

## **How Canadians Communicate VI**



**How Canadians Communicate VI**

**FOOD PROMOTION,  
CONSUMPTION,  
AND CONTROVERSY**

*Edited by Charlene Elliott*



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## **How Canadians Communicate VI**



# Introduction

*Charlene Elliott*

Tell me what thou eatest, and I will tell thee what thou art.

*Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin*

To begin a book on food with Brillat-Savarin's most famous aphorism has become a cliché. As the American journalist Bill Buford observes, the idea that you are what you eat has been "repeated so relentlessly that it is now a modern advertising banality" (2009, viii). Certainly, Brillat-Savarin offers other pithy insights to choose from in his *Physiologie du goût*, including such claims as "the destiny of nations depends on how they nourish themselves" and "the discovery of a new dish does more for human happiness than the discovery of a star" (Brillat-Savarin [1825] 1884, 15, 16). Yet despite aphorisms that tackle such grand themes as national destiny and human happiness, it is his comment on food and identity that steals the limelight: "Tell me what thou eatest, and I will tell thee what thou art."

As a communication scholar, I am interested less in the identity than in the telling, less intrigued by the *you are what you eat* than by the communication through and about food. Brillat-Savarin's "tell me what thou eatest" captures the representation, expression, and language of food; his "I will tell thee what thou art" captures the evaluative component of this representation. The phrase as a whole suggests a dialogue, an interactive exchange around food that—while bound up with normative judgments—is less final than it sounds. It is difficult to imagine that being told "what thou art" would put an end to the conversation. One would imagine, instead, that this would be a starting point for debate.

Conversations and debates about food form the basis of this volume. *How Canadians Communicate VI: Food Promotion, Consumption, and Controversy* brings together a range of scholars and experts who examine important questions about food and communication. Here, we are interested in how food is represented (in terms of advertising, promotion, food journalism, food radio, and food television), how it is regulated (via policy and law, foodways, and food systems), how it is consumed (consumer perceptions and attitudes, Canadian habits of consumption, and so on), and how it figures in various controversies (from debates over pasteurization to responses to contaminated food scares). In tackling broad issues of promotion, policy, consumption, and controversy, we hope to illuminate—and trouble—some important aspects of the contemporary food landscape.

#### FOOD IN THEORY, FOOD IN PRACTICE

Anthropologists have long known that food is “good to think [with]” (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 89) and that it serves powerful social functions (Douglas 1966, [1975] 1999; Douglas and Isherwood 1979).<sup>1</sup> The symbolic nature of food and eating has been examined in anthropology, sociology, history, communication, and cultural studies, as well as in the burgeoning field of food studies. Documenting the “massive expansion” of scholarship on food is a significant task, since food has “permeated almost every scholarly field”—from architecture and film studies to philosophy and geography (Counihan and Van Esterik 2007, 1). Whereas food was once marginalized as a scholarly focus, today we encounter books like *Food: The Key Concepts* (Belasco 2008) and a three-volume encyclopedia devoted entirely to food issues (Albala 2015), not to mention *The A-Z Encyclopedia of Food Controversies and the Law* (Williams and Carter 2011), *The Business of Food: Encyclopedia of the Food and Drink Industries* (Allen and Albala 2007), and the *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture* (Katz 2003).

Despite this encyclopedic treatment, food is more than a collection of discrete “entries” or products. As French cultural theorist Roland Barthes famously observed in the 1960s, food “is not just a collection of products. . . . It is also, and at one and the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a code relating to usage, circumstances and conduct” ([1961] 1999, 926). Although Barthes’s structuralist approach to food aimed to unveil the code or grammar underlying people’s food preferences—a

task of some complexity—his point is also straightforward: namely, that what we consider to be “food” extends far beyond its nutritive (or economic) value. As a system of communication, people use food to differentiate themselves from others, to establish rules of behaviour (“protocols”), and as a form of classification. To provide a modern example, Barthes would probably suggest understanding the early status and success of Starbucks coffee within the context of the larger world of coffee, including Tim Hortons and McCafé. Stated differently, the meaning of Starbucks’s customized espresso-based (and barista-prepared) drinks makes sense only when framed in light of the world of the “double-double.” (Given Tim Hortons’ fiercely loyal customer base, and \$2.54 billion net revenue in 2010 [Tim Hortons 2010], it is difficult to determine which “meaning” is winning out.) The protocols surrounding coffee are equally intriguing: the beverage stands as both a signifier of the workday and a social break (“Let’s meet for coffee”). Coffee is a morning ritual for many Canadians, but this morning protocol does not extend to all caffeinated beverages: we may drink coffee with sugar but object to Coca-Cola at breakfast.

A second example of food as communication involves the recognition that eating organic isn’t merely about avoiding pesticides. Rather, the choice of organic foods is often bound up with larger issues of identity (“I only eat organic in a world of industrialized food production”), as well as with issues of status, economics, and politics. For Barthes, the diets we select, the menus we create, all refer to a much larger set of themes and situations—so, too, do our choices of products and brands, restaurants, supermarkets, farmers’ markets, and the like.

Considering food *as* communication, and also food *and* communication provide important insight. The former allows for an exploration of food itself and its place in a larger system; the latter asks us to consider our “conversations” around food (broadly conceived) and the ways that foods: (1) become transformed into particular kinds of edible commodities through packaging, marketing, and promotion; (2) are managed and governed (through public relations, policy, and regulation).

This said, communication and food may be considered even more tightly intertwined. As John Peters observes in his history of the idea of communication, the word *communication* comes from “the Latin *communicare*, meaning to impart, share, or make common” (1999, 9). In Latin, *communicatio* “did not signify the general arts of human connection via symbols, nor did it

suggest the hope for some kind of mutual recognition. Its sense was not in the least mentalistic: *communicatio* generally involved tangibles" (7). Understanding communication as sharing and partaking in things that are tangible underscores the natural intimacy between *communicare* and food.

Invoking the Latin *communicare* in relation to communication and food is only part of the picture. The other part, I suggest, is nicely captured by Stuart Hall, one of the founding figures of British cultural studies, who reminds us that "when we speak of 'communications' in a consumer society, we have to think . . . of how other people speak at us" (1960)—rather like a kind of packaging. Combining the Latin *communicare* with Hall's sense of communications in a consumer society thus gives us the sense of something tangible that we share and partake of and that is deliberately designed to tell us something in particular: viewed in light of food, the first sense of communication is about sharing food; the second is about its packaging. And both of these meanings make food a powerful vehicle of engagement, since consumers figuratively and literally feast on the entertainment and visual tantalization provided by food and food-related media.

The American Federal Trade Commission reports that in 2009, the food industry spent \$9.65 billion promoting food and beverages to consumers, using the full spectrum of promotional activities—from television advertising and product placement to video game advertising and viral marketing. Of that, \$1.79 billion was spent directly targeting children and youth (Leibowitz et al. 2012, ES-2).<sup>2</sup> The global beverage-packaging market alone is predicted to grow some \$28 billion in the next five years, reaching \$125.7 billion by 2018 (O'Halloran 2013). Packaging and marketing aside, consumers feast on everything from *Top Chef Canada*, *Cupcake Wars*, and Anthony Bourdain's *No Reservations* to the 475,000 recipes on Food.com, the glossy pages of *Bon Appetit*, and the countless Facebook pages, blogs, and Twitter feeds devoted to food. Food also takes centre stage in networks that create content, like YouTube (with some 4.9 million channels on "food") and curation networks like Pinterest. The resulting jumble of food messaging is overwhelming.

#### OUR MODERN FOODSCAPE: COMPLEXITY AND CHOICE

This all makes eating sound tremendously complicated. In many respects, it is. The typical American makes close to two hundred decisions about

food each day (Wansink 2013, 277). In 2013, US grocery stores offered, on average, almost forty-four thousand items to choose from, while a superstore may stock closer to sixty-thousand items.<sup>3</sup> Canadians, presented with a similar cornucopia, are constantly bombarded with messaging about how and what to eat. Health and nutritional claims confetti across food packages, and food-related advice comes from government organizations, health professionals, advocacy groups, newspapers, radio and television shows, magazines, blogs, Twitter feeds, and the food industry itself. The fact that a 611-page tome *What to Eat* (Nestle 2006) even exists is a telling sign of the complexity of our modern foodscape. Its subtitle, *An Aisle-by-Aisle Guide to Savvy Food Choices and Good Eating*, suggests that navigating those 43,000-plus supermarket products may, in fact, take some time. With eighteen full pages devoted to the conundrum of “butter versus margarine,” seven pages on decoding ingredient lists in frozen foods, and entire chapters on the “dilemmas and quandaries” pertaining to fish, the safety of meat, and the issue of bottled water, *What to Eat* transforms a quick jaunt to the grocery store into a research-based exercise.

Journalist and foodie Michael Pollan contributes to this prescriptive vision of food with his rather lightweight book *Food Rules* (2009), which, ironically, starts from the premise that eating doesn’t have to be so “complicated” before launching into 139 pages and dozens of rules of eating. Pollan’s succinct mantra—“Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants” (elaborated in his 2007 book *In Defense of Food*)—splinters into sixty-four “personal policies” and “broad guidelines” aimed to make “everyday decision making easier and swifter” (xix). The book includes such hints as “Don’t eat anything your great-grandmother wouldn’t recognize as food” (7), “Don’t eat breakfast cereals that change the color of the milk” (79), and “It’s not food if it arrived through the window of your car” (43). These specific hints, I would suggest, seek to guard against food impersonation, food “cosmetics,” and food classification, respectively. Pollan also lists rules that directly pertain to the communication around food, ranging from the names of the edibles themselves to how they are promoted: for instance, “It’s not food if it’s called by the same name in every language. (Think Big Mac, Cheetos, or Pringles)” (45); “Avoid food products with the wordoid ‘lite’ or the terms ‘low-fat’ or ‘nonfat’ in their names” (21); “Avoid food products that make health claims” (19); and “Avoid foods you see advertised on television” (25).

Such advice joins many other cautionary books and films about placing faith in the food industry, including Michael Moss's *Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us* (2013) and Gyorgy Scrinis's *Nutritionism: The Science and Politics of Dietary Advice* (2013). Indeed, such cautions are wise, given the research showing that food products marketed as "better for you" are often as much about marketing as they are about nutrition (Elliott 2012). Consider, for example, Coca-Cola's advertisements for Vitamin Water that promoted the beverage as "delicious and nutritious" even though a 500-millilitre bottle contained twenty-three grams of sugar: the average consumer would not expect a "nutritious" drink to contain four to five teaspoons of added sugar (266). Or consider the fact that Nature's Path EnviroKidz Koala Crisp cereal—containing 40 percent calories from sugar—has a higher percentage of calories from sugar than Kellogg's Pop Tarts (36 percent) and has the same percentage of sugar calories found in marshmallow Lucky Charms cereal (271).

Issues of food complexity, food rules, and marketing manipulation barely scratch the surface of issues pertaining to the ways in which Canadians communicate about food. There is much more to say, and this volume brings together scholarly perspectives from a range of disciplinary fields, including communication studies, history, marketing, english, nutritional sciences, geography, and museum studies. All have much to contribute to an understanding of how food is being thought about and communicated in Canada. This book structures the conversation about food under the broad themes of food promotion, food communication, and food controversy. Along with the academic contributors, the volume offers three essays from "food insiders"—a bestselling cookbook author and food editor, a veteran restaurant reviewer and food writer, and an executive chef and culinary tourism provider—all of whom offer perspectives on what is happening in the world of food. These "Insider Voice" chapters provide valuable insights from those who have worked to shape the food experiences of Canadians, whether they are cooking, eating, or simply thinking about food.

## FOOD PROMOTION

We start with a look at what is offered up for consumption to Canadians, including the various environments in which food is represented and the



forms of communication used to promote foods. Part 1, on food promotion, examines the notion of place, food packaging, and the marketing of food in Canada. Charlene Elliott and Wayne McCready open the discussion by exploring how place of origin functions as a significant marketing strategy. They draw attention to the way in which certain packaged products gain distinctiveness by building on the values that consumers attribute to specific places, whether real or imagined. Labelling a product's place of origin can be an effective marketing strategy because it appeals to a basic human condition: food and humans are always emplaced, and humans seek meaning through emplacement.

While Elliott and McCready suggest that we consider the packaging of foods and brands in light of constructions of place, Jordan LeBel provides more practical insight into the key place where most food selection and food expenditures actually occur: the supermarket. LeBel describes the food retail landscape from the perspective of manufacturers and retailers, illuminating the complexity of the \$90 billion "food-at-home" market (Canada, AgCan 2013, 84). Introducing a range of industry-specific terms such as "share of stomach," "speed scratch," "premiumization," and "ready-to-eat," LeBel details how the operating realities of the retail end of the agrifood system work to influence what Canadians eat and how they relate to food. LeBel's work complements the data available on how Canadians spend their food dollars. We know, for example, that Canadians spent \$110.8 billion on food and beverages at retail stores in 2012, with the average Canadian household spending 18 percent of its grocery budget on meat, poultry, and processed meats and 16 percent on dairy products and eggs (Food in Canada 2013, 4, 12, 8). We know that Canadians are big snackers, spending \$1.8 billion annually on snack foods and \$3.3 billion a year on sugar and confectionary products (17, 21). Canadians are also interested in both health and indulgence, with "better for you" snacks and premium-priced confectionery and ice cream products in high demand (4). And Canadians are spending less time than they used to on food preparation, driving a demand for ready-to-serve salads, presliced fruits and vegetables, and ready-to-cook or ready-to-reheat foods (21). While such details are compelling in terms of mapping what Canadians spend on food and like to eat, LeBel unveils the factors that nudge us into eating what we do.

