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

March 11, 2010

Conscientious Cooks VII – Sooke Harbour House / Carlo Petrini and Slow Food Canada

Producer/Host – Jon Steinman
Transcript – Carol Elliott

Interpreter: And this is why we call ourselves "Eco-gastronomers."

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: If I was saying before that a gastronomer who is not an environmentalist is stupid or an idiot, I also would like to say that an environmentalist who is not a gastronomer is also very sad. (*audience:* laughter and applause)

Jon Steinman: This is Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly radio show and podcast out of Nelson, British Columbia's Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY. I'm Jon Steinman and you just heard a clip of Carlo Petrini, the founder and International President of Slow Food – a global organization whose mission is to work to defend biodiversity in our food supply, spread taste education and connect producers of excellent foods.

We'll be hearing more of Carlo Petrini in the second half of today's one-hour episode, when we'll also hear from Slow Food Canada's International representative, Sinclair Philip. But Sinclair will also be our *featured* guest for the *first* half of today's broadcast, which will also mark Part 7 of our ongoing series Conscientious Cooks. Sinclair is the co-owner of the well-established and very well-known Sooke Harbour House, a twenty-eight room inn in Sooke, British Columbia that is also home to a restaurant that has led the way in Canada (if not North America) in the practice of sourcing local and wild foods. The restaurant even goes so far as to cultivate its own herbs and salad greens right on the property thanks to the property's gardener Byron Cook (who we'll also hear from today). And this year the Sooke Harbour House will also be employing Jill Winstanley, a young Sooke farmer who will farm specifically for the restaurant on land that the hotel is leasing only blocks away from the property.

For the Sooke Harbour House, sourcing local is most importantly about sourcing the tastiest and most pleasurable foods, which, in turn, supports the local agricultural and food economy, and decreases the restaurant's environmental footprint.

We'll also meet some of those locals who *supply* the restaurant with fresh foods, such as Mary Alice Johnson of ALM Organic Farm and Amy Rubidge of Barefoot Farm.

And again, in the second half of the show, an inspiring talk delivered by Slow Food Founder Carlo Petrini, and Sinclair Philip will also weigh in with *his* perspectives on the Slow Food organization in Canada and abroad.

increase music and fade out

Jon Steinman: As part of our February 25th episode, we heard from a number of residents of Sooke, British Columbia – a small community about a forty-five minute drive from the City of Victoria on Vancouver Island. Those voices included Diane Bernard of Outer Coast Seaweeds and Pia Carroll and Marion French of the Edward Milne Community School's Culinary Arts program. All three of them have close connections with the most well-known restaurant in the area, the Sooke Harbour House - an inn and restaurant that has become an incubator for a vibrant food culture in the area since Sinclair and Frederique Philip purchased the property in 1979. The restaurant has also since become a place of employment over the past twenty-plus years for some of Canada's most reputable chefs, some of whom have even been featured here on Deconstructing Dinner.

Our ongoing Conscientious Cooks series has met with and heard from chefs from throughout North America and, while Sinclair Philip is *not* the chef at the Sooke Harbour House, it's been his and his wife and partner Frederique's passion for good food that has placed the Sooke Harbour House as a leader in North American for demonstrating the capacity with which restaurants can cultivate healthier food economies and more vibrant local food cultures.

I sat down with Sinclair in February 2010 while touring through the area, and I didn't say no to an offer to first enjoy a glass of sparkling wine while chatting about the restaurant's philosophy, its challenges and its future. The wine was from the nearby Venturi-Schulze winery in the Cowichan Valley and it went perfectly alongside the warm fire that we sat beside in the Inn's Garden Room.

Here's Sinclair Philip introducing the Sooke Harbour House and the area's agricultural and once-vibrant seafood history.

Sinclair Philip: We live in kind of an ideal location on Whiffen Spit. This area was only discovered a little over a hundred and fifty-five years ago in the mid-1800s.

We're on Whiffen Spit, which is named after the Chief Petty Officer who surveyed this particular area on the British ship that rediscovered it after the Spanish.

This was a very important summering grounds for the First Nations people of this area – the traditional T'Sou-ke band. Fishing has been very important on this particular location where Sooke Harbour House is. We've had fish traps across the bay. We had a shark

rendering plant that rendered salmon oil, which is popular today but it's been around for a long time, and shark oil.

Anthony Kohout and his wife Natalie, an American woman, started this place. They started this place in the twenties. For a while it was a summer camp. Then after that they built the Sooke Harbour House dining room that we are going to eat in in a little while, and built a small hotel here but they had communal kitchens. The whole place was a farm: it covered most of the neighbourhood.

The owner - strangely enough so that there is some lineage here - was the President of the Sooke Farmer's Institute while he was here. There was a lot of farming. That was carried on in the post-war period by the LaVertu family that lived here for quite a long period of time and were famous for their farm products and local meats.

Jon Steinman: Sinclair Philip is obviously passionate about food and for him the idea of eating as close to home as possible began as a child in what is now Cambridge, Ontario. While Sinclair's reflection on his childhood is one of seemingly abundant local foods, as we know all too well here on Deconstructing Dinner, access to such foods and such a culture is quite a challenge today in the shadows of a global food system. Sinclair speaks of those challenges and his and his wife's efforts to introduce unique foods to the area when they arrived in 1979.

