

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

November 25, 2010

Title: A Farewell ... For Now! (incl. Eggs Investigation Update)

**Producer/Host – Jon Steinman
Transcript – Nicole Timoshenko**

Jon Steinman: Welcome to Deconstructing Dinner and our 193rd episode, an episode which marks the final broadcast of the show before we embark on a much-needed break. For the past almost 5 years, this show has been coming to you from Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia, and I'm Jon Steinman.

On today's broadcast I'll of course speak a little bit about *why* there is a need to step away from producing new shows and what might lie ahead as far as the future of Deconstructing Dinner, and I'll also offer some reflections on the past 5 years of producing this weekly one-hour radio show and podcast, but more importantly I'll offer some reflections and projections on the future of what might appropriately be called the responsible food movement – a movement which this show has helped track its evolution and certainly one that this show has in many ways been a part *of*.

Also on the show a *brief* update (regrettably brief!) on our September undercover investigation on a B.C. egg business who had been fraudulently marketing their product as being from their own farm, when in fact the property on which the business operated was not a farm at all.

increase music and fade out

JS: A little over 5 years ago, I wrapped up a job in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia where I had worked 6 months as part of a restaurant and foodservice operation led by a chef who was doing something substantially different than what is often found within that sector of the food system.

Whereas most foodservice operations in North America purchase most if not all of their food from *one* multinational foodservice company (a company like Sysco Foodservice or Gordon Foodservice being the two largest servicing restaurants), the chef I was working for was ordering most of the kitchens' ingredients from nearby farmers and processors. As part of our training, staff of the restaurant were even required (and paid) to visit those farms and spend a few hours *working* on the farms so that we could be better able to not only communicate to customers just where the food was coming from, but more importantly, to be proud of being part of a restaurant that was having such a positive impact on the local food system. I recall one farmer who we visited as part of our training

at Suncatcher Farm in Kelowna, who referred to the restaurant as a vacuum that would quite literally suck up rows of their produce. And so it was this experience, working at this restaurant, this final experience along a much longer evolution of food system education (both formal and informal), that helped inspire the creation of a source of media that would seek to take apart and deconstruct our food system – the one in which is dominated by (in this case) two multinational restaurant foodservice distributors – and in doing so discover just how this system of which we have all for so long been a part, is an incredibly *irresponsible* system. Irresponsible in its complete disregard for the earth, for our individual communities and for our global community. And in doing so the show was able to steer itself into sharing alternatives to this system; alternatives that are, at the very least *less* irresponsible and perhaps even better, *responsible*, and in alignment with the natural rhythms of the earth of which we are all so inextricably a part.

But beyond the *food* intentions of the show (and all of the associated social, environmental, economic and health intentions *of that*), Deconstructing Dinner was also created as a *media* experiment, one that posed the question, “is it possible to sustain an intensive one-hour talk-based radio show with a full-time and part-time staff and all its associated expenses while, at the *same* time offer the show at no charge to the under-funded campus/community radio sector and also the appetite for *free* podcasts?” The *hope* was that the answer would be yes, that there would be enough people out there who would *choose* to voluntarily become a monthly subscriber and/or send donations to support our work; and while there hasn’t been that critical mass of support from listeners to sustain this show, I do have to also have to admit I’m *not* convinced the answer is no. And that’s an important point I’d like to make on this final episode because I’m actually quite convinced that had we decided to launch a make or break fundraising campaign as many projects like this one might choose to do at a time of funding uncertainty, I do think that enough funds would have been raised; but in having arrived at this point where it would have been necessary *to* do that, it was also an opportunity to take what I would say will be an important time of reflection, one during which this model for sustaining and producing a one-hour food security radio show and website can be reflected upon and strategically *redefined* to make it stronger and have an even greater impact than it already has. So that’s another reason for the break, an opportunity to reflect and re-strategize.

So what are the next steps? Well the first thing to note is that we do intend on offering four more months of episodes to the almost 50 radio stations who are airing this show each week. Of course so many of the shows that we’ve aired over the past 5 years are *as* relevant today (if not *more* relevant) as they were when they first aired. These weekly selections will also be posted to our podcast, so to access those you’ll have to sign up for the podcast or visit the podcasts rss feed linked to from the show’s website. Also currently underway is the ongoing transcribing of our archives which has been thanks to volunteer Michael Doratti, who has helped coordinate dozens of volunteers from quite literally around the world who have offered to transcribe our broadcasts and create print versions to be posted on the Deconstructing Dinner site. As of today there are about 50 transcripts available there and another dozen to get posted in the coming week. So that project will be ongoing, if you do want to lend your time to that you can get in touch with us by sending an email to dd.admin@cjly.net (again that email dd.admin@cjly.net). That

contact info is also on our website. And also to note is that we do maintain every intention to maintain the website and the archives and so at this point despite the decision to stop producing *new* broadcasts (at least for the foreseeable future), I still do want to encourage any of you who have not donated to this project to still consider sending a donation (even if it is a retroactive one). For the past few years Deconstructing Dinner has operated on quite the deficit and many expenses do remain unpaid, and so for that we would greatly appreciate that support. And beyond that, we are choosing to maintain what we do believe has become one of the more valuable resources of information out there on food security (certainly in Canada) but also for the many Americans and others who I know have become avid users of the site and those archives. So any donations and support that you can provide to the show also goes towards supporting the sites' presence and the way it's already proven to have influenced so many people and communities around the world.