Chapter 3 also deals with packaged food products, focusing on the promotion of better-for-you foods. Similarly to LeBel, Valerie Tarasuk draws

attention to manufacturer-driven trends in food, but she does it by examining food fortification and the all-important role of Canada's regulatory environment in fostering particular food trends. Tarasuk cautions that today's nutrition-labelling regulations and practices have ushered in a "new era of food fortification" in which manufacturers sell nutritionally enhanced products with nutrient levels that far exceed the required daily intake of healthy adults. Despite the abundant marketing of functional and fortified foods, I suggest that Canadians are left in a "communicative desert" when it comes to getting the information necessary to make an informed choice. As Tarasuk observes, the only mandatory nutrition labelling on food products in Canada is the Nutrition Facts table, which is based on outdated science and "communicates nothing about whether prospective consumers would benefit by adding more of the particular nutrients supplied by a particular product to their diets." Simply put, "selling nutrition" in Canada is often done at the expense of informed consumerism and public health.

Rounding out the section on food promotion is Eric Pateman's "Insider Voice" on culinary tourism. As CEO of Canada's largest culinary tourism company, Pateman offers his perspective on the marketability of place and Canadian food. As he notes, the Destination Canada has identified local Canadian cuisine as one of "Canada's five Unique Selling Propositions"—and it is a proposition that has driven both the creation and cultivation of distinctively Canadian food products.

## FOOD AND COMMUNICATION

Shifting from food "places" and promotion, we move to the theme of *food and communication*. Part 2 explores communication and "talk" about food, examining cookbooks, radio and television food shows, blogs, and reviews that—like food packaging—promote manners of eating. Food media create and/or channel certain styles of food, presentation, aesthetics, and expectations. Its educational and entertainment values often come bundled with implications for identity, tradition, and gender.

Ken Albala and Elizabeth Baird open the conversation on food media in Canada by exploring the question of whether, in fact, there is anything particularly Canadian about it. Examining the cookbook as communication, both authors argue that, indeed, there is. Albala illustrates how *La cuisinière canadienne* (the first culinary text published in Canada, in 1840)

provided a prescriptive vision for Montréal Canadians through its recipes and helped to shape a sense of a distinct heritage through food. His argument for an evolving yet distinctive cuisine—and one that creates traditions “in the very act of setting in print signature recipes that define this culture”—is echoed by Baird in her “Insider Voice” contribution (found in Chapter 9). The author of more than twenty-five cookbooks and a former food editor of *Canadian Living* magazine, Baird reflects on the Canadian foodscape. Baird also finds the building blocks of a Canadian cuisine in our regional ingredients, distinctive cooking techniques, identifiable “heroes,” and iconic dishes.

Jacqueline Botterill explores the “talk” around food quite literally, reporting on in-depth interviews that she conducted to reveal how Canadians apprehend and talk about dinner party experiences. Her research reveals the importance of sociability over status in the contemporary Canadian environment when it comes to dinner parties. Based on interviews with forty-seven Ontario residents in two different age cohorts, she suggests that the dinner party works to “construct an unmediated space of togetherness and the mindful preparation and consumption of food.” Her interviewees revealed the place of media in the modern dinner party: while they generally frowned on media use such as television watching and texting on mobile phones during dinner parties, they reported relying on media for content and coordination purposes. Cookbooks, food magazines, and food websites provide inspiration for menus (and cooking instruction for younger respondents), while Facebook and Doodle function as useful tools for inviting guests, at least for the younger cohort. Botterill’s work underscores how, for the Canadians in her study, conversation, connection, and collegiality remain the most important considerations in planning and executing dinner parties.

Dinner party conversation, the talk around food, segues smoothly to Nathalie Cooke’s chapter on Canadian food radio. While Botterill examines talk “around” food and the value of sociability, Cooke explores Canadian audiences’ long-standing appetite for food talk on radio—probing the meanings ascribed to food when it is served up on the airways, the opportunities and constraints that food programming creates for women, and why hearing about food (without being able to see or taste it) appeals to listeners. Cooke also highlights the commercial underpinnings of food radio. In the past, “food talk” was often about product endorsement dressed in an

educational apron, but it was also understood as providing a genuine service—sharing expertise in home economics with Canadian women. Cooke wraps up her chapter by describing the vibrant food radio programming of today, which offers an educational counterpoint to the fluff that typifies much of food television’s programming, and by underscoring the anticipation generated by hearing about food.

Like food talk on radio, nascent food television programming aimed to educate and entertain. In her chapter on the relationship between food television and masculinity, Irina Mihalache examines the “unintentional pedagogical acts” found in programs on Food Network. She argues that food television is less about making us better cooks than about communicating identity. By analyzing the transformation of the cupcake—“the quintessential symbol of domestic femininity”—in the hands of male celebrity chefs Chuck Hughes and Alton Brown, Mihalache suggests that food television provides a stage for the performance of masculine identity within that classically feminine space, the kitchen.

The final two selections in part 2 air the voice of insiders. First, Elizabeth Baird reflects on Canadian cuisine and the many “voices” that create it—not to mention the importance of Canada’s heritage ingredients, distinctive food “heroes” and iconic dishes. Then John Gilchrist provides the voice of the food critic. A prominent radio personality in Calgary, Gilchrist has reviewed restaurants weekly for CBC radio for over three decades. His essay discusses the delicate balancing act that food critics perform in providing both entertainment and evaluation. He also discusses how the changing media landscape, including “digital noise,” has buffeted the traditional critical review.

## FOOD CONTROVERSY

As noted earlier, communication about food is not as simple or as uncontested as Brillat-Savarin’s aphorism about identity suggests, and food-related controversies abound. The chapters in part 3 touch on what happens when the system fails. Such food-related “failures” are readily identifiable: food insecurity amounts to a system failure in which people cannot afford enough to eat; the obesity epidemic represents a failure of proper nutrition (and, some would say, the success of food marketing and pseudo-foods); food-borne illnesses result from a failure of proper food handling,

inspection, or control; and industrialized food production can be viewed as a failure to support the local, small-scale farm producer (and as a triumph of distorted farm legislation and food policies/subsidies). But food controversies such as these are also not that straightforward. The controversies themselves are contested, as is demonstrated by many chapters in this section. Pierre Desrochers, for example, contests the widely publicized rhetoric and what he calls the “one-sided narrative” of the local food movement, suggesting that locavorism is riddled with myths and lies that harm humanity and the planet. Stephen Kline contests the journalistic framing of the obesity “epidemic” in children, suggesting that the moral panic around childhood obesity is a triumph of public relations over science. And Charlene Elliott and Josh Greenberg show how Canada’s largest-ever food recall (meat processed by XL Foods at the Brooks, Alberta, plant) isn’t simply about contaminated meat. Rather, it contains important lessons about the importance of communication and the (mis)handling of risk. In all of these cases, the role of communication—and particularly the media framing and PR handling of the food problem or controversy—is front and centre.

Part 3 begins with an examination of the history of milk pasteurization in Canada. Catherine Carstairs, Paige Schell, and Sheilagh Quaile show that current debates over the pasteurization of milk, spearheaded by advocates for raw milk, are not new. Carstairs and her colleagues foreground the advertising campaigns, pamphlets, exhibits, and government-sponsored “blue books” on child care that promoted milk consumption to Canadians, and especially Canadian mothers, in the early decades of the 1900s. Long before regulations made pasteurization compulsory, large commercial dairies, not simply public health officials, played a central role in promoting pasteurization.

Melanie Rock’s chapter also takes up the topic of milk—specifically with regard to its absence in charitable giving. Food bank donations are critically important in light of the persistent problem of food insecurity throughout the country. A recent report reveals that 3.9 million Canadians struggle to afford the food they require and, sadly, that food insecurity has continued or increased in almost every province or territory since 2005 (Tarasuk, Mitchell, and Dachner 2014, 2). Rock’s chapter opens with the premise that “milk insecurity is often the epitome of food insecurity in Canada”; she then urges us to rethink food insecurity by considering Kraft Dinner, a product frequently donated to food banks because of its

reputation for being palatable, nutritionally complete, easy to prepare, and convenient to store. At the same time, Canadians who donate Kraft Dinner to food banks rarely reflect on the need for milk in Kraft Dinner's preparation: milk adds nutrition and taste, yet is often beyond the means of food-insecure Canadians. Rock suggests that the popularity of Kraft Dinner donations to food banks reveals that many Canadians are misinformed about the nature and extent of poverty in their midst.

Along similar lines, Rebecca Carruthers Den Hoed, through the figure of the "hipster hunter," urges Canadians to rethink food provisioning. This new hunter—in search of local, organic, natural food—could revitalize hunting across the country. However, "hipster hunting" also brings with it certain risks: namely, a new discursive rendering of "good" hunting—centred around notions of food quality—that threatens to exacerbate old (and to introduce new) forms of discrimination into Canadian hunting. Although excited at the prospect of encouraging more food-focused hunting in Canada, Carruthers Den Hoed urges foodies and scholars to consider the unforeseen consequences of their food talk and texts on others and to work actively to counteract injustices that new food trends create or perpetuate, usually unintentionally.

Pierre Desrochers also takes up the issue of "right living" through food provisioning, but he is far from sanguine about the viability of locavorism as a means of food-system reform. Acting as a counterpoint to Carruthers Den Hoed, Desrochers challenges the "erroneous information" and the "impractical and environmentally harmful solutions" presented by the locavore movement. Desrochers suggests that locavorism is "just a new spin on an old agricultural protectionist rhetorical package." In this spirit, he articulates and rebuts what he identifies as five key myths articulated by local food activists and points out the benefits of our globalized food supply chain.

Charlene Elliott and Josh Greenberg examine what happens when the system fails. Focusing on two recent "food scares," their perspective contrasts with Desrochers's optimistic view of the industrialized food system. Elliott and Greenberg examine how institutional actors in the food safety chain communicated with Canadians during two major outbreaks: the 2012 *E. coli* scare associated with XL Foods meat and the 2008 *Listeria* outbreak linked to Maple Leaf Foods. The problem, they argue, was not simply about the risk of consuming contaminated meat but also about the

communication strategies used in the crises, with the XL Foods response working to undermine consumer confidence and the Maple Leaf Foods response working to restore it.

Stephen Kline also examines the risks associated with food: in this case, the “globesity” and illness caused by eating too much of the wrong kinds of food. As in Elliott and Greenberg’s chapter, health and (mis)communication are front and centre. Kline shows how growth in the reporting of the obesity “epidemic” and the use of medicalized discourses helped to galvanize parents and health advocates against the mass marketing of food. He argues that the moral panic over the contribution of food marketing to childhood obesity fails to recognize the multiple lifestyle factors that contribute to weight gain in both children and adults.

In the book’s final chapter, Harvey Levenstein deftly unpacks the fascinating history of food fears in modern North America, a history in which the fields of science and communications tightly intertwine. Scientific discoveries of vitamins and germs, including Louis Pasteur’s “germ theory” of disease, and advances in chemistry that led to new forms of food preservation propelled forward certain fears about food, which were amplified through mass circulation newspapers and magazines. Levenstein shows how early muckraking journalists and media hype led to support for government regulation of food producers and processors; how the food producers employed costly advertising campaigns that used fear—of, for example, vitamin deficiency and contamination—to sell packaged, vitamin-enriched products; and how the media, particularly television, were later seen to be hiding information about food dangers, such as the dangers of chemical additives. As a whole, Levenstein reveals the indeterminate, shifting position of mainstream media when it comes to food fears—on the one hand, galvanizing public and government action by promoting scares about germs, pesticides, chemical additives, vitamin deficiency, lipophobia, and the like, and on the other, being suspected of “hiding facts” in order to appease corporate sponsors. Communication thus functions in generating and “solving” fears about food.

The themes that run through this book capture, in manifold ways, the intersections among promotion, values, and meanings related to food—and the fact that Canadians should not uncritically consume what is being “served” to them. Food and communication can provide the experience of belonging and communion; it can also, as Levenstein suggests, threaten

“death on a plate.” Brillat-Savarin starts the discussion rolling with “Tell me what thou eatest, and I will tell thee what thou art.” In considering food *as* communication and also food *and* communication, the contributors to this volume underscore just how much more talking needs to be done.

#### NOTES

- 1 This pithy statement is often quoted in food-related literature, and somewhat inaccurately, since Lévi-Strauss was talking about the ways that traditional societies placed taboos on eating totem animals. These animals, he argued, were important because they were symbolic; that is, they were “good to think with” rather than simply good to eat.
- 2 Canadian figures are not available, since our federal Competition Bureau—the Canadian equivalent to the FTC—has not collected such data.
- 3 For US grocery store statistics, see “Supermarket Facts,” on the Food Marketing Institute website, where numbers are updated regularly: <http://www.fmi.org/research-resources/supermarket-facts>. Superstore statistics can be found in Moss (2013, 27).

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PART ONE



FOOD PROMOTION







# Communicating Food Quality

## Food, Packaging, and Place

*Charlene Elliott and Wayne McCready*

A recent road trip in the Okanagan valley of British Columbia included a stop at a busy log-barn-styled food stand near the town of Armstrong. In addition to the displays of vintage farm equipment, bountiful shelves of local fruit and vegetables, free food samples, and gospel music playing in the background—there was an eye-catching “Log Barn 1912” logo on a host of food products that included Mennonite pies, Mennonite sausage, jams, jellies, pickles, Gouda cheese, fresh baking, and more. Sales staff assured customers that Log Barn 1912 food was natural, contained no additives, and was locally produced in the Armstrong area.

The “Mennonite Pies” box (see figure 1.1) communicates a clear message of what these food products are all about: the packaging features a wood-fired oven surrounded by log walls and the roof of a barn and, in the background, a collage of images, including a black and white family photo (perhaps from the 1940s), a woman with wheat fields in the background, a child praying, and a laughing woman and child rubbing noses. The text boldly declares “Log Barn 1912 Mennonite Pies” and “Handmade Flaky Butter Crust Pie.” The “Mennonite Ham Sausage” packaging (see figure 1.2) offers a similarly rustic feel, portraying a small child in western dress walking toward a forest and a logo image of a log barn with goats walking along the roof.