Sinclair Philip: My grandfather had very large kitchen gardens in downtown what is now Cambridge, which was then Galt. They had a summer kitchen where they preserved all their own food and they actually ate extremely well. They actually had a very large flower garden. This was in the middle of a thriving town, but he thought it was important enough that he would carry on the tradition. He bought a lot from Portuguese butchers and Italians and people who had excellent confectionary goods, who would hang meat for him and that sort of thing.

My grandfather on my mother's side ate a lot of wild fish and was good friends with the commercial fishermen in Ontario, the Oldfield family. The First Nations people who very frequently were good friends of his brought him meat and a whole lot of different wild foods. So I was brought up to degree on those sorts of foods. My grandmother was a very good gardener and an excellent cook.

And from Canada I went to France and lived in a very small valley for ten years where people really almost entirely only ate local food. They didn't eat local food because it was sustainable: they ate local food because that's what you eat in most parts of the world. Most people in the world today have barely moved away from where they were initially brought up and about half of the world's population is made up of farmers still today.

So these people ate food from their own communities because it was part of their cuisine. These were recognizable dishes that everybody could produce, that tasted very good, that were cooked with the very best ingredients. Food was about culture and enjoyment. It

was the key point of every day, it was the main period of relaxation, and it was a time for chat.

So most of your meals took place in your immediate family or in a larger family because people often had people over, extended members of their family and other friends. It was a main point of social expression and enjoyment and pleasure within the day.

When we arrived in Sooke there were quite a few farms. Almost all of the those farms are gone today because we had the largest rate of agricultural land removal in the province in Sooke under the encouragement of our town, both before but particularly after incorporation. So we've lost most of those farms.

We also had a very big fishing fleet at that time. But, unfortunately, due to the fact that we have the most heavily dragged area - perhaps in the world - in the Straight of Juan de Fuca, we no longer have most of the bottom fish we once had. Sooke was known for its fish traps and there's a wonderful display of all these fish traps in our local museum.

We've gone from having an abundance, actually millions of dollars have been made by a few local people, to the point where it's hard to get any fresh fish. When we first arrived in Sooke, I would say about twenty to thirty-five per cent of the fish and shellfish we got in the kitchen were alive and now it's hard to get anything. It's certainly hard to get things as fresh because of all the new technical requirements. All the shellfish go to Nanaimo for testing and then pretty well have to come back frozen so we can't get them. Abalone is extinct. We first got it at two dollars a pound and then got it at four, and then the price kept going up.

So we were able to get a wide variety of things. We also worked with commercial fisherman that had sea licenses at that time. So their same day boats - there is a much shorter term fishery without these huge factory ships that were going out that dominate our industry today. We were able to go out scuba diving as assistants and we get a certain percentage of the catch when we went out. Or we would exchange with local fisherman because there were so many here. If they went off for a week or two at a time, the fishermen would come back and would want to spend a night in the hotel or have a meal with their wives because they hadn't seen them for so long.

So we had a very direct relationship with those fishermen. Today there are practically none left. There are very few fish. We still get local crab. Our next door neighbours are crab fisherman and we get local shrimp. We still buy from some of our original suppliers, such as Gordie Hohert, who was here thirty-one years ago when we started, and from other people. But most of that fishery is gone and the direct relationships are increasingly disappearing.

Jon Steinman: That's Sinclair Philip of the Sooke Harbour House and this is Deconstructing Dinner. The Sooke Harbour House is an established 28-room inn in the community of Sooke, British Columbia on Vancouver Island. The property is home to a

restaurant that is the feature of today's first half of the show and Part 7 of our ongoing Conscientious Cooks series.

The restaurant has over the past twenty-plus years led the way among North American restaurants that seek to source most of their ingredients from the local community, which, for the Sooke Harbour House, also involves sourcing from the property itself. But, despite the efforts of the restaurant, there are and have been as Sinclair outlines many challenges to carry out this local philosophy. For one, and as has been discussed at length here on the show, British Columbia is still struggling with new meat inspection regulations that have forced many small-scale livestock producers and slaughterhouses *out* of business. Along with the seafood challenges also mentioned, this, too creates a lot of work for restaurants like the Sooke Harbour House to source local product.

Sinclair Philip: We've always put a lot of energy into it. It's probably no more difficult today, although it's going to become I think in the near future more difficult to source locally. But I'm encouraged by a number of recent evolutions that I have been able to follow.

I think it's always been somewhat difficult and we've always had to make a real effort. But we've never tried to be sustainable. It hasn't been our goal to be locavores - I don't like the term - or sustainable.

Our idea has always been that local culture involves local food: it's a representation of your area; it's the healthiest food; it doesn't travel long distance; and you can develop an understanding, and to that understanding you can cook much better with it. And you share the pleasure, not only with the people around your table, but also with the community that supplies you with those foods. So it's more a question of pleasure and food culture than it is really being sustainable. It's just coincidental that it's sustainable.

But the best foods in the world are always local foods. If you go to Japan it's extremely local. I had dinner with a chef in Italy and they won't really buy most of their ingredients from more than fifty kilometers away. In England the definition of local through the Soil Association is within a fifty kilometer radius.

So this is something that is traditional to everywhere in my opinion where they eat really well. It's never been fusion: it's always been the foods of that area well-understood. And that's all we've tried to do - increase the pleasure through eating local food and working with local people we enjoy.