What I'd also like to encourage on this final episode is for all of you to send your thoughts to us (over email, you can send a letter), send your thoughts on what you liked about the show, what you *didn't* like; perhaps the show has inspired change in *your* life (with how you eat or how you relate to your food), that would be something we'd love to hear and all of those emails and letters received will also help us in re-strategizing how Deconstructing Dinner might return in one form or another. Where can you send those thoughts to; well over email you could send them to deconstructingdinner@cjly.net or you can send a letter to Deconstructing Dinner, c/o CJLY, 308A Hall St, Nelson BC, postal code V1L 1Y8. That contact info is also posted on our website at deconstructingdinner.com

So that's the scoop on the break. Later on the show today I'll also share some more reflections and *projections* many of which will also be the product of some of the *unfinished* business here on the show.

Perhaps the most anticipated *unfinished* business here on the show are the outcomes of our September 2nd investigation into allegations of local food fraud. The day before that show went to air, Deconstructing Dinner contacted the Canadian Food Inspection Agency alerting them of the show that was about to *go* to air and offering them the details of our findings – most importantly that a registered egg grading station and *supposed* egg producer was fraudulently marketing their eggs as in part coming from their own farm, when in fact they operated no farm at all and housed no chickens. And furthermore that allegations had been received suggestive that the eggs were in fact coming from Alberta, which was somewhat confirmed by the evidence we found on the ground from our undercover visit to the operation, evidence that also suggested the eggs were coming from factory farms and were *not*, as the business told their 18 customers, local, free-range, and free of medication and hormones. So not only was this a story that offered *so* much about the state of our food system and our relationships (or lack of them) to the origins of our food - reflections of which I'll delve into later on the show - but this was also a story (if not more so) about the public institutions which regardless of whether we're Canadian or not, exist to *protect* us and to help facilitate whatever food system it is that Canadians want; which, when you frame it that way, the CFIA has in part, been

doing an ok job, because certainly the majority of Canadians at this point seem to continue to want a food system built on cheap and seemingly convenient food and that system as we all know is (so long as one turns a blind eye to all of its negative impacts) it's alive and well. But on the flipside is a growing and almost ravenous interest for a different food system, one that does not look through the lens of economics and convenience, but one that looks through *many* lenses: ecological, social, cultural, dare I say the *human* lens. How is then the CFIA doing? (Our publicly-funded institution that maintains a vision to “enhance the health and well-being of Canada's people, environment and economy.” How are they doing? Well, when these allegations about Eggs R Uz – the egg business in question were received by Deconstructing Dinner, those allegations were, by extension, also alleging that the CFIA was *not* doing a very good job at all fulfilling that vision!

Before that episode went to air well what is it we *did* know?

Well, we knew that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency in April of 2010 visited about a dozen retailers in the Kootenay region of British Columbia threatening them with \$5,000 fines unless the *ungraded* eggs on their shelves were removed (eggs which had originated on small-scale farms in the region.) The reason? The eggs had not passed through a registered grading station – a type of facility which, for many reasons does not exist in the region, except for two exceptions, a small operation grading its own small production, and another registered grading station that had been operating in the community of Wynndel (that's Eggs R Uz), a business who was selling eggs to 18 area retailers and a business with a known history of complaining about the presence of any *ungraded* eggs on store shelves – presumably as a means to protect what was a monopoly on the market for legal free-range local eggs. Now common sense would seem to dictate that *if* a public institution *was* using public monies to spend considerable time policing the region's food system (as was done in April of 2010), that that same institution would *also* be paying attention to the one notable grading station, Eggs R Uz.

Of course that does not appear to be the case because when on August 24th I paid a visit to Eggs R Uz there was not, anywhere on the property, any chickens as they said there would be, and instead, dozens of large cardboard egg boxes originating from a factory farm in Alberta. Now it would be one thing if Eggs R Uz had only just, prior to my arrival got rid of their chickens and began then fraudulently marketing their eggs, but evidence on the ground suggested that chickens had not been on the property for quite some time, and even when they were, there was no way that there was anywhere near enough space to house the number of chickens necessary to produce the volume of eggs that were being sold into the market by this business. Sure enough, one week after our investigation aired on September 2nd I received an email from a resident of Creston – a community located only a 10-15 minute drive from Wynndel. That email read this, “I'm so glad that you've investigated about Eggs R UZ. I've witnessed the two owners two years ago, buying large quantities of eggs from a white cube van with an Alberta license plate on the parking lot of Iron Kettle/Famous Fritz in Creston at dusk. I knew that there was something fishy going on, I should've taken pictures! This was in August 2008.”

Now note the date, August 2008.

So this had been going on, apparently, for at least two years, and this account almost identical to the one first received in June of this year when another and unrelated person witnessed the same thing, the purchase of eggs from someone who came from Alberta. But again, despite how long it appears this was going on, for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency they were not any the wiser, and one would at least *hope* that the CFIA undertaking a regular inspection of the grading station would be well aware once on the property that there were no chickens as Eggs R Uz had been communicating to their 18 customers in the region.

And we do know that the CFIA was well aware of the business because as mentioned on that September 2nd broadcast, when one retailer asked the CFIA inspector where they might get a legal source of eggs in the area, he suggested Eggs R Uz.

And so in part, airing this story was also strategically an invitation to the CFIA to demonstrate to their employers, us, the Canadian public, how they go about investigating these types of allegations and how they go about communicating their activities *to* the Canadian public. And so that was the role that Deconstructing Dinner took on after that story went to air - to monitor just how the investigation unfolds.

Step 1 involved an interview with James Rogowsky of the CFIA who spoke to the process that the CFIA undertakes when allegations like this are received. It was during that interview which we aired on September 9th that we were informed that Eggs R Uz had surrendered their egg grading station registration and was no longer in business. And it was also on that episode that it appeared the CFIA was continuing its investigation. But today almost three months later, the CFIA has chosen silence and by all accounts it seems possible that either no investigation was *ever* underway or, that there's information that was uncovered that the CFIA does *not* want Canadians to know. But this is in the end all speculation, because our ongoing efforts to access information as to the status of the investigation have all essentially resulted in silence.

