentrated that much more.

JON STEINMAN: Okay.

WAYNE HARRIS: So this is area right here is just kind of we call it the "spa" and it's for cows. There's four in here right now. Two of them are kind of geriatric grandmothers that'll probably be in there forever now. They're just really old cows and they have a bit of a hard time in the stalls so in the winter they get this. In the summer when everybody's on pasture, of course in the pasture they've got lots of room to move and stuff and it's not an issue. And then this 809 that's looking at you there, she actually had a C-section but she's doing pretty well actually.

JON STEINMAN: And so their food over the winter, how much of this is being grown on your farm?

WAYNE HARRIS: We've bought some hay this year. Generally they're all our own feed – grain and forage. This year because of the drought, we've purchased some mostly standing crop from a neighbour that had some certified land. So that's where we picked up the rest but you know I guess our ideas – we would like our farm to be on a 100-mile diet is too far, we'd like our farm to be on a two or three mile diet versus hauling grain from Alberta or some place like that.

JON STEINMAN: Right. If not from your own farm at least from your neighbours.

WAYNE HARRIS: That's right. Yeah we want to keep it as close as we can and we do have some mineral ingredients that comes from a long ways and we feed things like kelp. But in the whole scheme of things it's a very small percentage of the diet. And the calves are group-fed versus fed individually. And basically they're fed ad lib so they have as much milk as they want.

JON STEINMAN: And what the calves are fed here is that normal in the industry or are there other practices used?

WAYNE HARRIS: No, normally they're fed more of a controlled diet and they're fed individually too, like they'll be housed individually. I don't think there are that many group housing situations around. But this is much more social for the animal and they actually do much better.

JON STEINMAN: Yeah, they seem pretty content.

WAYNE HARRIS: Yeah.

FEMALE: What kind are these.

WAYNE HARRIS: It's a Holstein Swedish Red cross.

JON STEINMAN: Are you quite familiar with the history of dairy farming in Creston because I understand it was at one point a huge part of the farming here, is dairying. Is that still the case?

WAYNE HARRIS: I'm not sure when in my grandparents day how many farms would have been here but it would have been – well since we've been farming here, there use to be 15 farms and

we're down to seven now. So that gives you some idea. And there use to be a lot of dairying over in the Nelson area that Slokan Valley there. You can still see a lot of dairy farms in that area.

JON STEINMAN: This is Deconstructing Dinner and that was Dairy Farmer Wayne Harris of Mountain Valley Farm located in the Creston Valley of British Columbia. That segment is only a sample of a more in-depth look into their dairy operation, the politics and challenges found within the sector and we'll embark on a short tour of their *newly*-constructed cheese-making facility. That and more, next week.

ending theme

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.

Deconstructing Dinner is provided free of charge to campus/community radio stations across the country, and relies on the financial support from you the listener.

Support for the program can be donated through our website at deconstructingdinner.ca or by dialing 250-352-9600.