We have every confidence in our food because most of the food that comes through our door – not all, because we do buy some field crops and things from further away but try to buy locally as much as possible - we know the people behind it. We've seen their operations. We know what their farm looks like. We know how they treat their animals, which is very important. I can give you the name of one of the happiest farms in the world: Lucinda Fothergill, for instance. I've never seen such happy animals. They all come up to you. They are all very friendly. None of the animals are afraid. You can see

how badly these people's animals are treated. It gives you a very good feeling about animal husbandry, about the mentality of the person and also whether or not you are really honestly getting the kind of food that you want to feed your kids, or eat yourself, or feed your restaurant customers, such as we do at Sooke Harbour House.

Jon Steinman: Surrounding the property of the Sooke Harbour House are well over a dozen uniquely constructed and permanent hoop houses to permit for year-round growing of fresh herbs and salad greens, all of which are certified organic. Managing the gardens is Byron Cook, and when I first arrived on the property I was greeted by Byron, who was holding a bowl of freshly-picked stinging nettle – an edible and wild plant native to North America. It was quite a surprise to see stinging nettle so early in the season (February 15th). And while Southern Vancouver Island has the longest growing season of anywhere in the country, even that is unusually early for stinging nettle. Lucky for me, that bowl of stinging nettle became the first course of my dinner later that evening, which was prepared by the kitchen staff of Head Chef Sam Benedetto.

Here's Byron Cook introducing us to the Sooke Harbour House gardens.

Byron Cook: We have a garden here that has been certified organic for the last eight years. It's been organic since the present owners bought it thirty years ago and probably organic before that. We've always done things organically, and we only grow plants that you can eat.

It's a completely edible garden. We have about three hundred different plants during the year that we harvest and we harvest them for the kitchen.

Jon Steinman: Do you have a team of people you work with, or are you more or less the team?

Byron Cook: Well, right now at this time of the year I am the team. But we will have more people in the summertime. We have an auxiliary team at a farm that we have got that is about a four minute walk from here.

We have two green houses now and we'll have another greenhouse plus some field crops. It will be the first time that we have been able to do that here, like actually growing carrots, or potatoes or squash, which we simply don't have room for. And of course there is the deer problem.

Jon Steinman: Here we are in the middle of February. Most of the people who live in Canada, or outside of Canada, wouldn't imagine there is much food growing here. Is there anything right here that's being produced as we speak in this garden?

Byron Cook: Well, all of our salad greens right now. There are probably fifteen-twenty things I pick for a salad every day, some of them in small quantities and some of them in large quantities. Some of them are plants that are indigenous. Some of them are introduced weeds. Some of them are just plain old ordinary lettuce.

Jon Steinman: So you have a very close connection with the kitchens. Are you essentially bringing in whatever it is that's available? Are they working with you as to what they need?

Byron Cook: Well, they have a list in there and they write down what they want and I go and get it. If I have something that I think they might be interested in, like stinging nettles, which I was just picking. Two weeks ago we picked the first ones. Of course they didn't know they were there, so I picked a bunch and brought them in, and they were excited. That's the way it works: either they tell me what they want or I suggest things that I've got.

Jon Steinman: Are things like stinging nettles usually ready at this time of the season or this a little early?

Byron Cook: It's a little early. We had one good cold spell in early December, which set things back, but since then it's been a fairly mild winter.

Jon Steinman: Byron Cook mentioned the farm that the Sooke Harbour House will be sourcing some of their produce from this year. It's a one-and-a-half acre property that the Inn has leased for years but this year it plans to ramp up production with the help of area farmer Jill Winstanley, who has also planted many berry bushes on the property as well. It's yet another example of the intensive approach to controlling the source of the food entering into the Sooke Harbour House kitchen. There are very few restaurants in the country who maintain their own farm and farmer.

With the winter season in effect we *didn't* visit the farm but gardener Byron Cook was *not* without a *wealth* of options to demonstrate some of the unique winter foods ending up on the restaurant's menu.

Byron Cook: The deer fencing - that has become a critical thing around here because the deer problem is just enormous. We put these up last year.

What we have in here are mainly salad greens but some native plants also. Tulips - if the tulips are outside there wouldn't be any tulips to see – there are actually some buds on some of them. So that is pretty early. Usually it would be mid-March before you start seeing buds on tulips.

But we have a lot of Miner's lettuce, which is self-seeded everywhere. It grows from Alaska to Northern California. It's an excellent winter salad green. It will not grow in the summertime - it simply won't grow.

Jon Steinman: Also known as Claytonia? Is that the same?

Byron Cook: Claytonia, Montia. Same thing. We call it Miner's lettuce because it directly came from the fact that this was the first green thing the gold miners in Alaska saw in the Spring.

But we have some arugula here. We have some chervil growing back over here - chervil is an excellent Winter green, for us, and herb. The arugula, the parsley, cilantro – all grow better in the wintertime here. A cool weather crop is lettuce. It grows better in the wintertime.

Jon Steinman: And over here you have some it seems permanent hoop-house arrangement.

Byron Cook: Yeh, these are here for most of the Winter. I am sort of thinking I might take them off earlier this year because they were at one time not only to keep the rain off but to keep the deer out. Since we have this inside the fence now, I can take them off a little earlier, I think, because it makes it a lot easier to work from both sides of the bed other than working from one side of the bed, which is difficult at any time.

We're standing in front of a bed of nodding onion, which is a native onion – allium cernuum. You can taste it. It's a very strong flavour. We prefer to use the flowers and the bulbs themselves. You can see where somebody has cut some off.