Following numerous efforts to contact CFIA staff we did finally get a response on November 15th from Communications Officer Mark Clark based out of Vancouver. The response was to the following question that we sent on November 12th, "Have you received any updates on the Eggs R Uz investigation? Is it still underway, and if so, is there anything we might be able to share with our listeners?" The CFIA's Mark Clark responded with this email, "I looked into the Eggs R Uz file and I found out that the owner has surrendered their registration certificate and has officially finished operating. Thanks." Now needless to say that was not the information we were looking for and so immediately responding back was this email that was sent that same day, November 15th, "I did get word of the surrendering of the registration in the second week of September when I spoke with an Egg Program Specialist out of Winnipeg. He indicated at that point that the CFIA was still nevertheless investigating the allegations that the business had been fraudulently marketing their eggs. And so my query is in regards to what the *status* of that investigation is? Or, was there never an investigation?"

So that was on November 15th and as of today, November 25th no response to that question has been received.

The Kootenay Co-op food store in Nelson who was Eggs R Uz's largest customer did also contact the CFIA to find out what they might have found. Of course, for the Kootenay Co-op and its member owners, their primary interest was to find out the origin of those eggs, as it was the people of Nelson where the store is located who had been consuming over 3600 of those eggs every week for the past few years. But for the Kootenay Co-op, they too received the same and seemingly evasive response, that the CFIA has no information.

So here we stand, and despite Deconstructing Dinner poised to take a break, I can assure you that we will, nevertheless, file an access to information request to find out the status of the investigation (*if*, of course, there ever was one).

soundbite

JS: If you are just tuning in, today does mark the final episode of Deconstructing Dinner before some much-needed restructing gets underway. The show has consistently for years operated with a deficit, and so some new strategies are needed to help fund this work, but also a break that will hopefully be a great opportunity to assess just how, *if* Deconstructing Dinner does return to the airwaves, that this show can be even more impactful and effective than it already is.

Also as mentioned, Deconstructing Dinner will, until the end of March 2011, continue to offer a selection of weekly archived episodes from our almost 5-year-old archives. Those shows will be distributed to the 50 radio stations currently airing the show each week and podcast listeners can also expect those weekly episodes to get posted. And also as mentioned earlier, despite the show taking this hiatus to reassess and restructure, I do encourage any of you who support this work, if you haven't already done so, please do support this work (even if it is retroactive support) with a donation that can be sent either on-line or in the mail. Information on how you can do so is posted on our website, deconstructingdinner.ca. Your support helps cover the deficit that this project has operated with for the past few years and it also helps support our ongoing intention to maintain our extensive website of resources and archives including the ongoing posting of transcripts – a project which I hope will see every episode of the show transcribed into print from in the near future.

So, as this final hour of the show ticks away I think it's quite important to share some reflections – reflections which I think can be supported by this focus on the Canadian Food Inspection Agency for one, an institution which based on all of Deconstructing Dinner's experience with has left us quite comfortably declaring as was done two weeks ago, that the CFIA is a fundamentally broken institution. I think back to our efforts in 2007 when we came across an Internet-based advertisement for Kraft Singles which outright lied as to the calcium content of the product. The CFIA refused to offer any

information as to the outcomes of that complaint and when Deconstructing Dinner *finally* received a response to our freedom of information request, what *was* discovered is that the only actions the CFIA took was to author a one-page letter to the company requesting that they never do it again (this, despite the fact the company *had* already committed those same fraudulent advertising tactics for the same product in the United States years earlier). The chronology of *those* efforts remains on the Deconstructing Dinner website and part III of the Packaged Foods Exposed series.

So what can we learn from this? What can we learn from what at least from our perspective is a food system and food systems in Canada that are being regulated by a broken institution seemingly incapable of protecting Canadians from the abundantly clear and wilful negligence and deceit that permeates most of the major corporations involved in the production, distribution and retailing of food in this country. What can we learn?

Well, some might suggest just as seems to be the paradigm we live in, that institutions like the CFIA need to be fixed – that fundamental changes need to be made in order for the CFIA to do what it's supposed to do - enhance the health and well-being of Canada's people, environment and economy. And that is a pretty expected response. Don't for example look to the CFIA to investigate alleged local food fraud, but instead someone or *something* needs to apparently investigate the CFIA. And perhaps there's value in doing that.

But in demanding such a response are we helping perpetuate what might perhaps be a more foundational problem? And I would say yes. I would say that what the past five years of content that's been shared on Deconstructing Dinner all points to and which our investigation into alleged local food fraud acts as a *perfect* example of, I believe the "responsible food movement" is at a very notable crossroad, where on the one hand, the movement could continue down what I would consider to be a *slippery* slope (that is *falling* back into being a part of the very broken and, what I would consider to be in so many ways, the *irresponsible* food system dominating our food choices today), or, on the other hand, the movement could continue down the path that many people had *intended* (and *continue* to intend) which is fostering *true* alternatives to the dominant food system serving Canadians today. And so as I see it, seeking to fix what amounts to a broken public institution (the CFIA) who was not only unable to recognize what now appears to be some pretty obvious fraudulent practices on the part of a local business, and at this point has chosen silence over transparency as to offering anything to Canadians as to what really happened and how this was allowed to happen, is in fact only contributing to the slippery slope that I speak of. Instead, I would suggest that we (and the responsible food movement) need to change our perspective and look at this local food fraud case again, as a wake-up call.

And despite this suggestion being mostly the product of these past 5 years of producing Deconstructing Dinner, this change in perspective for me was perhaps best captured in just one very brief moment only a couple of months ago and because of a young boy. It's a story that might resonate with any of you who have children but all of us at one point being children, well I would imagine this will resonate with everyone.