The Log Barn 1912 food labels effectively evoke notions of product quality established through associations with the rural West, nature, and

Mennonite culture—their traditions, family values, and religious virtues. The company website ([www.logbarn.ca](http://www.logbarn.ca)) further explains that the brand “strives to provide a healthy and nostalgic experience inspired by the culinary traditions of Mennonite pioneers.” Encouraging online viewers to “come and enjoy the peaceful setting of our Log Barn 1912 Armstrong location,” even if only to “daydream the afternoon away in an environment that is sensory and refreshing,” it presents the following mission statement:

In our infancy as a business we dared to believe that, outside of our mere survival, we could contribute to positively impacting the world. While not always being successful, and having countless reasons to fold, we have held on to our vision strongly enough to drive us through adversity. In doing so, we have grown our tiny family roadside fruit stand in to an emergent business that supports and promotes the Okanagan region of British Columbia.



Figure 1.1 Log Barn 1912 “Mennonite Pies” package, a celebration of family values



**Figure 1.2** Log Barn 1912 “Mennonite Ham Sausage” package, evoking the rural and rustic West

It is the place in connection with the product that captures our attention here. Food explicitly linked to a place of origin, of course, is typically represented as “good” simply because the food’s ingredients are presumed to be local and natural and its production more socially embedded, making the product seem more nourishing and trustworthy. In the case of the Log Barn 1912 brand, the food products are marked as qualitatively different from—and superior to—those of competitors because, as the website specifies, they are a product of the “peaceful setting of our Log Barn 1912 Armstrong location” and of the traditions of the Mennonite pioneers who settled in that location. The Mennonite sausages, for example, are all natural, free of fillers and added fats or flavours—presumably not because of Canadians’ current concerns about health or processed foods but because that was the tradition of Mennonite pioneers. Log Barn foods, in this sense, are deliberately packaged in a way that emplaces them within a territory associated with close-knit community, relations of trust, moral and spiritual virtue, authenticity, and uncompromised nature, thereby positioning them as distinct from (and superior to) other packaged products.

This chapter considers food labels, food products and processes, and food marketing, with a specific focus on the role of “place” in promoting,

representing, and affirming distinctive quality foods. To this end, we examine how food and place intertwine, analyzing in particular how constructions of “place” promote claims about food quality.

#### PLACE STUDIES AND THE REPRESENTATION OF FOOD

In *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, Edward Casey (1997, ix) observes: “This much is true for place: we are immersed in it. To be at all—to exist in any way—is to be somewhere and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place. Place is as requisite as the air we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have. We live in places, relate to others in them, die in them. Nothing we do is unplaced. How could it be otherwise?” Casey’s proposal—that place is an experiential fact of human existence—is pivotal to understanding the representation of food when its “place of origin” matters. The meaning of the word *place* (from the Greek *plateia*, meaning “wide way” or “street”) is both simple and complex. Affirming that “Banff is a nice place” is straightforward with reference to its location in the Canadian Rockies and the experiences of its breathtaking scenery. To “know your place” suggests there is a social order to be acknowledged and followed—and suggests that “place” can be dense with meaning (including the application of social and cultural mores).

More generally, “place” is a social construct that informs how humans see, know, understand, and experience the world. As Tim Cresswell (1996) notes, places are vested with meaning and power. People fight over places; people are excluded from places; people experience places at a profound level. People also “package” and commodify places to promote food consumption, be it through regional tourism, culinary tourism, or packaged foods. Robert Sack, in *Progress: Geographical Essays* (2002, vii–viii), proposes that humans are “place-makers” in that they transform geographic and natural realms into built, social, and cultural environments through imagining alternative realities to what already exists, and because they believe that places can be constructed through human initiative. Understanding humans as profoundly place bound does not imply boundaries or limits in the geometric sense of perimeter—but in the ontological sense of a circumstance that is intrinsic to existence. Furthermore, being place bound invites meaning making, as well as refinement of identity and self-definition, for individuals and communities who are framed and conditioned by location and a sense of place.



Like everything else that relates to human activity, food and food processes are always emplaced. Food is prepared, processed, and eaten in places. Theoretical perspectives on place-making explain that it involves active engagement by humans with the places they inhabit. That is, place-making is an active, willed process, not a passive one (Fettes and Judson 2011, 124). A place exists as a place because of the efforts humans expend to engage it—and it is hard to imagine a clearer example of place-making than the active and willed process of food production and consumption.

Place studies scholarship is typically based on the understanding that place entails three primary characteristics: *location*—where a site, object, or activity is located (for example, the actual site of the Log Barn food stand near Armstrong); *locale*—where activities occur, the “where” of social life and environmental change (the traditional Mennonite setting in which Log Barn foods are produced and sold, for example); and *sense of place*—the emotional and experiential attachments to a place (such as the place-based experiences encouraged by the Log Barn website—“listen to morning birds sing and watch the sunrise” while indulging in French toast with special butter caramel syrup).<sup>1</sup>

Notably, it is the sense of place that features most prominently in the communication of the Log Barn 1912 brand. Using food labels and online marketing, the Log Barn 1912 brand constructs and communicates a distinct sense of place by associating its products with a specific location and local Mennonite culture, with traditional Mennonite production methods and ingredients, and with a nostalgic return to nature and an emplaced (Mennonite, western) past. The resulting sense of place suffuses the Log Barn brand, to the point where clear distinctions between the food and its place of origin dissolve; rather, they are interwoven and co-constitutive. Moreover, the resulting sense of place fosters within consumers a profound sense of “place attachment,” which is key to communicating the appeal of emplaced food.

We understand place attachment here, as part of the larger context of “sense of place.” The notion of place attachment not only provides insight into how people understand their experiential engagement with meaningful places, but also embraces what people do in those places. It encompasses a dynamic of setting, individual and group behaviour, and value-based evaluation. It involves connection to place that is forged through a trajectory of direct and imaged experiences that range from leisure to home life to

work places. Importantly, place attachment relies heavily on symbols and images to express what a particular place represents and why it is meaningful. “These connections [to place] are created regardless of whether a person has lived someplace their entire life, visited briefly, or has never spent time there” (Amsden, Stedman, and Kruger 2011, 34). The fact that the connection may be entirely imagined by the consumer is what makes the Log Barn packaging effective beyond the boundaries of the local community in British Columbia. The Armstrong-based food and food processes connect consumers (regardless of their own locations)—through images of family values, childhood innocence, and home baking—to the quality food claims of the Log Barn business. Visiting the fruit stand near Armstrong arguably affirms the values expressed in the Log Barn logo and images because traditional Mennonite culinary preparation is promoted in a friendly and effective manner; however, the Log Barn packaging alone engenders place attachment by promoting family, resiliency, and entrepreneurial and religious values, so that consumers can easily imagine they are experiencing the “peaceful setting of our Log Barn 1912 Armstrong location” without actually being there. Perhaps this is too much to expect of premade sausage or “flaky butter crust pie,” but, as Edward Casey (1987, 186–87) observes, place is formative in linking objects (such as food products) to intangible feelings, experiences, and value-based perceptions. “It is the stabilizing persistence of place as a container of experiences that contributes so powerfully to its intrinsic memorability,” he argues. “We might even say that memory is naturally place-oriented or at least place-supported.” In this way, the sense of place and place attachment invoked by Log Barn food packaging and marketing are arguably essential to making the brand—and the food—appear both stable and memorable.

#### THE GEOGRAPHIC IMAGINATION, NOSTALGIA, AND FOOD LABELS

Robert Feagan (2007, 23) notes that “food and place are intertwined in robust ways in the geographic imagination.” But how, exactly, are food, place, and imagination linked? Mark Fettes and Gillian Judson (2011, 124) argue that imagination plays an essential role in place-making because it involves a conceptual “reaching out” toward new possibilities. They suggest, for example, that environmental activists confirm that seeing a familiar and loved place change through development, pollution, and overexploitation

underscores the fragility of not only that particular place but, through imagination, other places. “A vision of what their own community might become, in their own lifetime or that of their children, fuels the passion of many place-based cultural activists,” they note, going on to argue that “three features of place-making—emotional attachment, active cognition, and a sense of possibility—are all hallmarks of imagination” (124–25).

All three of these place-making/imagination features are evident when food is connected with place. Place of food origin and food labels promoting place can evoke an “emotional attachment” because eating is a first-order experiential activity with vested consequences (survival and well-being). Eating also involves conscious awareness of what is being eaten—at least, among the people who choose to reflect critically upon their food choices. As Fettes and Judson (2011, 124–25) observe about the visions of place-based activists, “place does not simply supply a blank canvas for the projection of such visions,” and the same is true when it comes to food. And finally, most food consumers who pay attention to place-related images, symbols, and logos are attempting to understand the place of food and its embedded context through imagination (a “sense of possibility”). The Log Barn food labels are effective because they appeal to the imagination of the consumer by referencing culinary practices that affirm traditional values and validate an imagined, more “nature-based” place of food production—one that stands in stark contrast to the industrial food complex revealed by such popular documentaries as *Food, Inc.* (2008), *King Corn* (2007), *Fast Food Nation* (2006), and the like.

Of course, all food packaging invites consumers to situate themselves in relation to the package images and claims: the explosion of front-of-package and organic claims tap into a particular kind of consumer imagination. Similarly, packaged “exotic” (or unfamiliar) foods speak to the culinary and touristic imaginations of those consumers seeking more cosmopolitan or global tastes (Elliott 2008). There is also a robust literature on the eroticization of food, which examines how media representations “often stylistically code food with an erotic aura” (Lindenfeld 2011, 13). In contrast to the communication of the organic, the exotic, and the erotic—all of which imagine food in and of different places, be they natural, foreign, or embodied—the Log Barn 1912 labelling speaks of a past place. The geographic imagination of the Log Barn brand is not the conceptual “reaching out” toward new possibilities suggested by Fettes and Judson (2011, 124) but a reaching

backward into an earlier era. Specifically, the sense of place invoked by Log Barn food labels is rooted in an imagined past populated by idealized agrarian Mennonite pioneers who settled in an idealized bountiful and peaceful Canadian West. While this imagined past is not complete fiction, it is carefully manufactured with reference to the real, pieced together using a strategic selection of images and symbols that encourage consumers to envision a rural idyll that will, marketers hope, attract their attention and sell pies.

#### FINDING OUR PLACE: ORIGINS, INGREDIENTS, AND THE VALUES OF FOOD PRODUCERS

Several years ago, Brian Ilbery headed up a study that compared food marketing and labelling schemes in Europe and North America. It included over five hundred local food and drink products registered in the European Union under Protected Designation of Origin or Protected Geographical Indication programs. The study examined the ways in which intrinsic qualities of place and management practices linked to food products and processes seek to demonstrate food quality; that is, how food is positioned as both distinct from and superior to other products. Three essential ingredients for constructing food quality were identified: product, process, and place (Ilbery et al. 2005, 118). For example, the French Comté label, which marks one of the cheeses in France that has AOC (Appellation d'origine contrôlée) certification, represents some 3,200 milk producers, 190 cheese dairies, and 20 cheese-refining centres producing over 46,000 tonnes of cheese collectively. The AOC label promotes a local economy (dairy farmers using unpasteurized milk products, as well as cheese production and refining centres), a specific upland environment (chalk-based grass meadows), and traditional products and practices (linking a particular breed of cattle, Montbelliard, to defined grass-based feeding practices, resulting in unique dairy products). As Ilbery and his colleagues affirm, "It is clear that the 'Comté' label demonstrates elements of all three Ps [product, process, and place]. The product has reinforced the territorial identity of the region, both through the enrolment of local actors into a collective project and through recognition of the region and its qualities through the product and its marketing" (125).

Ilbery et al.'s North American case studies include Foodland Ontario, established in 1977; the New Brunswick Product Promotion Plan, founded

in 1981; and Buy British Columbia, started in 1993. These case studies dealt with strategically focused food chains that explicitly or implicitly fostered the marketing of “superiority” and “difference” in labelling schemes; connect producer and consumer through the promotion of artisanal products (versus mass-produced products) and regional products (versus the geographic anonymity typically associated with global-oriented food chains) (Ilbery and Kneafsey 1998; see also Kneafsey 2010; Berndt and Boeckler 2009). Ilbery and his colleagues examined products, processes, and place via two broad but interrelated rationales: a territorial-development rationale and a critical rationale.

The territorial-development rationale deliberately promotes a territory or region by emphasizing the distinctive place-origins of food products, such as cheese, wine, fruits, and vegetables that affirm “traditional” livelihoods, enhance territorial identity, and foster community cohesion. The primary linkage in this rationale is between products and places. Some programs focus on niche markets with an emphasis on product quality, local distinctiveness, and embeddedness in a local setting; such programs may use marketing labels like those associated with Comté (cited above) and, of course, the Log Barn brand. An essential characteristic of this rationale is an explicit or assumed place-context—for example, the Franche-Comté region of eastern France or the Armstrong area in the Okanagan valley of British Columbia. Both of these examples illustrate the idea that successfully representing the place-origin of foods depends on the capacity to appeal to the imagination of the consumer.

The second rationale in Ilbery et al.’s study—the critical rationale—uses food labels to connect food products with environmental, social, and distributional processes that stand in contrast to globally based food production, which is increasingly perceived as negative by consumers (2005, 120). The main connection here is between products and processes: logos and slogans connect food products to alternative or traditional production methods or distribution processes, which, in turn, suggest that the product is healthy, safe, and environmentally friendly. While connection to place is not central to this rationale, it remains an undercurrent, given that “quality” processes (notably traditional production methods) are often implicitly emplaced within a rural idyll and framed, via place-based images on food labels, as countryside benefits.