The deer started eating this last year. I've never seem them do that before. It's a native plant. The deer and the nodding onion have been here a long time. I don't know whether they've been eating it all that time.

Back over in here … again, Miner's lettuce everywhere. Some radishes here. We've got another big bed of radishes over there. We're growing them for the leaves and for the flowers and the seed pods, not for the radishes. Hopefully, with the new farm we're going to be growing radishes to eat, too, in addition to these.

There are lots of really good recipes for using radish greens in Japanese cooking. I've got a few from a Japanese farmer in Metchosin. I gave them to the kitchen years ago. I don't know whether they've ever used them or not. They don't often ask me for them. The flowers taste like radishes. They are pretty. They are pink, usually. They are starting to bloom now, so it's a really nice early Spring thing. Then when the flowers are finished the seed pods come along and they're nice and crunchy and taste like radishes.

Jon Steinman: Does being right beside the ocean here really change the climate of this particular space versus, say, if you were a little more inland?

Byron Cook: Oh, absolutely. It's much milder here in the wintertime and it's much cooler in the summertime. So we're not going to be trying to grow tomatoes, basil, peppers, eggplant – things like that – here. It's just not warm enough. Hopefully we're going to do a little better literally two hundred meters inland. We're growing to try things outside, we're going to try things in the greenhouse. We've grown tomatoes successfully. But it

takes a lot of time and energy to grow them in the greenhouse – tying them up - because they'll grow ten to twelve feet tall.

But it's really important to try to keep things in their proper season. We're not trying to grow tomatoes or peppers or anything like that, or basil, in the wintertime. We only try to grow them in the season where you'd normally expect to have them.

Jon Steinman: Has this become a model for any other restaurants in the area, or restaurants outside of the area, that are looking to really cultivate this kind of connection with the food that is in the kitchen?

Byron Cook: Well, I think all of them are using more local food, or trying to, anyway. You have to have people producing local food. And Sooke Harbour House has been instrumental in a lot of people getting into the business of growing food and selling it to restaurants.

Most chefs that have worked here that have gone to other places want to have their own farm, want to have their own garden. But it takes a commitment to do it, and it's a big commitment. Peter Zambri, one of our former chefs, has his own restaurant in Victoria. He wants my help in starting his own garden. It's very normal. It sometimes works. With Peter it will probably work very well because he's an energetic guy and we'll make it work.

But everybody wants to do it. All the chefs that deal with fresh herbs know they're better if they come out of your backyard rather than from California.

Jon Steinman: We've posted some images on the Deconstructing Dinner website which demonstrate the unique winter gardening set-up on the Sooke Harbour House property. Those photos are posted on the page for today's episode at deconstructingdinner.ca and the March 11th, 2010 episode.

We've been hearing from Byron Cook, the Head Gardener at the Sooke Harbour House, a twenty-eight room inn and restaurant located in the small community of Sooke on Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

While a growing interest in local foods permeates much of North American culture today, the Sooke Harbour House has been practicing a local philosophy for well over twenty years, certainly making it a leader in the country. The property's co-owner, Sinclair Philip, is also passionate about wild foods and heritage foods, such as those which are part of Canada's Ark of Taste - a collection of foods that are unique to the country and which are promoted and celebrated through an initiative launched by the Slow Food organization, an organization which we'll learn more about in just a moment.

But one of the more unique wild crafted foods used by the restaurant comes right from the property itself – Grand Fir. And here's Sinclair Philip speaking about some of those wild foods used at the Sooke Harbour House.

Sinclair Philip: At Sooke Harbour House, we've always, because we live in the country, worked with a lot of wild foods. I think that the better restaurants in North America, and also in the world that I have been to, are in the country, not in the city. They're closer to an area of supply. If you go to the best restaurants in Italy they are pretty well all in the country. Many of the famous restaurants in France are also in the country. Certainly it's the case with the restaurants of Japan.

When you live in the country you are closer to wild foods and you are also closer to farmers so you have a very different understanding of what food is. For us, wild foods have always been a very important component of what we do.

We worked with a phenomenal person. I would highly recommend all of her over thirty books, Dr. Nancy Turner, from the School of Environmental Studies. She is the dedicated Chair in Ethnobotany, and she's taught us a huge amount.

Earlier today we worked in our gardens and we worked with Grand Fir. So many of the wild plants that we are used to using, we don't always have time to go out into the woods to get them, so we transplanted them here. Grand Fir is a very good example of one wild plant that we use.

We use Western Hemlock as a food. We use a number of First Nations foods, including camas, which we grow in the gardens and we don't harvest wild. We wouldn't want to, because those areas should be left untouched.

We grow the native onion allium cernuum, which is a very good wild plant. We grow a wide variety of traditional First Nations plants, including cow parsnips.

We collect all kinds of berries. We work with a First Nations band in Sooke and we have very good suppliers of wild berries from the First Nations groupings around here.

We have several good suppliers, and also we have local children. And we'll go out and we'll put ads in the newspaper because we freeze a lot of our foods for the winter. We preserve them in different ways.

So people will go out and harvest a wide variety of berries, First Nations plants, and other wild plants, such as the oxeye daisy, which is probably a noxious weed that has been introduced into this region, and a whole variety of other greens that have become common throughout our countryside.

We also have served, of course, probably the widest variety of seafood on the West Coast of Canada and in the earlier days, and developed an interest in a number of seafoods, which sadly have practically disappeared from the marketplace. Either they're entirely exported to Japan and we don't get access to them, or they become extinct because of the drag fleet or because of over-fishing.