Myself, I do not have children of my own, but I *do* now live with an amazing 8 year old boy whose name is Jari – the son of my partner. And to give you a little bit of background, over the past few years in my backyard garden where I was once living I would grow a Golden Scallopini squash, which every year I would harvest and turn into soup. I would take that soup, stick it in the freezer and over the course of the winter take out that soup. So that first batch that I took out of the freezer was again only a couple of months ago, and like many children, Jari is quite *selective* of the foods that he likes and *doesn't* like but I didn't really hesitate to take this one soup out because my experience had told me that Jari liked the soups that I made. But like most children, Jari on some days likes a particular food whereas on the next day he hates that very same food. And so we sit down at the dinner table, I pour the soup into the three bowls, and we each proceed to take our first bite, and without any hesitation, Jari lets out this big satisfying “yum!” and then moment later after taking that first bite he asks a question “what kind of soup is this?”

And now again, not having as much experience with children as someone with their own might have, I made what I've now learned to be a pretty stupid mistake, because without any pause I responded and said, “well it's squash soup” and with what must have been all of two seconds between the “yum” and my response that it was squash soup, Jari let go of his spoon and let out a good old “ewwww!”

I could see in my partner's eyes that she was telling me that I should have just said veggie soup (and at the moment I didn't necessarily disagree), but I'm also sitting there thinking what a great opportunity, perhaps that he would see that his *dislike* of the soup had nothing to do with how it tasted but instead had everything to do with his *thoughts about* the soup, right? And so I said, “but you just said that you loved it,” and he paused, and he thought about it for a moment and he responded, “welllllll it's ok, but I don't like squash soup.”

So, many lessons to be learned from this interaction I'm sure, but the one that stands out for me and offers a good introduction to these reflections, was that this rapid shift in perception about the soup (which is pretty common among children), is also pretty common among us adults - let's be completely honest *we* do the exact same thing! We exhibit the *exact* same reaction if not more so. At one moment we can appear quite content eating food that tastes good, but the moment that we begin to learn what it is, what's in it, how many calories or fat is in that food, or how it was produced, that can mean the difference between wolfing it down or not touching it with a 10 foot pole.

And so as *I* see it, what this soup experience and all of *our* similar tendencies offers, is that we have become *so* detached from how our food is produced and where it comes that many of us have a such a *precarious* relationship to food that at any moment we can completely abandon eating with our senses, and instead eat much more with our heads!

Is this a good thing or a bad thing? Well, I think a bit of both.

Bad because if the veil was *completely* lifted off of the food system I would expect that many people would simply stop eating! While others might simply choose to turn off any interest to *know* about their food and go about as usual, ignorance is bliss right?

But on the other hand, and what *excites* me the most about this, eating with our heads, is that *if* the outcome of deconstructing our food *can* have *that* much of an impact as it did with Jari (that the same food can, in a matter of milliseconds go from utterly fantastic to utterly disgusting simply because of *information*), then think of the power that deconstructing (taking apart) our food and food system can have in being able to help shape a *new* food system.

And I think this is why the industrial food is so afraid of us seeing where our food comes from and how it's produced. But more specifically, this to me is the most *exciting* opportunity; that if the pleasure that we derive from eating can so swiftly be taken away when we discover something we *dislike* about the *origins* of what we're eating, just imagine the *pleasure* we're therefore capable of experiencing when we eat when the story of how and where that food was produced and *who* produced it, is a story we *support*.

That as a child for example, we were involved in planting that squash, we watched it grow, we harvested it, we cooked it, or perhaps we visited that farm where the pork on our breakfast plate came from a pig who lived a relatively happy life, or we can visit the chickens who produce our eggs in our backyard every day or we know the first name of the farmer who raises the cows that produce the cheese we eat. Again, just as quickly as we can be turned off, I believe we can quickly be turned on.

And for me I can testify simply from my own personal eating experiences, many of you I'm sure would agree, that when sitting down to a meal where I can trace every ingredient (if not most of those ingredients) to their source. When I know for example that what I'm eating has a positive impact on my community, it has a positive impact on other communities, other people, it pays respect to animals to the earth, well my eating experience goes from what would otherwise be filled with trepidation to instead being a full-on *embracing* of the food that I'm about to eat.

Wendell Berry once said, "If there is any truth to the cliché that 'you are what you eat', then we should be honest about the fact that most of us haven't the slightest idea what we are."

And really it's this that I find the most fascinating outcome of this practice that I refer to as "deconstructing" our food, or deconstructing our food system, because what we are doing is *peeling* away the layers, and with each layer we peel away we're revealing a layer of who *we* are and which reality we are choosing to live in.

So with that said, let's bring this back to the all important egg, the catalyst for these reflections. For most North Americans, the choice before us is quite simple; on the one hand we have the industrial egg option, and on the other, the local small-scale farm (or backyard) option. And on the surface, both eggs really do look identical, but when we

peel away the layers, when we *deconstruct* the eggs, our perspective can change dramatically.

As for the industrial egg, a look behind the scenes reveals much of what has already been shared here on the show, and what most already know, that the vast majority of all the eggs produced in North America come from hens who are confined to tiny cages in which they're crowded together, unable to spread their wings, all are of the same genetic variety and in such conditions the over-use of medications, antibiotics, is inevitable. Also as a part of that system, only handful of massive grading stations processing the bulk of those eggs, all of which come from a pretty small pool of massive industrial barns where those eggs are produced. In Canada as an example, the average flock size of Canadian eggs farms is just under 19,000 hens, with some operations housing up to 400,000 hens.

So that's the industrial egg.