Both the territorial-development rationale and the critical rationale involve the deliberate linking of products to place. These three Canadian case studies were classified as representing the territorial-development rationale involving government-led initiatives that continue to the present. For example, to get Foodland Ontario off the ground, the Canadian Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs invited industry stakeholders from twelve grower and retail organizations to cosponsor product identification and boost sales of Ontario products within the province. Similarly, the Government of British Columbia partnered with industry to create a Minister's Council on the Food Industry (involving food, fisheries, and beverage industries) for its Buy British Columbia venture. It should be noted that of the three Canadian organizations examined by Ilbery and colleagues, only Foodland Ontario is still operating. In New Brunswick, a New Brunswick Agriculture Strategy evolved to promote "local agriculture," and in British Columbia, Buy Local emerged, a program that is part of the provincial government's Agrifoods Strategy. This Canadian push to support local food by linking food and place stands in contrast to American local-food promotion programs that have typically emerged at the local or regional level in nongovernment and nonindustry settings and are often concerned with food production and environmental matters. The Log Barn brand, in pointedly foregrounding BC food products, fits the territorial-development rationale category. However, its emphasis on quality, local identity, and traditional means of production and Mennonite culinary traditions is equally rooted in the critical rationale because of the implicit and explicit promotion of self-sufficiency, resiliency, entrepreneurialism, and the family.

In "Translating Terroir: The Global Challenge of French AOC Labeling" (2003), Elizabeth Barham examines labels of origin for agro-food products that link local and global through an emphasis on place. She argues that "the discourse around labels of origin brings in issues of 'the incorporation of nature (both symbolic and biophysical), social movements, consumers and food scares, regulatory politics, contest over corporate involvement and issues of standards and meaning.' But labels of origins tie all of these questions to specific places" (137).<sup>2</sup> Barham's study suggests that labels of place origin have the capacity to engage complex and diverse human issues because they appeal to the basic human conditions of place-making and place attachment. Ilbery et al.'s rich research deepens the substance of

Barham's observation because it underscores the primacy of the connections among food product, food process, and place, connections that pay substantial dividends for food producers and food promotion.

Again, Ilbery et al.'s study of food marketing and labelling schemes in Europe and North America identify the three essential factors of product, process, and place that support claims about superior food quality based on difference and distinctiveness. We build on this to suggest that place-making, when combined with values attributed to food based on its place of origin, significantly strengthen marketing claims about food distinctiveness. It matters that the Comté label affirms the French pastoral landscape in a remote agricultural region on the Swiss border. Such labels underscore the notion that place influences the taste and character of food—but more importantly, they express values that link the consumer to the producer, in their different places, through labels. For Comté cheese, the AOC certification label assures the consumer about quality control (100% small farms with small herds; cooperative cheese production that includes handmade cheese-making to ensure the right consistency), aging, and distribution. The purchase and consumption of food are consequences of decision making, and, arguably, the values linked to small, cooperative, and personal cheese-making from the Comté region play a central role in the successful marketing of this food product. Likewise, the Log Barn 1912 labels demonstrate the essential role that place of origin and Mennonite tradition play in suggesting quality, limited processing, and nonindustrialized food products.

## CONCLUSION

While the link between food and place is often commercially motivated—as evidenced by programs such as Buy Local, Buy British Columbia, and France's AOC—the success of such food marketing strategies is propelled forward by our imaginings of particular places (past and present) and particular values. It is worth underscoring that these are indeed often imaginings: the reality for many Canadians is one in which food is consumed in places far removed, in terms of both geography and ethos, from food places of origin—scarfed down in cars or in front of computers at work or the television at home. It is also consumed with attitudes rather distant from values about qualities of process distinctiveness, fast food and packaged food being decidedly nondistinct and homogeneous, and in contexts where

“food topophilia” is entirely absent: it is unlikely, for example, that most Canadians will feel a strong place connection to Saltine crackers or All-Bran cereal.<sup>3</sup> But as consumers seek to decide among the roughly forty-four thousand products found in an average supermarket, the construction and communication of “place” becomes one distinguishing labelling strategy among many.<sup>4</sup> We suggest that communicating a food product’s place of origin is indeed a potent marketing strategy for certain food producers who wish to promote the distinctiveness of their (usually high-priced) products to appeal to discriminating consumers. We also suggest that all “origins” are not created equal—fine French cheese and Mennonite sausage, in fact, cannot be found in Safeway, and the consumer who seeks out such food products is probably well aware of their places of origin. A place-focused marketing strategy is effective because it highlights and invites identification with the social embeddedness of production and takes advantage of the powerful links among food, place, and the values attributed to food producers who are rooted in places of food origin.

#### NOTES

- 1 On the three characteristics of place, see Agnew 2011; Cresswell 2004; Entriken 1991; Malpas 1999; Sack 1997.
- 2 Barham is quoting from Hugh Campbell and Ruth Liepins, “Naming Organics: Understanding Organic Standards in New Zealand as a Discursive Field,” *Sociologia Ruralis* 44 (1): 21–39.
- 3 *Topophilia* refers to an affective bond between people and place (Tuan 1974, 1977). As we have shown, it functions as an effective marketing tool for the Log Barn 1912 brand.
- 4 For supermarket statistics, see “Supermarket Facts,” on the Food Marketing Institute website, where numbers are updated regularly: <http://www.fmi.org/research-resources/supermarket-facts>.

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# **The Food Retail Environment in Canada**

## **Shaping What Canadians Eat and How They Communicate About Food**

*Jordan LeBel*

Today's food retail landscape can be confusing to navigate. For consumers, it is a landscape characterized by an abundance of products to choose from, the omnipresence of food in multiple and nontraditional points of sale such as hardware stores and gas stations, and mixed messages from manufacturers, retailers, food activists, celebrity chefs, and public health officials and advocates. Not surprisingly, for many consumers, the weekly trip to the grocery store has become a dreaded experience marked by the stress of making sense of nutritional labels, marketing promises, and eat-this-not-that advice. From the manufacturers' and retailers' perspectives, the food retail landscape is equally fraught: they are faced with uncertainty, paradoxical trends, and daunting challenges. Commercial success is often elusive and requires accurately predicting consumers' changing needs and tastes as well as the alignment of numerous variables, which is often more the result of providence than calculated moves. While cooking shows, food exposés, cookbooks, and magazines have increased consumers' interest in food and cooking, the food industry remains opaque, its inner workings often hidden and mysterious to the public.

Actually, "food industry" is a misnomer. More correctly, the agrifood system encompasses several industries, including primary agriculture

and its suppliers, food and beverage processors and transformers, importers, wholesalers and distributors, retailers, and the foodservice industry. According to Agriculture Canada, the agrifood system represents 8 percent of the country's GDP and employs 2.1 million people (Canada, AgCan 2013). The different sectors in this system face both common and unique business parameters and operating challenges. The modus operandi of the retail sector influences many of the practices and processes that occur earlier in the value chain that moves foods from producers to Canadians' tables. This chapter examines the retail end of the agrifood system and describes various aspects of its operating reality. Ultimately, my objective is to begin to explore how the retail sector influences what Canadians see on grocery stores' shelves, what they bring home, and to some extent even shapes how Canadians think about food.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE BATTLE FOR THE CONSUMER'S FOOD DOLLAR

A heated battle is being fought for the consumer's food dollar. On one side, "food-at-home," totalling over \$90 billion in 2011 (Canada, AgCan 2013), includes food sold by manufacturers and retailers and meant to be prepared at home, regardless of where it is eaten. On the other side, "food away from home" (FAFH), valued at \$72 billion (Restaurants Canada 2015), includes food prepared outside the home, regardless of where it is eaten. Since the mid-1950s, in part because of urbanization and changing lifestyles, FAFH's share of consumers' food dollars has grown consistently. By 2013, Canadian households spent on average \$7,980 on food-at-home and \$2,226 on FAFH (Statistics Canada 2015). However, the battle lines are not as neatly drawn as this overview might suggest, for providers of food-at-home and FAFH are both competitors and accomplices.

In their fight for a "share of stomach," food-at-home providers have expanded their product offering, focusing on "value added" products. These products reflect the growing importance of convenience and the changing Canadian appetite. For instance, products known as "speed scratch" are designed to save preparation time for the home cook. These include products that have undergone varying levels of transformation and are sold in more advanced stages of preparation. "Ready-to-cook" and "ready-to-heat" options, such as seasoned skinless chicken breasts, require little or no preparation but some level of cooking or reheating. Many of

these food-at-home innovations are in fact inspired from and speak to the growing competition with FAFH providers. Betty Crocker's Warm Delights Molten Chocolate Cake mix, for example, was clearly inspired from the popular dessert found on many restaurant menus. And the very name of Healthy Choice's Café Steamers product line is itself a nod to the cafés and FAFH providers with which it competes. This latter example falls within the food category that is generally known as HMR, or "home meal replacement." These value-added products have been developed to save consumers preparation time and still give them the impression that they are actually cooking, along with the accompanying emotional fulfillment of doing so, even if that involves performing highly simplified tasks. Lastly, in a growing encroachment on the territory of FAFH providers, most grocery stores now feature often quite sophisticated buffet-like options of "grab-and-go" and "ready-to-eat" (RTE) foods.

Not to be outdone, Canadian FAFH providers are trying to gain a greater share of stomach in a variety of ways. While a full treatment of the current trends in FAFH is beyond the scope of this chapter, two important trends are worth noting. First, "premiumization" (also referred to as "gourmetization") has been taking place in both the food-at-home and the FAFH sectors (Ipsos Reid 2008). Within the FAFH industry, this trend has been driven in part by the rapid growth of "fast casual" restaurants serving higher-quality fare than fast food at a price point higher than fast food establishments but lower than restaurants in the "casual" segment. The success of fast casual restaurants has prompted fast food operators to improve their menu selections. The McDonald's Angus Beef Burger exemplifies the gourmetization trend. Affordable premium offerings make eating out more appealing for consumers than cooking at home. A second important way in which FAFH providers compete for a share of stomach is by offering "ready-to-cook" or "ready-to-heat" versions of their signature products, often sold by the very retailers against which they otherwise compete for a share of stomach. In 1965, Québec's Saint-Hubert Rotisserie became one of the first FAFH providers to enter supermarkets. The company's products, benefitting from the restaurant's established brand equity and recognition, are now on sale in more than ten different categories (such as soups, salads, and frozen entrées) and are manufactured by a third party. Supermarkets thus extend the distribution and reach of FAFH providers against which they otherwise compete for a share of consumers' food dollars.

In this battle, constant innovation is required to remain attuned to consumers' changing taste preferences, and convenience and availability (being available when and where the customer wants to eat) are key "value added" features for which many consumers are willing to pay a premium. In this competitive landscape supermarkets are at times willing allies and at other times victims of food-at-home manufacturers' and FAFH providers' attempts to shape and influence consumer demand.

#### THE STRUCTURE OF FOOD RETAILING: INTENSIFYING COMPETITION

The front line of the battle for Canadians' food dollars is the retail sector, which is currently facing an identity crisis brought on by increasing competition, particularly from supercentres, warehouse clubs, and newly arrived players in the food retail sector. While traditional supermarkets' sales increased from \$69.2 billion in 2008 to \$74.6 billion in 2012, their actual share of the food retail sector decreased from 85.6 percent in 2007 to 80.7 percent in 2012. In Canada in 2013, Loblaws was the leader of the supermarket sector with a 31 percent share, followed by Sobeys, which, after its acquisition of Safeway, controlled 21 percent of the market; Metro was in third place with an 11 percent market share ("Target" 2013). Together, the "big three" controlled the traditional supermarket sector with a combined 62 percent market share. By comparison, in the United States, sales by the top twenty food retailers accounted for 63.7 percent of the market in 2012 (United States, USDA, ERS 2014b), revealing a much more competitive industry structure where innovation is a key success factor. In contrast to the United States, serious competitive threat for the control of a large share of the Canadian market comes from only two other major players, so there is less need to innovate. As a result, and by virtue of the decisions they make about product assortment and operating processes (which favour volume-oriented large producers), the "big three" have an unavoidable influence on the content of Canadians' plates. Have Canadian supermarkets become complacent? Not entirely. New competitors and the increased presence of established ones have forced the three leaders to adapt and improve both their product offering and operations.

Supercentres and warehouse retailers, fairly recent arrivals on the retailing landscape, have gnawed away at traditional supermarkets' share. Costco and Walmart, for example, each have 6 percent market share

("Target" 2013). For retailers like Walmart and Costco, selling food increases store traffic and generates purchases of other merchandise with higher profit margins (Beatty and Senauer 2012). Although Walmart has only a 6 percent share of the food retail sector in Canada (in contrast to its 25% share in the United States), the company's supply management processes and everyday-low-prices strategy have influenced competitors' practices (Kinkoff 2011) and have kept the pressure on other Canadian retailers to keep prices low. In a defensive move, many traditional grocery stores have expanded their product offering to include over-the-counter and prescription drugs, housewares, and even clothing. But this is only one half of the identity crisis facing the food retail sector.

A more recent shakeup in the Canadian food retail sector has come from an unexpected competitor and is a harbinger of more competition to come. More than a quarter of the sector's sales (the remaining 26%) are made by "nontraditional" retailers, a broad heading that includes convenience stores, specialty food stores, dollar stores, and drugstores. The gourmetization trend noted earlier has favoured some of these nontraditional retailers: specialty food stores' sales have increased by more than 23 percent between 2008 and 2012 and now account for \$5.3 billion. New "hybrid pharmacies," where up to 50 percent of the public floor space is dedicated to food (mostly dry goods, frozen foods, and beverages), have given both traditional supermarkets and convenience stores cause for concern. As a result of these hybrid pharmacies' penetration, sales at convenience stores have decreased slightly from \$6.8 billion in 2008 to \$6.3 billion in 2012 ("Target" 2013). The recent acquisition of Shoppers Drug Mart by Loblaws is indicative of the growing importance of pharmacies in the food retail landscape and its strategic role in the ongoing and intensifying battle for consumers' food and wellness budget. Given consumers' interest in food, it is no surprise that Walmart, Loblaws, and Sobeys all have massive expansion plans. In fact, the two leading traditional retailers (Loblaws and Sobeys) are expected to expand their available square footage (total across all stores) at a rate faster than the Canadian population growth rate (Charlebois et al. 2012). Moreover, further changes are soon to come to the food-retailing landscape, as Loblaws is said to be contemplating the addition of hot and fresh foods to the product assortment to be offered at Shoppers Drug Mart (Canadian Press 2014).