We have always, since the day we opened our doors, been very interested in mushrooms. We had the very good fortune of employing a man who used to come to our door all the time. His name is Michel Jansen-Reynaud, who is truly the number one expert in this area, and can find a mushroom when nobody else can, and knows every spot far more than anybody else knows. He came to our door repeatedly and sold us mushrooms.

He was a very good French professional waiter, perhaps the most professional waiter we've ever had. One day we said, "You know, you are always coming out here delivering chanterelles, or matsutakes, or different mushrooms. Why don't you come and work here?" And he said, "Yes." So he came and worked here for about twenty years and did a phenomenal job and continued to sell us mushrooms. He's no longer extremely young, although he seems as if he is thirty-five or forty. But he's still one of our biggest suppliers of mushrooms.

There is a very big network out here of wild foragers, who bring us all kinds of things, from soap berries, to what the people in Newfoundland call "bake apples," to evergreen huckleberries, to red huckleberries, and a wide variety of mushrooms. We employ a lot of people. It may be seasonal but for these people it's an important part of their year's income. People like Eric Whitehead – who's a very, very good expert mushroom supplier - come here on a regular basis. He makes his entire living from it, and so do people like Michael Scholey, or Danusia Urbanski, or a variety of other people.

So mushrooms and wild foods are a very important part of our diet. An important thing to remember is a lot of restaurants might have specials and they can incorporate these things into their menus but what we've done is we have made it a habit of changing our menu every day. So if we only get six of one kind of fish we'll put that on the menu and when we run out we have to serve something else. And it would be the same thing if we get half a pound of chanterelles or matsutakes or lobster mushrooms or whatever it might be. Or wild truffles - I know it's the season for wild truffles. We'll only have them on for a day or two while they're fresh and while they're available.

But there are always wild surprises. I think of all of the things which make food across our country interesting and characteristic wild foods is probably the most important category.

Jon Steinman: Sinclair Philip. Now beyond the Sooke Harbour House's gardens and farm and the efforts to source wild foods, the restaurant also and not surprisingly supports many farmers in the area. One of those farmers is Mary Alice Johnson, an experienced farmer, seed-saver and educator in the Southern Vancouver Island food community. Along with Marika Nagasaka, Mary Alice operates ALM Organic Farm. From the farm they also operate Full Circle Seeds, a producer of certified organic seeds for farmers and gardeners. Mary Alice is also involved in a number of unique educational programs, including apprenticeship programs such as S.O.I.L (a.k.a. Stewards Of Irreplaceable Land).

Sinclair Philip joined me for a brief visit to ALM Farm to meet with Mary Alice Johnson, who at the time was taking care of a few rows of rhubarb that were just breaking through the soil's surface.

Mary Alice Johnson: I came to Sooke to join my husband from Malaysia. I had met him there and I was a teacher there. I love Sooke. We had a little house down the road and we'll probably never move from there.

I had this little bundle of money, and I drove by this old farm. It's a 1910 farm. I looked at it from the road and it looked abandoned at that point. The roof was falling in. There was broom everywhere. We didn't even know we had an orchard until we started cutting the broom.

So, we bought it in '86. That was two years after I arrived in Canada. So I just took a summer off to work here. Went down to the Harbour House. Took them some things I was growing. I like to grow strange things. I said, "Well, what's this and when do I harvest it?" They say, "Well, that's tough so you better wait until it's a little bigger."

Because I have that teaching background I guess I've always liked to have people come and work with me. And we've always had folks here working and developing that. So it's good for them and it's good for us.

We have a pretty serious apprenticeship program here. People come late February – early March and stay until the end of October. By the time they leave they really can pretty much run the farm.

We sort of give them responsibilities. Like last year - Bill is from England but he has a work visa here and he's really interested in farming. We gave him the job of connecting with restaurants. Always Marika had done it. Marika, who is my partner now, she came as an apprentice seven years ago and about three years ago we got into profit sharing. But she always worked with the restaurants and she's great. So she trained Bill to do that.

One thing that's nice to say is it's all sold before it's picked, which is why we need new farmers. We don't need people to help us market, particularly. We need more farmers in this area.

Sinclair Philip: We need more produce.

Mary Alice Johnson: That's what I mean. (laughs)

Sinclair Philip: Here's a sad story: Sooke Harbour House has been buying from Mary Alice for twenty-odd years. We've been good customers. And so I said to Mary Alice, "Can I get on your CSA program?"

Mary Alice Johnson: I wouldn't let him. (laughs)

Sinclair Philip: And she said, ”You’ll have to get in line with the others.”

Mary Alice Johnson: Right. So, yeh, we just don’t have enough produce.

This farm, it’s an old farm. It was an old turnip farm. It’s not particularly good agricultural land. It’s full of rocks. It hasn’t got a real rich soil. But it produces really good food.

We bought a new property down there - five acres just south of us. We have got pigs over there. We have got Tom Henry’s Berkshire pigs.

Sinclair Philip: Can we buy some?

Mary Alice Johnson: Sure. (laughs) Yeh. That’s Marika’s project.

Sinclair Philip: Okay.

Mary Alice Johnson: So they’re…

Sinclair Philip: But we’d like to buy some.

Mary Alice Johnson: Yep.

Sinclair Philip: Soon.

Mary Alice Johnson: It’s pretty good. Edward’s been smoking it for us, too, which is pretty good.