The local farm-fresh egg, well, that's the children's storybook image, a small farm, chickens running around outside scratching in the ground for bugs, eating through scraps from the vegetable garden next to the coop, those chickens likely are part of an operation that offers a diversity of foods to the local food system and local economy and instead of one variety of chicken in the flock, likely many varieties creating a healthy level of diversity and therefore less of a need for medical care and antibiotics.

So that's the local farm-fresh egg.

So these are two *very* different realities that we can choose, and our choice can paint very different surroundings in and around our communities. But at this point, the vast majority of North Americans choose the former, the industrial egg and the reality that that industrial system creates.

Now in the West Kootenay region of B.C, the focal point for our recent eggs investigation, well it's like many other regions throughout North America where the population is, comparable to other regions, quite conscientious of its ecological, social and economic footprint.

One case in point, the presence of Canada's largest independent member-owned co-operative grocery store, the Kootenay Country Store Co-operative in the City of Nelson; one of the best examples of how, through the co-operative model, a community can take literal ownership of its food system – at least in this case, a major player in the food system – a grocery store.

Founded over 36 years ago, it's owned by the community it serves. There are 9,000 member/owners on the roster, 2/3rds of which are said to be active members. Every year, members vote for a board of directors who are responsible for steering the business. The store generates over \$9 million dollars in annual revenues. It employs over 65 people providing the highest non-union entry-level wage in the community. It maintains a buy local and buy organic first ethic, for example last year the store spent \$320,000 on local

produce alone. It's a business that showcases farmers right when you walk through the door. The store prides itself on its bulk section thereby reducing the amount of packaging that people are walking out of the store with. And its prepared food section is almost entirely supplied by local producers.

And so for Nelson and area residents, the Kootenay Co-op is one option where one can purchase eggs, but like any retail establishment in Canada, the Co-op is restricted to only being able to sell eggs that pass through a federally registered grading station. But if you take a look at a map, Nelson, B.C., well it's right in the middle of southern British Columbia – an 8-hour drive east through many mountain ranges from the main food distribution centres, Vancouver being one and its neighbouring communities of the Fraser Valley, and to the north east, an over 7-hour drive to Calgary. So Nelson is quite an isolated community to say the least). As for egg grading stations, well they have too, like every other sector of the food system, become increasingly large and increasingly consolidated. In B.C., and of the four largest egg grading stations, one is in Abbotsford (600 km away), another in Kamloops (460 km away), one in Duncan (800 km away), and another in Terrace (1600 km away). As for the largest Certified Organic grading stations, same story: Langley 620 km, Richmond 665 km and Burnaby 650 km.

But also having been an option, was Eggs R Uz, a small federally inspected grading station operating in the nearby Creston Valley – only 130 km away. So for the people of Nelson, those were the legal options that could be found at local retailers. Other legal options are for eaters to go directly to the farm to purchase ungraded eggs (which is allowed), but for people in Nelson, the closest farms tend to be at least 40 km out of town and there really aren't any farmers anyway who sell at the farmgate. Another legal option for eaters in Nelson is to purchase ungraded eggs at farmers markets, which for eaters in Nelson is not a year-round option, and eggs are also not a very common food to find at the city's local markets.

As for the *illegal* options, well up until April of this year, there were many retailers who, recognizing the limited option for people to access local and non-industrial eggs, chose to sell ungraded eggs that came directly from local farms. Now again this is a practice which is not allowed in Canada and which is why in April the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, as we documented on our show, and acting on a complaint, cracked-down on about a dozen of those stores in the region, eliminating many of those options.

And then the last option for Nelson eaters would be backyard eggs, which as Deconstructing Dinner listeners might also recall is also *illegal*, and some of those who have nevertheless attempted to produce their own eggs in the city have in the past year received visits from City of Nelson bylaw enforcement officers.

So in almost every instance, the people of Nelson, B.C. are quite slave to a food system which many people in the community do not support. To put it simply.

But to the Kootenay Co-op – a business that has over the past many years offered many of those certified organic options mentioned earlier, albeit options again that originate

from over 600 km away; in recognizing the many downsides to supporting such a long-distance option, the store chose to begin purchasing non-organic eggs in 2007 from a local supplier – Eggs R Uz who had stated was selling eggs from their own farm and eggs from neighbouring farms in the Creston Valley. Eventually, the only eggs being sold at the Co-op were those eggs from Eggs R Uz – totalling 3600 eggs a week.

This decision is similar to that of many conscientious businesses, organizations and eaters who believe that supporting local businesses is of greater value than supporting an organic product that might come from hundreds if not thousands of kilometres away.

But fast-forward to our recent investigation into the practices of Eggs R Uz, during which it was discovered that the egg grading station/egg supplier to 18 area stores and restaurants was fraudulently marketing their eggs as in part being the product of their own farm. Of course, once on the property, it was discovered that Eggs R Uz operated no farm at all and not one chicken could be found on the property. Video footage also gathered during that visit shows dozens of large cardboard boxes from industrial egg producers – one of which is in Alberta, an origin which would match one of the allegations received prior to our investigation that the eggs were being purchased from someone who came from Alberta. A week after our investigation aired, another witness sent us an email stating that they too had witnessed the Eggs R Uz owners purchasing eggs from a white cube van with an Alberta license plate at dusk in a Creston parking lot, and that, in August of 2008.

Now in the end, at this point we really don't know where those eggs were coming from, as mentioned all of our efforts to find that information have resulted in silence by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency who was made aware of our investigation on September 1st.