To lure customers into stores and to keep them coming back and spending more, retailers must strategically choose to emphasize breadth of product selection, convenience of location, in-store shopping experience, low prices, unique brands or products, or a combination of these and other attributes appealing to their targeted customers. While surveys—typically conducted in conditions bearing no resemblance to the environment in which food choices are actually made—often point to taste, convenience, and health as key drivers of consumers' choices, sales receipts tell a different story: as many industry veterans often point out, price is the key decision factor. Consumers are price sensitive, especially in some product categories, such as FAFH, soft drinks, and meats (Andreyeva, Long, and Brownell 2010). Additionally, the rumoured possibility of a Canadian expansion by Whole Foods Markets continues to worry Canadian retailers: the US retailer would likely capture a large share of the lucrative organic market should it decide to enter Canada with a more substantial presence.

#### SUPERMARKETS: NO LONGER IN THE FOOD BUSINESS

The battle for consumers' food dollars is, of course, being fought and most visible on the store shelves. Consider that the first self-serve grocery store, Piggly Wiggly, opened in 1916 in Memphis with a little over six hundred items on its shelves. In 2013, grocery stores offered just under forty-four thousand items, and some of the largest supermarkets offer twice that number of products.<sup>2</sup> Traditional retailers are thus caught in a delicate balancing act by having to face competitive pressure from established and new retailers, to meet customer demand for variety and new products within the constraints of limited floor space and the many enticements of manufacturers and distributors who wish to gain access to consumers. Adding to the challenges of this reality is the notoriously small profit margins in the retail food sector—in the order of 1.2 to 1.5 percent (Bergeron 2008)—which forces retailers to focus on volume and inventory turnover (Cardello 2009).

Although we tend to think of supermarkets as being solely in the business of selling food, they are, fundamentally, in the real estate business. Since space is a marketable commodity, supermarkets supplement low-margin sales from food with revenues from selling valuable real estate. To be a recognized supplier, most supermarkets charge manufacturers a



standard “listing fee” (also called a “slotting fee”) per “stock keep unit” or SKU. These fees usually start around \$25,000 but can go as high as \$250,000, depending on the coverage (number of stores) and the desirability of the area to be covered—high traffic areas with high sales potential command higher fees. Some categories (ice cream, frozen foods) command higher fees to offset the steep investments in refrigeration equipment and maintenance costs. In addition, supermarkets charge a “shelf fee” to manufacturers that wish to occupy highly visible shelf space within stores. For instance, the mid-section of aisles at eye level is usually considered premium space, as is the end-of-aisle space, usually reserved for products with high contribution margins or for products of manufacturers willing to pay for that specific space. To be visible in this sea of products, manufacturers always want to have multiple “facings,” or product facing consumers. In addition, special placement fees or promotional fees may be charged, at the discretion of the retailer, to manufacturers who wish to hold special promotions, such as a large display of product at the entrance of a store. These fees, negotiated on a case-by-case basis, typically depend on the contribution margin of the product category or specific brand: a product that brings higher contribution margins (potato chips, for example) will be charged lower promotional fees than a brand or product with lower margins. The key performance metrics used by traditional supermarkets clearly convey the importance of nonfood sales and real estate: supermarkets closely monitor sales (of food) and revenues (including nonfood such as fees) per square foot and per linear foot. What Canadians are exposed to as they go about their weekly grocery shopping and what ends up in their cart and on their tables is no accident but rather the result of calculated choices made to maximize sales and the use of real estate.

A second important way in which supermarkets increase their profit margins is through marketing their own store brands (also called “private labels” or “house brands”). Store brands have enjoyed unprecedented popularity as of late, partly because of the economic climate, and sales show no signs of slowing down (Glanz, Bader, and Iyer 2012). These store brands are priced lower than competing national brands but generate higher contribution margins, thus adding significantly to a retailer’s bottom line. For instance, the worldwide sales of Walmart’s private labels account for US\$150 billion of the company’s US\$446 billion in total sales. By comparison, Loblaw’s store brands generate US\$8 billion of the company’s

US\$31 billion sales.<sup>3</sup> On a global level, private labels are expected to double their market share and account for 25 percent of food retail sales by 2025 (Gerlsbeck 2011). Store brands usually thrive in categories with low differentiation and low emotional attachment (canned goods, for example, have low differentiation and low attachment, while cookies or ice cream do not). The importance of store brands must be understood within both the battle for consumers' food dollars and the power struggle between national brands (more accurately, the powerhouse that owns them, such as Procter and Gamble or Unilever) and retailers. Whereas national brands previously held considerable consumer loyalty, which gave national brand owners hefty powers in negotiating or even removing slotting fees, today's store brands, in addition to increasing profits, can help to increase loyalty to a supermarket (Azzato 2009), thereby giving retailers more power. In the evolution of store brands, President's Choice represents a notable success story and has now become a national leader in its own right. Its slogan, "Worth switching supermarkets for," indicates the newfound status of store brands as destination brands (Collins and Bone 2011).

To appreciate food retailers' impact on what Canadians eat and how they communicate about food, important aspects of their internal processes must be understood. Managing the cornucopia of available products in supermarkets is done through an approach known as Efficient Consumer Response, or ECR. The kingpin of ECR is management by category (fresh fruits, canned goods, frozen foods, etc.). "Category managers" or "category buyers" must ensure the profitability of their category and are thus concerned with contribution margins and inventory turnover. This means they must select and secure the products that their clients want at a price point that will return adequate margins for the retailer. Miscalculations can lead to significant waste and financial losses. Category buyers prefer value-added products that have a stable shelf life and that travel well: such foods facilitate distribution across hundreds of stores, command a higher price, and generate higher contribution margins. As a result of this focus on value-added convenience, the farm share, in the United States, of a \$1 food purchase is 15.5 cents, with the rest going to all other postfarm activities, such as processing, packaging, retail costs, and advertising (United States, USDA, ERS 2014a). Beyond margins and transportability, an important concern for category buyers, especially as it relates to the obligation to move inventory, is the notion of "frequency." The foremost interest of retailers

and manufacturers alike is in creating repeat purchase, or getting consumers to buy frequently and repeatedly. However, given consumers' price sensitivity, many retailers and manufacturers believe that brand loyalty is very difficult to achieve in today's food environment. Consequently, short-term price-driven tactics such as instant rebates and price discounts, coupons, bonus offers, and reward points are often preferred means to sustain repeat purchase. Hence, by deciding which foods enter supermarkets, category buyers control what ends up on Canadians' plates, and by focusing on price, they also contribute to shaping the discourse on food, thus influencing how Canadians' relate to and eventually communicate about food.

To move products off of store shelves, marketing at the "point of sale" (that is, the grocery store) is critical. In-store merchandising efforts are typically aimed at increasing "spending per visit" (getting consumers to purchase more than planned in terms of quantity and/or to buy premium items) as well as increasing "number of categories purchased" (leading consumers to consider and purchase items from more categories than planned). Categories are carefully laid out according to a "planogram," which even manufacturers and distributors have access to and check from time to time to ensure that they have the right facings and that their products are correctly displayed. In recent years, "shopper marketing" has emerged as a complementary approach to category management (Ståhlberg and Maila 2012). Essentially, this involves seeing the grocery visit from the consumer's perspective and placing products and purchase enticements in such a way as to facilitate problem solving, whether that problem is "How do I make a tasty salad?" or "How do I fix dinner for the family in thirty minutes?" As a result, consumers are bombarded with "Buy me!" messages and calculated sensory stimulation. Making healthy choices in this environment can be daunting: indeed, 50 percent of consumers don't believe that their supermarket is helping them making healthy choices (Catalina Marketing 2010).

#### REACHING TODAY'S CONSUMERS AMIDST CONFUSION AND DISTRUST

The wild card in today's food environment is the consumer, who both drives and blocks innovation. On the one hand, by virtue of their evolving preferences and spending power, consumers act as powerful agents of change and motivate innovations in the entire agrifood system. On the

other hand, they can also be creatures of habit reluctant to embrace new ways of eating, new products, or even new information. This makes it particularly challenging for manufacturers and retailers, who must identify the features that will add value to food products in the eyes of consumers and lead to product adoption and repeat purchase. Adding complexity to this exercise is the heterogeneity of consumer demand: demographic changes, such as those that affect ethnic composition, and an explosion of lifestyles have made it particularly challenging to predict consumer preferences and choice criteria. While surveys point to taste and nutrition as key drivers of food choices (see, for example, CCFN 2008), field observations reveal that consumers' actual use of nutritional information is far less frequent and detailed than surveys suggest (Grunert, Wills, and Fernández-Celemin 2010). When they do use nutrition labels, Canadians tend to use an elimination-choice heuristic, looking primarily for red flags such as high levels of sodium, sugar, and calories (Nielsen 2012). In the grocery store, a number of cues can sway consumers' product evaluations and choices. The shape and colour of a package, promotions, and even the retail environment and the pleasantness of the shopping experience can influence product evaluations (Collins and Bone 2011). In the current competitive landscape, manufacturers and retailers gladly seize on any trend that has the potential to give them an edge over their competitors, even if momentarily. In this crystal-ball-gazing exercise, providers of syndicated surveys and commercial market research hold considerable influence. Given the fact that public policy makers have been timid and slow to regulate communications in this area, this has resulted in a cacophonous and confusing landscape.

To encourage consumers to buy, food marketers have long appreciated the importance of a key principle: the closer one gets to consumers, the shorter the message must be. That is, a manufacturer can develop sophisticated communication for distributors and category buyers, but when it comes to communicating with consumers, messages must be short and clear, and must provide a compelling motivation to purchase. Weekly flyers, for example, typically show appetizing pictures and only a few key words. Nowhere is this principle clearer than on packaging's "available display surface" (ADS), the limited area used for communicating key messages, including nutritional information. ADS must be strategically and carefully maximized so as to draw consumers' attention as they navigate crowded

aisles. Food marketers have therefore resorted, among other techniques, to using a variety of evocative words chosen to convey a product's benefits and to trigger emotionally laden mental associations and images. Words such as *authentic*, *local*, *organic*, *homemade*, *natural*, *fresh*, and *light* owe much of their marketing effectiveness to the fact that consumers make over two hundred food decisions daily (Wansink and Sobal 2007) and to their propensity to use shortcuts or heuristics when making these decisions. Some keywords, such as *homemade*, can make foods appear tastier and even more filling (Wansink, van Ittersum, and Painter 2005). Interestingly, laboratory evidence reveals that pleasure-oriented descriptors, while associated with estimation of higher calorie content, do not lead to greater consumption than health-focused descriptors (Provencher, Polivy, and Herman 2009). By using these evocative keywords, retailers and manufacturers shape how Canadians communicate about food, since consumers willingly adopt these words and participate in cocreating the narratives that support their effectiveness, making up stories and myths of their own to connect with brands (Kniazeva and Belk 2010). At the same time, consumers are becoming distrustful of marketers' liberal use of these keywords: a recent survey reveals that a vast majority (70%) "only sometimes" or "never" trust these product descriptors (Nielsen 2011). As sophisticated as food producers' efforts to sway consumer choice appear to be, they are mostly based on intuition and past success rather than on rigorous scientific evidence, so we still do not clearly understand the mechanisms and processes underlying consumers' interpretation and assessment of these keywords and product claims (Lähtenmäki 2013; Labbe, Pineau, and Martin 2013).

Social media has become part of how Canadians think about, experience, and communicate about food. Consumers use social media, blogs, and online resources to expand their culinary horizons, share experiences, and even guide food purchase decisions. As much as social media have democratized food knowledge and access to information (Johnston and Baumann 2010), they are also partly responsible for the current distrust of food marketers and have contributed to propagating suspicious or untrustworthy information, myths, and beliefs (Rousseau 2012). Consumers are more likely to distrust information provided by food manufacturers than to be critical of pseudo-scientific information contained in some anonymous chain emails touting the merits of this or that new diet or miracle food. Food myths such as the oft-cited but inaccurate fifteen hundred miles

travelled by industrially produced food (Desrochers and Shimizu 2012; Black 2008) are illustrative of the misinformation that manufacturers and retailers must now deal with. As it stands, consumers can more easily find reliable information about which car to buy than about what to eat.

To nudge consumers in their decision-making process, retailers and manufacturers have two relatively new tools in their arsenal. Front-of-pack nutritional labels now summarize key nutrition information on the front of packages. Nu-Val and Guiding Stars (used by Loblaw's) are two popular systems. By placing such information in plain view, these information systems shape the discourse on food and how Canadians relate to foods as bundles of calories, fat, and sodium. Another tactic to nudge consumers' decisions is the use of loyalty programs or other point-based rewards. For instance, PepsiCo uses Aeroplan miles to move consumers toward its Tropicana and Quaker products. Sobeys offers AirMiles, Metro introduced a successful loyalty program called "Metro and Me," and Shoppers Drug Mart uses its Optimum loyalty program in part to promote its own Simply Food brand. Both of these tactics, front-of-pack labels and reward programs, shape how Canadians relate to their food, either as a gateway to better health or as a vehicle with which to accumulate points.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have tried to explain some of the food retail sector's practices with two goals in mind: first, to help readers, as consumers, to understand food retailing practices and thus possibly avoid some of the marketing traps in their weekly grocery shopping trip; second, to contribute to a greater understanding of the retail sector's challenges and operating reality so that critics and researchers interested in the food retail environment may develop solutions and address important issues as we collectively try to improve the system that feeds Canadians.