Jon Steinman: That’s farmer Mary Alice Johnson of ALM Organic Farm in Sooke, British Columbia. As you could hear at the end there, the demand for local product by the Sooke Harbour House is rather ravenous, with Sinclair Philip’s clear eagerness to access the farm’s soon-to-be-available Berkshire pork.

Just down the road from ALM Organic Farm is yet another supplier of the Sooke Harbour House – Barefoot Farm, operated by Amy Rubidge. Amy currently focuses solely on egg production and is the restaurant’s egg supplier.

Amy Rubidge: (sound of hens cackling) I’m actually in the process of rotating my flock. I rotate them every year.

These girls are just at the end of their high production - their twelve months. So they’ll be replaced by some pullets in the next month or so.

Jon Steinman: So what is the history of what you’ve been doing with chickens and eggs? Have you been doing this for a while?

Amy Rubidge: About three years. Yeh, I bought the farm. It actually came with 500 birds but I backed it off to about 140, just because it's a lot more manageable, both financially and work-wise.

There's a lot of work involved with the chickens. But it's basically the perfect livestock as an entry-level farmer to have because it doesn't require a lot of responsibility.

Yeh, I'm getting a few more birds in the next couple of months, but 140 at this time.

Jon Steinman: So as far as making a business out of doing this, where do your eggs end up?

Amy Rubidge: Well, they end up at the Harbour House, and the Red Barn Market, and the local grocery stores here in Sooke.

Jon Steinman: Amy Rubidge of Barefoot Farm in Sooke, British Columbia.

The Sooke Harbour House clearly maintains a passion for supporting a local food economy in the Sooke region and its over twenty years of experience doing so has provided dozens of chefs who have passed through the kitchen's doors with the inspiration to practice similar philosophies elsewhere.

One of those chefs is Andrea Carlson, who we heard from years ago as part of this Conscientious Cooks series here on Deconstructing Dinner. Andrea was at the time the Executive Chef at Vancouver's Raincity Grill but has since moved on to become the Executive Chef at Bishop's, another well-known Vancouver restaurant.

You can learn more about the Sooke Harbour House on their website at sookeharbourhouse.com or link to it from the Deconstructing Dinner website at deconstructingdinner.ca and our March 11th, 2010 episode where today's broadcast is also archived.

And be sure to check out our previous episodes of this Conscientious Cooks series that meets with chefs and restaurants from around North America who cultivate more personal relationships with the farmers and producers supplying them with food.

And of course I should extend a big thanks to Chef Sam Benedetto and his team at the Sooke Harbour House, who prepared what stands as one of the best meals that I've ever had, and all of it from ingredients sourced from either the property itself, the Sooke area or Southern Vancouver Island.

Jon Steinman: This is Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly radio show and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman.

Now, our featured guest for today's broadcast has been Sinclair Philip, who, along with his wife Frederique, own and operate the Sooke Harbour House. But Sinclair is also involved with the international organization known as Slow Food, and I spoke with Sinclair about his involvement with the organization in Canada.

But first, let's listen to an amazing talk delivered by Slow Food founder and International President Carlo Petrini. Carlo is from the Italian region of Bra and developed the organization in the 1980s after taking part in a campaign against fast-food giant McDonald's, who was at the time opening a restaurant in Rome. Slow Food is a non-profit, eco-gastronomic member-supported organization that was founded in 1989 to counteract fast food and fast life; the disappearance of local food traditions; and people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, how it tastes and how our food choices affect the rest of the world. Slow Food has over 100,000 members in 132 countries.

Here's Carlo Petrini speaking in November 2003 at the University of California at Berkeley.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: I have to say something, that to be part of an ecological discussion for a gastronomer has been very difficult - impossible - for a long, long time.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: Because for too long gastronomers have been too proud of being stupid. (*audience:* laughter)

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And I believe that gastronomy should come out of this limbo of general stupidity.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: People play around with food in front of the tv set, make food into a spectacle, and are absolutely ignorant of how food arrives to the table.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And so in this instance this is what Slow Food has tried to do: to free gastronomy from this context, and to join it with the environmental sense. This is why we call ourselves "Eco-gastronomers."

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: If I was saying before that a gastronomer who is not an environmentalist is stupid or an idiot, I also would like to say that an environmentalist who is not a gastronomer is also very sad. (*audience:* laughter and applause)

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And I think that food is almost as important as language.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And it provides a sense of identity, even more so than language.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: With language all you have to have is an interpreter and problem solved. (*audience:* laughter)

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: Not so with food.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: Not so with food because food is directly linked to our umbilical cord.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And in general this was not even something that came from our mothers but generally from our grandmothers.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: So, therefore, a food is very, very important, not only for history and the identity of people but the psychological health of people - for their serenity. This is how important it is.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And there are some similarities with language because, of course, we have the alphabet. And the alphabet for food – it's the raw matter, the basic ingredients.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And grammar are the recipes.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And syntax becomes the menu.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And the rhetoric is conviviality – sharing.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And, therefore, food is extremely important in today's battles in globalization, because there is a tendency to fight a whole heritage, and that is destroying also our biodiversity.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: It is the flattening, it is the evening out of taste. No long this identity, this personal identity – this personal flavour. But bringing everywhere, everything the same. Everything homogenized.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: So if we have to recover this identity we have to be in the front of this battle.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And we have to have the same pride and the same strength as an environmentalist.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And we have to become aware that we can start a process of globalization by the virtues.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And globalization has a deleterious and noxious effect because it is a dominating ideology that has exercised this very negative force.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: My friend Edgar Morin, a great French philosopher, says …