But an important piece to insert here is that this type of practice is nothing new; the marketing of a product alongside a number of claims when in fact that product is not what it's being claimed to be. This happens all of the time in the industrial food system. In fact it was only back in March of this year 2010, when Keith Owen – an English businessman was sent to jail for three years for doing this exact thing, although in his case on a much, much larger scale. Using his company known as Heart of England Eggs Unlimited, Owen purchased over a two year period, eggs coming from battery-caged hens to only later resell them to other packing companies labelled as free-range and organic. Those eggs later ended up in the UK's largest grocery stores. That practice allowed Owen to pull in the Canadian equivalent of over 4.8 million dollars in profit from that scam.

So again, this Eggs R Uz incident is nothing new, but there is something substantially different this time, because in this case, it was a *local* business operating in what essentially are people's backyards, and its major customer was a co-operative food store with one of the most adhered to buy-local and buy-organic strategies as any Canadian grocery store has. So needless to say, this shook up the people of Wyndell (where Eggs R Uz was located), it shook up the people of the neighbouring Creston Valley and the

people of Nelson and the communities surrounding Kootenay Lake who had been consuming those eggs regularly for years.

So with that as an extended segue, there are of course many lessons to learn from this incident - some of which might not even yet be known. But *two* questions that have arisen (certainly the expected ones) are; number one - how did they get away with it? And number two - how do we prevent and fix the problem?

Well both are fascinating questions. But let's look at the second question first, "how to prevent and fix the problem?" It's pretty expected one; it's the same question that's often asked anytime an incident like this exposes a hole in the system (how do we make business does not get away with something like this again?)

But instead of looking for a 'fix' to what happened (or a preventative measure), we should I believe *first be* asking "can this even be fixed?" Or is there instead something wrong at the *core* of our food system and how our culture has come to access food and how we relate to our food, how we develop relationships with our food. I think we need to be asking that question first.

The other question, question number 1, is "how did we get here?" How did we get to this place where a *local* business *was able* to dupe 18 other local businesses into believing that the eggs were coming from their own farm when as we now know they were not.

And I believe part of the answer can be found by a brief revisiting of what the food system is that we're all a part of, more specifically, what is the food system when looking at it through the lens of corporate concentration. Well when we look at the agricultural component of our food system at this point most of Canada's farms are owned by families, they're family farms. Whereas when we get into the other sectors we get to say, grain handling, dominated by three companies: Viterra, James Richardson & Sons and Cargill. We get into the retail sector of the food system, well there's three major companies, Loblaw, Metro, Sobeys, all controlling about 60% of the grocery retail in the country and another five companies contributing notable percentages, Safeway, Costco, Walmart, Federated Co-ops and Overwaitea. Restaurant Foodservice, same story, two companies Sysco, and Gordon Foodservice (GFS). In the Institutional Foodservice sector, three companies dominating that market, Compass, Sodexo and Aramark. In the beef sector, well we've talked about this before on the show, two companies Cargill, and XL Foods. And in the non alcoholic beverages including water, three major companies, Pepsico, Coca-Cola, and Nestle. In the case of dairy, milk and cheese, four companies Saputo, Agropur, Parmalat and Kraft. In the case of pork, same thing, two companies Maple Leaf and Olymel. And the same goes for every other sector of the food system.

So what does this equal? This high level of corporate concentration. Well it equals a box. It equals a box with limited choice and limited room for navigating *out* of it. What about us eaters, what does our box look like? Well our box appears in the form of a grocery store, and while there might be a very convincing image of choice when we walk into that box, upon deconstructing those options, well nothing could be further from the truth.

What we see on the shelves of a grocery store really has little to do with what we want, but much more to do with which company can pay the highest price for shelf space. That's right, food manufacturers pay to have their product on grocery store shelves. The US Federal Trade Commission has estimated that in the US \$9 billion transfers hands per year, spent on these promotional expenditures, known as slotting fees, failure fees, or staying fees. So the grocery store is more than just a box it really is an impenetrable safe, within which any effort to navigate outside of it seems increasingly difficult. Some might say "oh but the free market, it will solve all of these challenges." Well the former Chief Executive Officer of one of the largest agricultural businesses in the world, Archer Daniels Midland, he said something quite different. He said that, "*the free market is a myth. Everybody knows that. Just very few people say it . . . if I'm not smart enough to know there's no free market, I ought to be fired.*" Again that was Dwayne Andreas, the former CEO of Archer Daniels Midland.

Now back to the Eggs R Uz incident, using the Kootenay Co-op as an example - while this store no doubt represents a promising alternative, it would be foolish to not also recognize that the store (while no doubt being a less *impenetrable* box and one that does work outside of it often) is in many ways still a box! It's competing with the other retailers in the community, it's still bound to only a few distributors who can transport all of that California produce (especially in the winter) to its shelves, and most importantly, it's bound to its members, who so long as they demand to have products of the industrial food system, then members are choosing for the Co-op to remain in that box.

And it's the Eggs R Uz incident which, in my opinion, provides the most tangible evidence of this box that I believe the responsible food movement needs to be very cautious about. That here was a community of people who, even despite our efforts to support what we *thought* was a local producer and farm, we were still unable to pull ourselves far enough *out* of the box to actually see where the food was coming from (until of course I showed up at the "farm").

And for the Co-op and the member owners & customers, the intentions were all good (they were the same intentions that are driving the responsible food movement as it exists today). In this case it was the intention to support local farmers, local eggs; people were paying more per dozen than the vast majority of people in Canada (almost \$5.50/dozen.). But all those good intentions were lost because the effort remained within the four walls of that building (the box), without anyone having ever visited the farm itself.

And this is what I've observed over the past 5 years producing this show, that this widespread support for *local* appears to have become (and unintentionally I would add) much more about supporting the *idea* of local (or for that matter the idea of more responsible food), all so we can walk into a store, into the box, as we always have, select our food, and so long as the label says "local," "organic," "natural," "free-range," well we can walk out of that store, feel good about our purchase, and continue on living the lives that we're used to - never at any point leaving the box.