Through its position in the chain that moves food from producers to consumers and through its business practices, the retail sector of the agri-food system has a defining influence on what Canadians eat. From an industry perspective, retailers' practices impact those of producers, manufacturers, and distributors earlier in the food value chain, shaping product development, packaging, marketing communications, and merchandising at the point of sale. Engineering value-added products yielding high

margins, paying for privileged shelf space, and using enticing keywords and nutrition information on product packages are all examples of tactics employed by producers and manufacturers to ensure that their products stand out in the crowded retail environment. That very environment, in turn, dictates consumers' food choices. Thus, from a consumer perspective, retailers' decisions and practices define what Canadian consumers see and buy during their weekly trip to the supermarket and, consequently, what they eat at home. Through product variety, store layout, strategic placement of high-margin items, in-store merchandising techniques, pricing, and other enticements, supermarkets shape consumers' food choices—typically toward high-margin, ready-to-eat processed foods that tend to be high in fat and sugar or sodium. Such foods are increasingly popular with Canadians, who are essentially trading health and nutrition for convenience and ease of preparation, even as they claim to care about health and nutrition. The growing presence of these foods on the tables of Canadians speaks to an evolving relation to food items as bundles of conveniences and practical attributes rather than as vectors or sources of varied pleasures, conviviality, and, indeed, good health.

Through marketing communications and other practices, the retail sector also influences how Canadians relate to and communicate about food. Consider, for instance, the promotion of ready-to-eat processed foods. Whether as mass-produced packaged goods or self-serve, grab-and-go buffets, these foods are typically promoted with enticing and often misleading keywords, such as *authentic*, *homemade*, *fresh*, or *natural*. While some consumers may have become skeptical of such promises, these claims nonetheless still influence choice. For instance, while considerable confusion now surrounds the term *organic*, the overwhelming majority of consumers still buy foods labelled as such (Watson 2014), quite possibly because of the peace of mind or reassurance produced by a label or seal that, in the end, acts as a decision shortcut. While these keywords influence Canadians' product perceptions and purchases, more importantly and perhaps alarmingly, as their meaning is co-opted by industry and often further transformed by the shorthand of popular culture, they come to define consumers' mental associations and representations of what constitutes authentic, homemade, fresh, and natural foods. The lack of clear standard definitions and the outright abuse by a minority of unscrupulous food marketers underlie the growing skepticism that Canadians have toward

these tactics and their eroding confidence in food marketers and in the entire food system.

To be fair, food marketers are not the only force shaping how Canadians relate to and communicate about food. On the one hand, health advocates—including public health officials, nutritionists, and doctors—remind us of the importance of making healthier choices and eating well. On that front, even the definition and meaning of a healthy food and diet is subject to interpretation. On the other hand, food magazines, cookbooks, celebrity chefs, televised cooking shows, and food marketers tantalize us and invite us to indulge. Add to that cacophony all the self-proclaimed experts with an exposé or provocative book to sell, and you have a confusing sea of mixed messages where pseudo-scientific evidence and urban legends pass for truths. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that in spite of the unprecedented attention currently directed toward food and cooking, consumers often lack the knowledge to make educated choices and, equally importantly, to communicate about food in ways that promote mindful appreciation of the varied pleasures of the table. Even so-called foodies, whose *raison d'être* includes the pursuit of knowledge about food and evaluation of food (Johnston and Baumann 2010), often rely on global evaluations (such as “It’s delicious”) rather than precise words to convey their liking. Developing a more detailed and comprehensive knowledge and vocabulary about food is important because it leads to more defined preferences and to greater resistance or immunity to marketers’ tactics.

Herein lies an opportunity for professionals from different sectors—including health, agriculture, education, business, media, and even policy making—to work together and develop both programs to educate consumers about the fundamentals of making sound food choices and vocabulary that goes beyond simplistic keywords on product packaging. In this regard, Sobeys’s recent collaboration with celebrity chef Jamie Oliver to educate Canadians and empower them to eat better is a step in the right direction. Still, the situation calls for more ambitious and far-reaching initiatives. Without any such education initiatives, it is likely that, given our busy modern lifestyles and the lack of nutrition literacy, consumers will continue to favour shortcuts when grocery shopping, relying on cues such as keywords or summarized nutrition information.



## NOTES

- 1 With a few exceptions, the food industry's practices have been largely undocumented and ignored within the academic literature. Research on the industry's impact on public health began only recently and is largely attributable to the obesity epidemic. This chapter is based on personal experience and communications, trade references, and, whenever available, academic research. Industry-specific expressions appear in quotation marks. Unless otherwise indicated, values are in Canadian dollars.
- 2 For grocery store statistics, see "Supermarket Facts," on the Food Marketing Institute website, where numbers are updated regularly: <http://www.fmi.org/research-resources/supermarket-facts>. Superstore statistics can be found in Moss (2013, 27).
- 3 "Private Label," *Food Retail World*, 2014, <http://www.foodretailworld.com/PrivateLabel.htm>.

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## **Selling Nutrition**

### **Current Directions in Food Fortification and Nutrition-Related Marketing**

*Valerie Tarasuk*

Large supermarkets in Canada routinely stock thousands of products, with “nutritionally enhanced” and “better for you” products constituting an increasing share of the market (Canada, AgCan 2011). This expansion can in part be attributed to technological advances that have enabled the manufacture of foods with increased concentrations of desirable (marketable) components such as fibre, probiotics, and micronutrients and with reduced amounts of undesirable substances such as fat, sugar, and salt. The growth in sales also speaks to the competitive advantage afforded to manufacturers of these products. Food manufacturing is a fiercely competitive industry, and nutrition-related marketing sells foods.

The increasing prominence of “nutritionally enhanced” and “better for you” products in Canadian supermarkets also reflects a fundamental shift in our regulatory system. Recent changes in food regulations are designed to facilitate consumer choice and product innovation and to support the harmonization of fortification and labelling practices with those of our major trading partners. Whereas food fortification in Canada has historically been a tool for public health intervention, the addition of nutrients to foods is increasingly being permitted at the discretion of food manufacturers, and regulatory oversight is defined by a focus on consumer safety and risk management. This new era of food policy places the onus on

consumers to make informed choices and manage their own health and nutrition needs, but this in turn raises questions about the information available to Canadians. With so many products adorned with health and nutrition messaging, weighing the nutritional merits of existing options is complicated both by the ways in which food manufacturers have taken up the concept of nutrition in product formulations and labelling and by the paucity of standardized nutrition information available.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of the emergence of manufacturer-driven food fortification in Canada and the increasing use of nutrition-based food marketing, as evidenced by the communications regarding nutrition that appear on food packages. I then juxtapose these trends to current nutrition-labelling regulations and practices in order to critically examine the potential for informed consumerism to enable healthy food choices within the current food environment.

#### FOOD FORTIFICATION POLICY IN CANADA: AN EVOLVING CONCEPT

Historically, the addition of vitamins and minerals to foods in Canada was a tightly controlled public health measure, invoked to address demonstrated problems of nutrient insufficiency in the population (Sacco 2013). It required the identification of a serious public health problem and the amassing of evidence that this problem could be ameliorated by adding more of a particular nutrient to our food supply. When food fortification was considered to be warranted, both the levels of addition and the “food vehicles” for these mandatory additions were carefully determined to ensure maximal benefit and minimal risk to the population. Examples of such regulatory action include the mandatory iodization of table salt to prevent goitre, the addition of vitamin D to milk and margarine to prevent rickets, and the fortification of enriched flour and grain products with folic acid to reduce the incidence of neural tube defects (Sacco 2013, 60–64).

We now appear to have embarked on a new era of food fortification, with regulatory changes enabling more nutrient additions to occur at the discretion of manufacturers, whether or not there is a demonstrable public health need for increased nutrient levels in our food supply. The addition of select nutrients to breakfast cereals at the discretion of the manufacturer has long been permitted, but in the 1990s, products like calcium-fortified orange juice began appearing on store shelves. An even wider array of

products became the subject of discretionary fortification when Natural Health Products (NHP) regulations were introduced in 2004 (Canada, Department of Justice 2003). This regulatory framework also granted manufacturers more liberty in product marketing and exempted them from the nutrition-labelling requirements applied to packaged food products. The first food product to be approved for sale as a Natural Health Product was the energy drink, Red Bull. Several other highly fortified products followed, including more energy drinks, vitamin waters and other nutritionally enhanced beverages and energy bars. The regulatory oversight of these products is now shifting from the Natural and Non-prescription Health Products Directorate (formerly the NHP Directorate) to the Food Directorate, so that they will be regulated as foods. This means that all products will be required to comply with food-labelling regulations, but it does not necessarily spell an end to discretionary fortification. A special market authorization process has been introduced to handle products that are not compliant with Food and Drug Regulations (Canada, Health Canada 2013b).

Since the introduction of “novel beverages” into the Canadian marketplace, sales have grown rapidly (Canada, AgCan 2011), suggesting that they are part of the dietary intake of an increasing number of Canadians. Sometimes described as functional beverages, these products include energy drinks, sports drinks, vitamin waters, and novel juices. Product formulations variously include caffeine, herbal substances, and a variety of vitamins and minerals. These products are not unique to Canada but reflect a global trend (Burrows et al. 2013; Heckman, Sherry, and Gonzalez de Mejia 2010; Zucconi et al. 2013). Most of these beverages are manufactured or distributed by Coca-Cola or PepsiCo (Dachner et al. 2015, 193), and it can be no coincidence that their proliferation comes at a time when the health effects of sugar-sweetened beverages are under increasing scrutiny. The promotion of vitamin waters and nutrient-enhanced juices on the basis of unique health benefits attributed to their nutrient content implies that these are healthy alternatives to the more conventional beverages now under attack by health advocates.

A detailed examination of the nutrient content of sixty-six novel beverages brought to market under the NHP regulations and sold in Toronto supermarkets in 2011 (Tarasuk 2014) provides a graphic illustration of the principles of discretionary food fortification in practice. The sample of novel

beverages analyzed included energy drinks, vitamin waters, and nutrient-enhanced fruit beverages—products sold alongside conventional beverages on store shelves. Most of the novel beverages contained four or more vitamins and minerals. The most common additions were B vitamins: niacin, riboflavin, pantothenic acid, and vitamins B6 and B12. In most instances, a single serving of the beverage provided a greater amount of the nutrients than most people would require in an entire day in order to meet their body's needs. When compared to the Estimated Average Requirements (EAR) for an adult man (the age and sex group with the highest requirement for almost all nutrients), eighteen beverages contained, in a single serving, more than six times the EAR for vitamin B12; twenty-five contained more than triple the EAR for vitamin B6 (with three beverages containing more than seven times the EAR); thirteen contained more than three times the EAR for niacin; and fourteen contained more than three times the EAR for riboflavin (with two products containing more than six times the EAR; Tarasuk, 2014, 4423–24). The nutrient loads would be even higher if these beverages were consumed as directed, since most labels included recommendations for the consumption of at least two containers per day.

Not only are the nutrient levels of many novel beverages well in excess of human nutrient requirements, but the nutrients most commonly found in these beverages are not ones lacking in the diets of most Canadians. Although there is some indication of inadequate intake of vitamins B6 and B12 among older adults, the text and imagery on the products examined suggest that the target market is younger adults, and there is little evidence to support the need for more B vitamins among this demographic (Canada, Health Canada and Statistics Canada 2008b). Contrary to the labels on these bottles, which suggest the drinks will “replenish” or “restore” missing nutrients (Dachner et al. 2015, 196), the young Canadians who most often consume these products stand to derive no benefit from most of the added nutrients.

If there is no possibility of benefit, is there a potential for harm from the nutrients being added by novel beverage manufacturers? Nutrient toxicity is a nascent field of research in the nutritional sciences, necessitated by the potential for people to ingest nutrients from supplements and fortified food products in doses not possible by the consumption of natural food sources (Institute of Medicine 1998a). In affluent countries, it is not uncommon for people to consume diets that provide some nutrients in excess of their



requirements, but much higher levels of nutrient exposure have been documented recently in conjunction with the consumption of highly fortified foods and nutrient supplements (Sacco et al. 2013; Shakur et al. 2012). A joint Canada-US scientific review was undertaken to determine Tolerable Upper Intake Levels (ULs) for nutrients, but this process was limited by the paucity of data, yielding only crude estimates of safe upper ranges of intake for some nutrients and no estimate whatsoever for others (Taylor and Meyers 2012). Yet these reference standards constitute the only available evaluative framework against which to assess the potential for risk of excessive nutrient exposures in this new era of discretionary food fortification.

Dachner et al.'s (2015) comparison of the nutrient content of novel beverages with the available ULs revealed excessive levels only for retinol (vitamin A) and niacin. Three products were found to provide retinol at or above the UL, if consumed at recommended levels. The consequences of excessive retinol exposure are well established; they include liver toxicity and birth defects (Institute of Medicine 2002). One Coca-Cola product that contained 3,000 micrograms of retinol (the UL for adults) in a single serving at the time of our study was subsequently reformulated, apparently in response to publicized complaints by a nutritional scientist and a medical expert (Schmidt 2011). So far, this appears to be an isolated case, but it illustrates the potential for risk when manufacturers are given free rein to fortify products. The case also highlights the challenges of effective regulatory oversight in the context of manufacturer-driven fortification.

One-quarter of the novel beverages examined by Dachner et al. provided niacin in amounts above the Institute of Medicine's ULs for adolescents and/or adults. This reference standard does not differentiate forms of niacin, but scientific reviews in some other jurisdictions have proposed much higher ULs for nicotinamide, the form of niacin found in novel beverages, arguing that there is no evidence of harm with lower intakes of this compound (EVM 2003; European Commission, Scientific Committee on Food 2002). In its risk assessment of caffeinated energy drinks, Health Canada drew on this literature to conclude that the beverages "would be unlikely to pose a health risk in the short term," at the same time acknowledging "uncertainty in the safety of life-long consumption at this level" (Rotstein et al. 2013, 24). These comments point to what is by far the most worrisome aspect of Canada's current directions in food fortification policy. By permitting manufacturers to add nutrients at levels unrelated to human

requirements, Health Canada has essentially engaged the Canadian population in a natural experiment. The health effects of chronic exposure to such high levels of nutrients are unknown. For some consumers, the level of exposure is likely to be substantial, as the nutrient loads delivered by highly fortified “novel” food products are added to already high nutrient levels resulting from the daily use of vitamin and mineral supplements (Shakur et al. 2012). If such high nutrient loads have adverse consequences for health, they remain to be discovered.