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And he's also a member of Slow Food…

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: He says it's like four engines…

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: But these are four engines that we cannot stop and they are taking us directly to death.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And these four engines are made up of science, technology, industry and profit.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And so science that believes that it has the truth, technology that produces everything, and then profit, of course, that thinks it's the only true thing.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And virtuous globalization is possible, and it is possible when someone opposes these four engines.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And there are so many people who are fighting these four engines.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And they are not just the people who go to demonstrations, but people who on a daily basis commit themselves to the defense of biodiversity.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And I am thinking about the humble lives of forgotten peasants in the Third World and also of this world.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: They are the ones who are struggling against these four engines.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian) (*audience:* laughter)

Interpreter: (her own words in English – "my, my, my")

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And the only thing that we have to do is help them to do this.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: I've thought about everything, I can imagine everything, but I never thought that the President of Slow Food was asked to talk fast. (*audience:* laughter and applause)

Carlo Petrini: (laughs, then comments in Italian)

Interpreter: Oh yes, I am respecting your time line – yes, only one minute.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: If biodiversity does not have this structure of people that are in favour of the world, are working toward the world…

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: This is the alliance that we have to create…

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: Otherwise we will not be able to stop these four engines.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: So we have to work on a daily basis to preserve biodiversity, to develop consensus, and to develop - more than anything else - education, education and education.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And I have to tell you that education has a sensory component as well.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: Not just intellectual aspects.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: We have a part of the brain that has the taste and smell memory.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And we create thinking arguments and thoughts on the basis of smells.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: So we have to help children grow up with this education of smells…

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: Even bad smells. (*audience:* laughter)

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: Because they are people who take four showers a day… (*audience:* laughter)

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: So they no longer have the right smells to make love. (*audience:* laughter and applause)

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: I apologize. I am sorry.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: What I would like is for you, when you go home tonight, that you have in your minds a small sense of what is gastronomy.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And the action of eating.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And the most beautiful sentence - the most beautiful phrase that I ever heard in my life – I heard it from that gentleman over there who is a farmer.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: He said that eating is an agricultural event.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And that's extraordinary.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: We can have an influence, an impact, an agricultural event - if we eat well.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And having a good relationship with peasants.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: But peasants as well need to learn to be gastronomers.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: So, my statement is: that cultivating is, above all, a gastronomic event.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And to really keep in mind - to have in their heart – the knowledge of who is going to eat their products.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And the way they have to be consumed.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: And how much they should be paid for.

Carlo Petrini: (comments in Italian)

Interpreter: But that is something else for another time. Thank you. (*audience:* applause)

Jon Steinman: This is Deconstructing Dinner. And that was Carlo Petrini, the International President of the Slow Food organization speaking in 2003 at the University of California at Berkeley.

Carlo's talk helps introduce my conversation with Sinclair Philip, who we heard from earlier. Sinclair is the co-owner of the Sooke Harbour House in Sooke, British Columbia but is also the Canadian International representative to the Slow Food organization. He's the Past President of Slow Food Canada and is now a member of the Slow Food Vancouver Island Convivium.

Both Sinclair and chef Mara Jernigan, who is from the community of Duncan, British Columbia, were instrumental in forming Slow Food Canada, and Sinclair spoke to me about these beginnings after the two of them met Renato Sardo, the head of Slow Food International.

Sinclair Philip: I've been interested in Slow Food for probably fifteen or twenty years. I decided to become more actively involved when I went to Cornucopia at Whistler in I think it was 2000. And Renato Sardo and the then President of Slow Food U.S.A. were in attendance.

We talked with Renato Sardo and he suggested that we start developing more of a movement in Canada. And so with Mara Jernigan, who is now the President of Slow Food Canada, we set up the Vancouver Island Convivium. We also started to develop an International organization to bring together the different convivia - that are the local chapters in Canada - together.

And so I was the first Acting President. I was the Governor, as it was called at that time. This was an elected position but not elected by a national board and a national membership. There was a representational convivia, that is the heads of the committee, who elected me. I became the representative and have been the International representative of Slow Food since 2003 and will be the International representative until 2011.

But I was Acting President for the first several years and now we have actually had elected Presidents and our current President is Mara Jernigan. It's easier for us to work together because we are both on Vancouver Island.

But we are the largest food organization in Canada, as far as I know, with on an average about 1200 members.

Jon Steinman: The Slow Food organization is often misunderstood as simply a celebrator of good food, and, while it definitely is that, it's also significantly invested in challenging the dominant fast culture of big, industrial and globalized food. It recognizes all too well that, to preserve and protect local food cultures around the world, a strong stand needs to be taken against all of these threats. And Sinclair Philip believes that the organization is the best one around who understands how to deal with these threats.

Sinclair Philip: Slow Food is really in some ways – philosophically, anyway – the perfect organization that understands how these issues need to be dealt with.

Slow Food is often misunderstood. Slow Food is primarily about shortening the distances between supplier, producer and consumer, and trying to get the consumer to work with the producer. It's a hard to understand concept that Slow Food is about.

So Slow Food is about buying directly from local people you know who produce what is called "good" food, that is food that tastes good; "clean" food is food that is safe for local consumption; and "fair," by that it means fair to the people that are producing it, and also fair to the animals that they might be raising.