From Eggs R Uz's perspective, well, they *saw* this box, and everyone stuck inside it, and they took full advantage of the people in the community that I live in and surrounding communities and profited from the higher price people were willing to pay, for what in the end was merely an idea. And again, this incident is a microcosm of the industrial food system for so many reasons. From the perspective of local farmers in this area, well it was this business Eggs R Uz who identified a captive market, dumped a cheap product into the community from somewhere else (we really don't know where from), marketed it as something it was clearly not, and effectively eliminated the opportunity for *actual* farmers on *actual* farms to produce and sell eggs into the local market. And this is what happens every day around the world.

Back to the question "how do we prevent and fix it?" Well, business as usual would mean (and many people have already suggested this) more scrutiny, more regulations, perhaps more certification (organic certification, local certification), and perhaps some of these are good options, but I would strongly urge caution around any of those approaches because those options can too keep us stuck within the box – the one that we now call the industrial food system. And we have the examples to prove it!

What happened when eaters demanded "real"? Well, we got products like Sun Rype juice on which, the label for one product they produce reads in a large font, 100% juice, again 100% juice. Well, nothing could be further from the truth, because turn the container on its side, the ingredients read this: "water, concentrated apple or pear or grape and melon juices, mango puree concentrate, citric acid, natural flavour, vitamin C. Yet somehow, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency who is supposed to be protecting Canadians, permits this product to be on grocery store shelves – a product that is so far from being 100% juice, yet somehow, is allowed to call itself as that. Now similar to the eggs, well, that means a farmer down the road who is *actually* producing a product that is 100% juice, is competing with this, a hands-down a fraudulent product.

What other examples do we have that can caution us from unintentionally maintaining our responsible food interests within the same box that we're seeking to escape out of? Well, what happened when we demanded "Natural?" Well, we ended up with products like the *Natura* brand. A name that evokes a natural product; but similar to before, a glance at the ingredients of their Soy Beverage reveals a concoction of ingredients including nine added vitamins to the product suggestive of course that the product in its actual natural form would not have offered adequate nutrition. What else do we find in the realm of so-called natural foods? How about the increasingly popular Earth Balance brand and their "Natural *Buttery* Spread"? Well, with absolutely no dairy in the product, is a "natural buttery spread" not a complete oxymoron?

And what happened when we demanded "Organic" – well, to no fault of the well-intentioned people and farmers who first launched that movement and many of whom *still* maintain those values of what organic was meant to espouse; today the bulk of organic foods are produced using industrial methods. The word itself has now become regulated, organic produce is often packaged and labelled with *more* packaging than its conventional counterparts, we have products on the market like organic Kraft Dinner, or

Safeway's new organic line of products like organic apple juice from China shipped to North America in a petroleum-based container. And we have fertilizers that are permitted to be used in organic agriculture like SeaSoil, produced on Vancouver Island and containing the by-product of the controversial open-net salmon feedlot industry. With SeaSoil also being an incredibly *heavy* product, it's even more shocking to know that farmers as far away as Nova Scotia on the east coast have become dependent on this product now shipped all over Canada.

And then there was "Farm-Fresh," what happened when we demanded farm-fresh? Well, we got companies like California-based Earthbound Farm, the largest supplier of organic produce in North America – and a company which, despite the name, is in no way a "farm," but instead a major consolidator of products from many farms.

And what happened when we demanded "Ethical"? We got "free range" and "free run" eggs as an example, which on the surface might sound good, but with a little bit of deconstructing, both free-range and free-run simply translate to chickens which, while perhaps not in cages, are nevertheless crammed together indoors.

And then we arrive at "Local" – what happened when we started to demand local? Well what stands as perhaps the epitome of how this demand was too responded to within the food system box, was Unilever's 2009 marketing campaign for the well-known Hellmann's Mayonnaise. Their 'Eat Real, Eat Local' campaign encouraged Canadians to "eat local" and promoted their product alongside the slogan. To Unilever however, local meant Canadian. And of course upon closer look at the ingredients of Hellmann's Mayonnaise (which is produced in only one facility in Toronto) we find canola from the prairies, eggs from Ontario, and vinegar, salt, sugar, spices and lemon juice, clearly being anything *but* local. And again, yet another multinational food company undermining Canada's farmers and their ability to *truthfully* market their product.

And then there was Eggs R Uz – the focal point of our 2010 investigation, when that very same practice of marketing a product as local when in fact it was not, played havoc on the farmers and local food system of the Kootenay region of B.C.

And all of these marketing efforts, (real, natural, organic, farm-fresh, local) all of them are tactics really held together by just a thread and obscured by a thin veil, because all it takes to move out of the box, is for that thread to snap, or for that veil to be lifted, and all those false images that we have (the Old Macdonald had a farm image) well they fall apart, and we can wake up from this sleep.

Here in Nelson, the fall-out epicentre (if you will) of our Eggs R Uz investigation, well a notable percentage of the population did wake up, with the story quite literally becoming the talk of the town. In fact I would say 9 out of 10 people who would stop me in the street and who continue to do so, have said the same thing - I never liked those eggs - yet somehow we here in the community kept buying those eggs, an estimated 7500 a week when you include the other 17 businesses who purchased those eggs. Perhaps it was because the community *thought* that a local farmer or farmers were being supported or

perhaps out of dare I say complacency, manifesting itself into purchasing all of ones food in *one* location as we always have.

And so the point that I'm trying to get at is this; that perhaps the answer we're looking for to *truly* achieve a more responsible food system is *not* within the box. It's not within this narrow perspective that so many of us currently maintain of our food system, where our food comes from, how our food's produced, how we access it, how we prepare it at home; instead perhaps the answer that we're looking for to achieve this truly responsible food system is *outside* of that box.