Concerns about the potential adverse effects of the caffeine in energy drinks have recently prompted Health Canada to issue interim guidelines to bring the products more in line with food regulations, capping caffeine additions and requiring nutrition labelling consistent with other foods (Canada, Health Canada 2013a). Yet there is no indication that the discretionary fortification of these products will be halted. The interim guidelines for energy drinks prohibit additions of folic acid and vitamin A in the form of retinol because of safety concerns, but the guidelines include maximum permissible levels of addition for eleven nutrients (Canada, Health Canada 2013a). In seven cases, these levels are several times higher than the nutrient requirements of healthy adults, with the most dramatic discrepancy for niacin. Nicotinamide can be added to a daily maximum of 450 mg; this is thirty-eight times the average niacin requirement for men and forty-one times the average requirement for women (Institute of Medicine 1998b).

Setting aside the question of why regulators in Canada and many other countries are permitting such high levels of nutrient addition in the absence of any evidence of public health need or benefit, manufacturers’ reasons for wanting to add vitamins in these quantities are also unclear. Whatever marketing advantage is gleaned from the promotion of products with added nutrients could surely be achieved without such extreme nutrient concentrations. Rotstein et al. (2013) speculate that niacin is being added because of its role in energy metabolism, but a recent review of the scientific literature found no evidence that the addition of B vitamins to these beverages enhances their effects on physical or mental performance—the primary benefits asserted in product advertising (McLellan and Lieberman 2012). Whatever manufacturers’ reasons are for such high levels of micronutrient fortification in novel beverages, these amounts cannot be defended in light of the current science on the nutrient requirements of human beings.

Responsibility for navigating the current food landscape to procure healthy foods rests with the consumer. This task is complicated not only by the thousands of products from which to choose but also by the changing nature of the regulations governing this system. As processed food manufacturers are given increasing latitude over nutrient additions, consumers can no longer take for granted that the nutrients being promoted on product labels are necessary or beneficial to them. Yet there is very little standardized nutrition information available to enable Canadians to critically appraise new products and make informed decisions.

### *The Nutrition Facts Table*

The only mandatory nutrition labelling on food products in Canada is the Nutrition Facts table (Canada 2003). Typically found on the side or back of food packages, this boxed text displays the content of thirteen nutrients plus energy (calories) on a per serving basis. The Nutrition Facts table is meant to help consumers compare the nutrient content of different food products and to provide information about the relative contributions of a food to an overall health-promoting diet. Nutrient content is expressed as a percent of a Daily Value (DV), but the reference values currently in use are largely based on the 1983 Recommended Nutrient Intakes.<sup>1</sup>

The greatest discrepancy between current requirement estimates and the DVs in use on the Nutrition Facts table is for sodium. The sodium DV is set at 2,400 mg, which is 900 mg more than the amount most adults are estimated to need for good health. The DV also exceeds the UL of 2,300 mg/day, a level associated with increased risk of high blood pressure among healthy adults (Institute of Medicine 2005). Lowering the DV for sodium has been identified as critical to reducing the prevalence of excessive sodium intake in the Canadian population (Canada, Health Canada 2010), but to date, there has been no change to the food label. Education campaigns have been mounted by Health Canada and some nongovernmental health organizations to help Canadians understand how to use the Nutrition Facts table, but outdated DVs remain a serious obstacle to informed food selection.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to outdated science on which the DVs are based, the relevance of the particular nutritional attributes included in the Nutrition Facts table to the health concerns of the contemporary population is questionable, as

are the merits of expressing nutrient content in relation to a single standard. As it is currently designed, the Nutrition Facts table communicates nothing about whether prospective consumers would benefit by adding more of the particular nutrients supplied by a particular product to their diets. Yet this information is critical in evaluating one's need for highly fortified products. Practically, it is impossible for individuals to monitor the adequacy of their vitamin and mineral intakes. Population-level dietary assessment surveys have furnished detailed information on the prevalence of inadequate intakes for many nutrients for different population subgroups defined by age, sex, and province (Canada, Health Canada and Statistics Canada 2008a, 2008b), but this information is not common knowledge. Only a few results, such as the findings that most Canadians consume excessive amounts of sodium and insufficient amounts of vitamin D, have made their way into the popular media. Thus, most consumers lack the knowledge and information necessary to critically appraise the micro-nutrient content of products.

### *Voluntary Nutrition Labelling*

The provision of all other nutrition information on food labels is voluntary, provided at the discretion of the food manufacturer. This includes regulated statements such as nutrient content claims ("a good source of calcium") and diet-related health claims ("A healthy diet low in saturated and trans fats may reduce the risk of heart disease"), for which the wording is prescribed and specific compositional criteria must be met. Such discretionary provision of information also includes a plethora of unregulated text and graphics, including quantitative statements about nutritional content ("x grams of fibre"), the inclusion of nutritional attributes in product names, and a variety of health endorsement symbols (such as the Heart and Stroke Foundation's Health Check or the Whole Grain Council's stamp). The scale and complexity of the nutrition information presented on food packages cannot be overstated. A recent survey of front-of-package nutrition marketing in three Canadian supermarkets documented thirty different ways in which manufacturers highlighted the fibre content of products, including the use of terms like *inulin*, *psyllium*, *prebiotics*, *beta glucan*, and *soluble fibre* (Sacco, Sumanac, and Tarasuk 2013).

While almost half of processed foods sold in major Canadian supermarkets bear regulated nutrient-content claims (Schermel et al. 2013), the

prevalence of unregulated nutrition-promotion material on food labels has yet to be comprehensively quantified. However, an examination of front-of-package references to fibre on foods sold in supermarkets indicated that 31 percent of the references used unregulated language (Sacco, Sumanac, and Tarasuk 2013). A closer look at the implications of this practice for breads revealed that unregulated references to fibre were associated with systematically lower fibre content than regulated claims (Sacco, Sumanac, and Tarasuk 2013). This finding might be interpreted as signalling a role for education campaigns to help consumers differentiate regulated from unregulated nutrition labelling, but such efforts would be thwarted by the sheer volume of nutrition messaging on food labels. Rather than pointing to the need for more consumer education, these findings with respect to fibre speak to the futility of using voluntary nutrition labelling as a guide to healthier food choices.

Consumers do not have to rely on voluntary, front-of-package labelling to make food selections based on attributes like fibre that are listed in the mandatory Nutrition Facts table, but voluntary labelling is critical to the identification of foods with nutritional characteristics not included in that table. Consider the case of whole grains. Whole grain foods are now recognized as an essential component of a healthy diet, yet whole grain labelling is entirely unregulated.<sup>3</sup> It is impossible to discern the whole grain content of foods from an ingredient list or Nutrition Facts table, so consumers who cannot independently identify whole grain foods in the supermarket are completely reliant on the declarations made by product manufacturers (Sumanac, Mendelson, and Tarasuk 2013).

While whole grain labelling is an example of the potential for voluntary labelling to compensate for limitations in the Nutrition Facts table and positively influence food selection, a more systematic examination of manufacturers' uptake of regulated nutrient content claims suggests limited congruence with current priorities for population health. The most prevalent claims on processed foods relate to fat and trans fat, with comparatively few foods displaying content claims related to sodium, saturated fat, or added sugar (Schermel et al., 2013). Moreover, voluntary nutrition labelling is more often found on processed foods than on whole foods, raising the question of whether this practice risks obscuring the inherent nutritional value of whole foods. For example, while half of the breakfast cereals we found for sale in Toronto supermarkets bore front-of-package

references to fibre, such references were absent from 51 percent of canned and dry beans, 95 percent of nuts and seeds, and 96 percent of frozen and canned fruits and vegetables—all foods that are excellent natural sources of fibre (Sacco, Sumanac, and Tarasuk 2013, 520). The prominence of nutrition-related marketing on foods that are considered “foods to limit” on Canada’s Food Guide because of their low nutritional value also raises questions about the healthfulness of the food selections being promoted by voluntary nutrition labelling.

In sum, the one mandatory piece of nutrition labelling on food packages, the Nutrition Facts table, is based on outdated science and provides insufficient information to support healthy food choices in the context of such a complex food supply. The selective nature of voluntary nutrition labelling, in terms of both which foods are subject to such labelling and which food attributes manufacturers choose to highlight, means that this too is of very limited value as a source of nutrition information or guide to healthier food choices.

#### CONSIDERATIONS FOR CANADIAN SHOPPERS: THE PROBLEM OF CONSUMER CHOICE

The task of grocery shopping is complicated by the vast array of options available in supermarkets now, and by the ways in which processed food manufacturers have taken up nutrition. The regulatory oversight of our food supply is increasingly directed toward product innovation and toward what is often presented as the facilitation of consumer choice. Emphasis is on consumer safety and risk management, not on health promotion. With the expansion of discretionary fortification, the risks to be managed are those associated with chronically high nutrient exposures, but the nascent science of nutritional toxicology provides a very weak foundation upon which to mount such regulatory action. In this context, the onus is clearly on consumers to make informed food choices and manage their own nutritional health, but the volume and complexity of nutrition information required to navigate our food system is arguably beyond consumers’ reach.

The criticisms of voluntary and mandatory nutrition labelling expressed here could be interpreted as a call for improved nutrition labelling. In recent years, several composite nutrition-rating schemes have been proposed as a means to simplify and standardize the communication of nutrition

information on food packages (Institute of Medicine 2011; UK Food Standards Agency 2007). However, simplified rating systems typically offer little guidance to help consumers differentiate the presence of valuable micronutrients from gratuitous fortification. In part, this reflects concerns about the interrelation between nutrition-labelling and food-manufacturing practices. While nutrition-labelling regulations can exert a positive influence on food-manufacturing practices, the opposite is also true.<sup>4</sup> Consider, for example, the Institute of Medicine's decision to not include an assessment of micronutrients in its recommendation for standardized front-of-package nutrition labelling so as not to encourage more discretionary food fortification and increase the risk of excessive nutrient intakes (Institute of Medicine 2010, 84–85). A compelling alternative, put forward by Marion Nestle and David Ludwig (2010), is to eliminate all front-of-package nutrition claims and enhance the mandatory Nutrition Facts table so that it provides more effective guidance.

Evidence continues to mount that the health of many Canadians is compromised by what they are eating. Population health surveys have revealed a high prevalence of inadequacy for some nutrients, such as magnesium, calcium, and vitamin A (Canada, Health Canada 2012; Canada, Health Canada and Statistics Canada 2008a, 2008b), along with excessive sodium intakes (Canada, Health Canada 2010) and growing problems of overweight and obesity (Shields 2005; Tjepkema 2005). A regulatory framework that better supports Canadians in making healthy food choices needs to be seen as a population health imperative. This means placing the nutritional needs of the population at the forefront of policy related to nutrition labelling and food fortification.

#### NOTES

- 1 Many DVs on US food labels date even further back, to the 1969 Recommended Dietary Allowances (Institute of Medicine 2003).
- 2 See, for example, the information available at Health Canada, "Consumers: The Nutrition Facts Table," 2008, <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/label-etiquet/nutrition/cons/index-eng.php>.
- 3 The most recent edition of Canada's Food Guide recommends that Canadians make half of the grain products they consume whole grains as a means to achieve adequate intakes of fibre and magnesium (Canada, Health Canada 2007).

- 4 An example of a positive influence is the incentive that the mandatory inclusion of trans fat content in the Nutrition Facts table created for manufacturers to lower the amount of trans fat in foods.

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## **Edible Canada**

### **The Growth of Culinary Tourism**

*Eric Pateman and Shannon King*

Culinary tourism allows people to learn about and appreciate a region while consuming food and drink that is somehow related to that area. Its aim is to connect people to regional cultures through their cuisines. In Canada, this can mean learning about how maple syrup is made in Québec or enjoying a British Columbia meal of Dungeness crab paired with local wines. The diversity of cuisines across Canada offers ample opportunity for the culinary tourism industry to expand.

As a leading chef and president and founder of Edible Canada, Canada's largest culinary tourism company, I have watched the country's food scene change rapidly.<sup>†</sup> From high-end restaurants to food carts in back alleys, Canada's cuisine is diversifying and gaining a global reputation. Culinary tourism is on the rise around the world, but Canada, I suggest, is a leader in the field. So why are food tours, casual dining, and other culinary adventures on the rise, and how do these food-related activities work to communicate about food?

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<sup>†</sup> The "I" in this chapter is Eric Pateman. I write in the first person because the views presented in the chapter reflect my experience as president of Canada's largest culinary tourism company. Shannon King, my coauthor, interned at Edible Canada in the summer of 2013, while she was earning a degree in applied human nutrition.

Edible Canada, a Vancouver-based culinary tourism company, was founded in 2005 as Edible Vancouver—a culinary concierge service that gave tourists personalized itineraries of where to eat and shop in Vancouver during their stay. During people’s visits to Vancouver, I would tour them around Granville Island Public Market to enrich their experience of the market and to ensure they were able to enjoy the products that the vendors had to offer. I expanded this service to include other culinary adventures, such as gourmet kayaking trips, before entering the retail sector in 2006 with a store in the Granville Island Public Market called Edible British Columbia, which offered BC artisans a year-round outlet for their products. In 2011, Edible BC moved to a new larger building on Granville Island and was rebranded as Edible Canada: our facility now includes a bistro and a demonstration kitchen (to complement the retail store, cooking classes, and tours) and carries items from across Canada.

With Edible Canada, I have tried to create a place where tourists and locals alike can enjoy and celebrate all that Canada has to offer from a culinary point of view. Edible Canada’s activities include gourmet kayaking weekends through the Gulf Islands (where a chef prepares all the meals and pairs them with regional wines and spirits), daily Granville Island Market tours (where a chef guides visitors through the market), whisky dinners (where a local whisky expert teaches guests about whisky and pairs it with local cuisine), and a “new Canadian cuisine” bistro on Granville Island (where Canadian cuisine is interpreted for visitors, and local farmers, fishmongers, and artisans are showcased).