Jon Steinman: Since it's inception in 1986 under the name Arcigola, the Slow Food organization has shifted from a focus on gastronomy to what Sinclair Philip describes as Terra Madre – the name of the bi-annual gathering that Slow Food hosts in Italy.

Sinclair Philip: In the earlier phase Slow Food was more about gastronomy, more about understanding artisanal foods. Artisanal foods of places like Italy and France are the ordinary everyday food of peasant farmers, small ranchers and ordinary people. Those foods translated to North America to become the luxury food of the elite because we don't have the tradition of local farm relationship and the simple foods.

So in the earlier days Slow Food was partially identified with things like quality olive oil, and Italian white wines, and prosciutto, and a variety of those different things. But very quickly it morphed or evolved into something which I think is much more valuable and has moved away from fancier dinners. Even though the appreciation of quality food and the education around quality food is very important it's become more of an organization that is called Terra Madre and less of one which is called Salone del Gusto, which is a food show for small peasant farmers and artisanal food producers in Europe.

Terra Madre is the meeting of primarily food producers – farmers, fisherman, ranchers, wild foragers – and, secondarily, university food specialists, chefs, and young people. And it's continuously developed into, recently, a meeting that counted over 5000 representatives from Canada and many other parts of the world, and with observers, up to about 8000 people. It's going to become a bit smaller this year. But this is an opportunity, strangely, for people of like interests across the world to talk about raw milk; about slaughter facilities; about limitations on fisheries; about ethics; about genetically modified organisms; about global warming; the environment - a whole variety of different topics.

And in Canada - because we haven't had very many organizations that allowed particularly producers to meet together before - it seems odd but many of the top producers in Canada, and also the United States and many of the famous names, have met in Italy rather than in Canada in their initial meetings and talked over the problems of our own country. So Canada might often have a delegation of between 120 to 200 people, so we have very large meetings in Italy and discuss our local problems because we all end up there.

We're trying to change that a bit in that we meet more within Canada. We try and have our national meetings in different regional areas so that we can work more with local suppliers of various kinds and producers. And increasingly, instead of becoming an organization of consumers or gourmets, we're increasingly an organization that brings together the best producers in Canada with all the problems that they might have.

Jon Steinman: As my conversation with Sinclair Philip approached its close, I asked him what the most important shift he believes needs to take place in Canada in order to fully carry out the mission of the Slow Food organization. From his food travels abroad and specifically in Europe, he believes Canadians should work towards the development of

specifically defined regions of cuisine and food culture – something that is *slowly* beginning in Quebec.

Sinclair Philip: An important thing that we need to start to understand is that in the countries in the world that are reputed for eating well, although many of those countries have their own challenges, in those countries they develop very narrowly defined regional food systems and cuisines.

So in a country like Italy, we say, "Oh well, Italian food is pizza, or it's pasta with tomato sauce." It isn't. If you go to different parts of Italy the food varies tremendously, not even regionally but very locally.

So each part of Italy will have it's own type of pasta. It'll have a specific sauce. If you are away from the Coast you won't eat fish; if you are on the Coast you'll eat fish. If you're in the North you'll eat bigger fish; if you are in the South you will eat fish fry.

But you have these highly regionalized food cultures. It was the same thing in France. That's changing, unfortunately. In Japan the food often does not come from more than twenty kilometers away.

The fundamental thing that we need to try and understand in Canada is the development of local cuisines. And a local cuisine is something that is recognized from the outside. It's a repetition of specific recipes. Of course you can vary them, but it may mean eating less of a variety of food but understanding it better, understanding the production methods better, supporting local farmers, and eating better in fact because everybody can cook these dinners. You don't have to be reliant on going to a fast food outlet for your dinner. Everybody knows how to cook these meals. You spend more time eating throughout the day in most of these cultures. We spend very little time in Canada eating and preparing food. And you get much more enjoyment because you are around food and you spend a much longer period of time every day enjoying food with family and friends.

In France they have an Appellation system of over five hundred different types of food stuffs. Within this Appellation system, which they are just starting to develop in Quebec, you have a cooperative effort between different kinds of producers that set norms. They may be passed by law, but it's the artisan producers of these products that set the norms and set the regulations that the others must abide by. It's a cooperative event.

Many of the rare breed animals are on the verge of extinction or will disappear and we only really have a few types of beef, or chickens, or turkeys, or a variety of other animals. In a country like France, this type of Appellation system guarantees types of animal species; productive methods; areas that are set aside for the farming of these animals; and the promotion, public relations, and certification of those products. So you have this whole infrastructure that protects a whole wide variety of different regional foods. It's terrific.

In Italy you have the Indicazione geografica tipica, which are not as structured systems. That is one of the reasons why Slow Food came into existence in Italy because one of the sorts of things that the Presidia do in Slow Food – and Presidia is part of Slow Food's Ark system – is set up structures that may provide technical skills or equipment or promotion or a variety of other things. It sort of helps replace the French Appellation system by setting up structures so that people can work together under specific norms. And that is precisely what they are doing under the Appellation system in Quebec.

Jon Steinman: That was Sinclair Philip, the Canadian International representative to the Slow Food organization. Sinclair is the Past President of Slow Food Canada and is a member of Slow Food Vancouver Island. More information on the Slow Food organization can be found at slowfood.org, Slow Food Canada at slowfood.ca, and Slow Food Vancouver Island at slowisland.ca

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 also courtesy of Nelson-area resident Adham Shaikh.

This radio show 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.