And that's my message to the responsible food movement as I sign off before Deconstructing Dinner embarks on this indefinite break. I urge caution when throwing your weight behind what might *appear* as an "alternative," but is instead simply a different story - a different story being told within the same box. Refrain from hanging on to where we came from - go there, look around, deconstruct it a bit, but don't stay long - move forward and embrace change.

Someone the other day said to me you know I'm so upset with what's happening to organic food. Organic is about small-scale farming, ecological farming, it's about local, it's ... and without hesitation, I stopped her and I said, "was," "it *was* about all of those things." But today, despite the many, many amazing people and farmers who *are* maintaining those foundational values of organic, those *truly* organic producers and products today exist in the same box as all the other organic products out there including Kraft Organic, Safeway Organic, or Wal-Mart Organic. Besides that, the very fact that farmers need to be what essentially is policed, (that is that an organic farmer is guilty until proven innocent), well that's the sign of a sick food system.

And so while I don't offer any tangible steps today as to how that might look, allowing ourselves to cultivate a food system *outside* of the box, well that's intentional, because how that looks will be different in every community and in every ecosystem, but whatever those steps *are*, breaking out of the box that we call our food system will need to be done with force. That I'm sure of. It won't be a simple name change, it won't be simply redirecting our dollars, I believe what is needed is the most significant change of all, the one that happens inside, whereby our own perspective changes as individuals, and changes dramatically.

And it's that I believe is the most important lesson to learn from the Eggs R Uz incident (and the many other similar stories shared on the show today) that if we *really* want to be a part of fostering a new food system, we need our food system to become a part of us, and us, a part of it. No longer can we simply be a recipient of food as is the current paradigm, we need to *become* the food system. As Buckminster Fuller said, "in order to change something, don't struggle to change the existing model. Create a new model and make the old one obsolete." And then there is Wendell Berry who says: "Eating with the fullest pleasure - pleasure, that is, that does not depend on ignorance - is perhaps the profoundest enactment of our connection with the world. In this pleasure we experience and celebrate our dependence and our gratitude, for we are living from mystery, from

creatures we did not make and powers we cannot comprehend.” And I like this as a quote to help conclude this broadcast. I like it because it honours our dependence on the earth, on each other, and it honours the mystery showcasing itself when we allow ourselves to honour that dependence.

And perhaps the most important thing that I’ve learned when observing the efforts that so many right now are taking to cultivate more responsible food systems, is that the greatest strength that we can find is embracing humility, by embracing what it is we *do not* know; because so often it’s individuals and groups who become *so* convinced that they know the way out of the box, or know how to work within it, it’s that that seems to always spell the futility of those efforts. And what better lesson to learn than that of humility, a word which derives itself from the Latin: *humilitas*, a word which shares its roots with “humus”: humus being any organic matter that has reached a point of stability, where it will break down no further. In other words, our strength, our humility, is found in the soil, in the earth.

So this marks the final episode of Deconstructing Dinner, at least for now. Where this show will go? Time will only tell, but I do hope that in whatever form it does evolve into, that it will offer more than it already has, and continue to inspire even more people and more communities.

As mentioned, the show has operated with a deficit for the past few years, and so any donations that you can make to this almost-5-year-old project are welcomed and will also further go to help support the ongoing presence of Deconstructing Dinner on the web and our archive of 193 shows. You can donate on-line at deconstructingdinner.ca, or you can send your support through the mail. Contact info is also there on-line, but that address for you now is Deconstructing Dinner, CJLY, 308A Hall St, Nelson B.C, postal code V1L 1Y8.

And stay posted to our website and our Facebook page for any updates on the status of Deconstructing Dinner or any important updates on some of the unfinished stories that we had been working on as mentioned at the top of the show. Also posted on the site will be any public speaking tours that I’ll be embarking on, such as my January and February visits to Ontario, Nova Scotia and perhaps Quebec. If your organization, school or group would like to host a Deconstructing Dinner presentation, don’t hesitate to contact me at deconstructingdinner@cjly.net.

And I also encourage you to spread the Deconstructing Dinner word; the show might not be producing new episodes for the time being but many of the shows archived on the site are as relevant if not more relevant today than they have ever been. Because of that, we *will* continue to provide a selection of shows from our archives to the 50 radio stations airing Deconstructing Dinner each week, and those same shows *will* get posted to our weekly podcast and we’ll be doing that until the end of March 2011.

And a final thanks to everyone who has lent their time, resources and support to this show, to Deconstructing Dinner. That includes everyone of course at Kootenay Co-op

Radio and all of the radio stations airing this show, past technical operators John Ryan and Dianne Matenko, volunteers Michael Doratti, contributors like Andrea Langlois and the many great producers whose work has been featured here on the show. All of the musicians whose music we've shared, and especially the music of Adham Shaikh whose piece titled *Infusion* has graced the intro and outro of this show for so many years. Thanks needs to go out to all of the individuals, organizations, schools and businesses who have financially supported this work. Without you, this show would *not* have come this far. And perhaps the biggest thanks needs to go to every person who lent their voice to Deconstructing Dinner and who participated in what I believe is one of the most important dialogues we should all be having today, a dialogue about the future of food.

And with that I'll end with this on that subject, the future of food, because it was only last week when someone asked me, "Jon, what do you think will happen, with all these challenges we're faced with, what do you think will happen to our food?" Now being asked such a big question, I paused, thought for a moment and I said, "well, I think what *will* happen is we'll end up living in a world where most of the food we eat will be so highly processed to the point of being unrecognizable as food, but nevertheless, it will be packaged, labelled and marketed as though it is."

ending theme

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

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

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