As a culinary tourism company, Edible Canada is part of an industry that is still in its infancy but that has grown rapidly over the past decade. A few vital organizations—such as Lonely Planet, through its culinary guidebooks, and the International Culinary Tourism Association—have helped the industry develop both in Canada and abroad. Québec is probably where the industry originated in Canada. The direct influence of the French heritage on the province is evident in its cuisine, and for a long time, Québec was a leader in bringing European culinary traditions to Canada. In fact, in the mid-1900s, Québec was *the* destination where North Americans came to connect with what was happening in Europe.

Since then, Nova Scotia has emerged as a Canadian leader in culinary tourism. For instance, it was the first province to develop an association to set quality standards in order to ensure that culinary tourism provides the best Nova Scotia has to offer. Most other provinces have since followed suit, developing associations to promote provincial culinary tourism activities. Ontario also stands out as an industry leader: the province offers the largest variety of culinary tourism experiences in the country and was named one of three worldwide leaders in culinary tourism in *The State of the Culinary Tourism Industry Readiness Index* (ICTD 2010).

Promoters of tourism in Canada are beginning to embrace in earnest what the country has to offer from a culinary perspective. For instance, Destination Canada (previously the Canadian Tourism Commission) has now identified “award-winning local Canadian cuisine” as one of the “five Unique Selling Propositions that set Canada apart as a travel destination” (Canadian Tourism Commission 2015), and the commission has been essential in promoting not only culinary tourism companies like Edible Canada but also Canada’s culinary tourism brand. The support of similar national, provincial, and local groups will play a key role in developing the industry in Canada in the future.

One reason for Canada’s emergence as a leader in culinary tourism stems from the diversity of food-related opportunities and experiences available across the country. For instance, wine tourism has become popular in both British Columbia and Ontario: in the Okanagan valley, on Vancouver Island, and throughout the Niagara area, tourists visit wineries to learn about and sample wines first-hand. Even southwestern Saskatchewan now offers a wine-tasting experience on the edge of the Cypress Hills. On the East Coast, with its fresh lobster, and the West Coast, with its Dungeness crab, tourists can try to catch their own supper. And tourists who prefer red meat can savour Alberta beef and lamb, touted as the best in the country, while taking advantage of the food tours now on offer in Alberta’s two largest cities. The Canadian industry simply offers tourists a wide breadth of unique and unforgettable culinary experiences.

Locals and tourists are no longer content to just eat food; they crave culinary experiences that broaden and deepen their understanding of food. Whether inspired by food activists—like Jamie Oliver, who claims to be at the forefront of a “food revolution”—or by environmental concerns and calls for more local consumption, people are seeking opportunities not

just to eat something new but to experience food in ways that help them think more deeply about what, how, and why we eat.

#### WHY IS CULINARY TOURISM ON THE RISE?

Although several factors have contributed to the growth of culinary tourism around the globe, one key contributor is consumers' growing appetite for stories about where and how food is produced. Terms like "farm to fork" and "locavore" are increasingly commonplace, as is consumers' desire to connect with food producers. Tourists seek venues like Pike Place Market in Seattle or the Granville Island Public Market in Vancouver, where they can interact directly with producers—the people who can best explain and educate consumers on their culinary choices. Increasingly, Canadians are buying meat from the butcher and bread from the baker, taking the time to reconnect with the people who are knowledgeable about the food products they sell.

Another driver behind the increasing fascination with food and food stories is the growing prestige surrounding celebrity chefs. Food Network has certainly been a major contributor to this phenomenon and has also significantly increased the popularity of culinary tourism. In 2012, Food Network had a nightly audience of over 1.1 million, which allowed it to remain in the top ten cable networks for the fourth year in a row (Scripps Networks Interactive 2012).

Whether it is watching Anthony Bourdain eat beating cobra hearts in Vietnam or watching Jamie Oliver travelling across Italy in his camper van as he learns to cook traditional dishes from local grandmothers and grandfathers, the sense of adventure depicted in these shows rubs off on viewers, encouraging them to seek out their own culinary adventures. The sheer number of food-related attractions in the top "must do" lists on TripAdvisor is testament to this growing interest: almost every major city in Canada features two or more culinary tourism activities in its "top 10" attractions listed on TripAdvisor.

The development of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook and of social review sites such as Yelp, TripAdvisor, and Urban Spoon has had a huge influence on the culinary tourism industry. Before the advent of consumer review websites, diners relied on word of mouth and professional critics for restaurant reviews. Using consumer-review platforms, though, people can now read multiple reviews from casual diners like themselves

before choosing a restaurant, and good reviews can prompt others to visit in droves: one survey concluded that a one-star increase in a company's Yelp review could increase their business by 9 percent (Luca 2011).

Social media have also been an interesting factor in the farm-to-fork movement. Since people are now able to interact directly, via social networking sites like Facebook, with food producers and preparers. Twitter offers chefs a platform to give customers sneak previews of what they will be preparing for dinner that night, allowing diners to begin their culinary experience before setting foot in the restaurant. At Edible Canada, we use social media to share information about offerings such as new products at the store, upcoming events, and special menu items.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the development of the culinary tourism industry around the world has increased the number of experiential learning opportunities related to food. Canada's diversity of products—both cultivated and created—and consumers' growing interest in the stories of food (and food celebrities) have fostered the rapid growth of culinary tourism across the country and have yielded a unique culinary tourism industry whose expression is dramatically different from region to region, and even from city to city. Although the industry is still young, in the years to come the world may very well begin to see that the Canadian food scene has far more to offer than smoked salmon and maple syrup.

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PART TWO  
FOOD AND COMMUNICATION







## ***La cuisinière canadienne***

### The Cookbook as Communication

*Ken Albala*

Cookbooks are not merely instructional texts designed to teach culinary techniques and transmit recipes. They are cultural narratives, and embedded in the stories they tell are certain aspirations and values. Cookbooks entice readers with the implied possibility of an enhanced lifestyle and they often reflect a distinct aesthetic or ethical position, even an entire world view. Modern cookbooks, in particular, seek to suggest that a specific mode of eating will produce a transformational experience of some sort. If you follow their advice, you will reap rewards—weight loss and greater health and vitality, or a happy, well-nourished family, or a conscience relieved of the burden of cruelty to animals, or the sophistication required to impress guests and claim membership in a higher social class. Whatever the angle, cookbooks implicitly promise a better life.

Deciphering the messages, the subtext beneath the recipes, which is not always so apparent, is a matter of setting the cookbook in its social and historical context and then reading between the lines to gauge the intended audience and projected outcomes. Sometimes, what appears to be a simple list of recipes actually contains an entire cultural agenda, complete with social, political, and economic goals. Moreover, the cookbook empowers the individual to express identity, to perform a specific role, whether it involves one's ethnic or religious persona or national background, or even a particular ideological position.

For example, a cookbook containing traditional ethnic recipes enables the readers to connect with their heritage and recreate the past while cooking and serving foods eaten by one's ancestors. It thus strengthens social cohesion within a group. Likewise, a cookbook based on fresh local ingredients implies a political stance against industrially produced food processed hundreds of miles away and shipped, wasting fossil fuels and damaging the environment. In other words, cookbooks are almost always about something more than recipes.

With this in mind, this chapter will deconstruct and analyze one particular cookbook: the anonymous *La cuisinière canadienne*, which appeared in Montréal in 1840 and was the first culinary text to be both written and published in Canada.<sup>1</sup> It was an immensely popular book, going through eleven editions well into the twentieth century (Driver 2008, 84–86; Cooke 2009). It is, in part, a book that simply records recipes, but it also aims to preserve a threatened culture by encouraging readers to be proper Montréalais through learning to make dishes unique to Montréal and its French-speaking population. To some extent, of course, it creates a culinary tradition in the very act of setting in print signature recipes that define this culture.

The book therefore functions on one level as propaganda insofar as it attempts to promote one particular culture among many—even at the time of publication, an antiquated culture that may no longer have reflected how most people ate. The work is not only self-consciously French but also Catholic, and Elizabeth Driver's (2008, 86) contention that the book originated within a nunnery is perfectly plausible. The author of the book is not identified, but the publisher, Louis Perrault, was in the circle of one Mme Gamelin, a founder of the Institute of Providence, a religious order. The Church had a vested interest in preserving French culture and was one of its foremost advocates in these years (86). The explicit aim of *La cuisinière canadienne* was to encourage the preparation of very traditional dishes as a way to preserve identity.

Before delving into these details, allow me to briefly explain the initial allure of this topic for me personally. When I was very young, my mother, before doing her daily chores, would set me up in front of the television to watch cooking shows. My favourite was *The Galloping Gourmet* (filmed in Ottawa from 1969 to 1971), starring Graham Kerr, who would traipse around the studio, wine glass in hand, while executing impossibly rich,

fantastic dishes. In one episode, he cooked a gargantuan tourtière, the historic game pie of Québec, replete with a variety of meats. It stuck in my mind for years as one of the most incredible things I had ever seen. It became such an obsession that, on the day after I got my driver's licence, my best friend and I drove all the way from central New Jersey to Montréal, at a hundred miles an hour in a Delta 88 Olds, just so we could taste a tourtière. I'm not sure why my parents let us go, but we did find the tourtière, at Les Filles du Roy, a historic restaurant that still exists, with the dish still on the menu. And as we will see, it is featured in *La cuisinière canadienne*, too.

My impression, confirmed by this admittedly limited experience, has always been that Québécois cuisine contains numerous rudiments of seventeenth-century cooking, somehow frozen in time from the point of original settlement, while they disappeared back in France. Most notable is the use of certain spices in savoury dishes, but cooking techniques that are characteristically medieval were also preserved. I also expected to find, as is typical of colonial cuisines, odd substitutions and the use of indigenous ingredients in place of those available in Europe. It is these elements that contribute to the uniqueness of a regional cuisine, the product of history and evolution interacting with a new environment, people, and economic forces.

The frozen-in-time phenomenon is not unusual among emigrant cuisines. Often, a set of classic dishes will become fossilized in a colonial setting and remain as a mark of identity long after the repertoire has changed back in the mother country. This is partly a function of being cut off, as it were, and retaining antiquated usage, as can happen in language and dress. In cuisine, it occurs most frequently among expatriate communities surrounded by a majority culture: examples include the Portuguese in Macao or Goa, the Dutch in South Africa or what is today Indonesia, the Spanish in Mexico and Peru, and, as I will argue, the French in Montréal. The publication of a cookbook naturally aids in the ossification of culinary practices because it can become authoritative, promoting a kind of invented authenticity that people thereafter rarely veer away from in their effort to remain true to what they perceive as the proper way to make a certain dish.

The historical setting is crucial to understanding *La cuisinière canadienne*, because it was written several centuries after settlement. Montréal in 1840 was the biggest city in Canada, the financial and trade hub, and even the capital for a while. It was also in the thick of the Industrial Revolution: the

Lachine Canal had just been built, as had the Victoria Bridge. One might expect that a cookbook would reflect these industrial advances, but in fact, *La cuisinière canadienne* is decidedly traditional. Most surprising is that the recipes all call for cooking in a hearth or wood-burning oven rather than a cast-iron stove with hobs on top. Several recipes call for a tripod or, as it is called in English, a spider, on which a pot is set to cook over hot coals in the hearth. The technology is scarcely different from a century before, and the recipes themselves could easily have been penned in the 1740s, some even in the 1640s.

The absence of any prepared condiments and sauces, which are evident in contemporary British cookbooks, is also immediately striking. Everything is made from scratch and the cookbook's author insists in the introduction that one must start with good fresh butter, the purest flour, and fresh eggs, the implication being that many people bought stale ingredients in the city. No doubt the booming population made it increasingly difficult to obtain fresh ingredients from the countryside.

It is also important to remember that Lower Canada (what is today Québec) had been conquered by the English in 1763. After seventy-seven years, it was still to some extent an occupied territory under foreign rule. With an influx of English and, especially, Irish in the nineteenth century, its cultural identity was considered threatened. This was also a time of political reactionism following the failed Republican uprisings of 1837–38. The Act of Union of 1840 aimed not only to join Upper and Lower Canada but also to efface the Francophone population and assimilate them into the English population as subjects loyal to the Crown. There were even measures to ban the use of French in the legislature. This turmoil would not begin to settle until later in the decade, so when this cookbook came out, French culture, language, and cuisine were definitely under threat.

Thus, at a certain level, this cookbook can be seen as an act of defiance, for it is written in French and features recipes that are decidedly antiquated. As for the book's inherent conservatism, a close examination of the recipes is instructive. One for *canards maigres aux épices* (*La cuisinière canadienne* 1840, 37). It is made with wild ducks that are cleaned and stuffed with a mixture of onions and bread crumbs. The ducks are then boiled for two hours in water, which creates a kind of broth. Then, strangely, they are removed and roasted with butter and spices, then returned to the broth before serving with sliced onions or shallots and a splash of wine. The technique of first

boiling, then roasting—or, equally often, half roasting, then braising—is entirely medieval and had largely disappeared from the French repertoire by the eighteenth century. So, too, had the practice of serving duck in a dish of broth. This is a culinary rudiment that had survived, or perhaps revived, in Montréal and was at least several centuries old.

Why would this have survived here, apart from the prevalence of wild ducks in the region? Obviously, the spices had to be imported—in the case of *canards maigres aux épices*, a typical combination would have included pepper, nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon, and ginger. This was a standard medieval combination called *pouldre fort*—enjoyed specifically for the heat of its spices and originally intended to counteract the cold phlegmatic nature of waterfowl. It may thus have originally had a medicinal logic. The hot spices were also thought to aid in the passage of tough indigestible flesh—in this case, old thin ducks that are best stewed. Retaining this very old recipe appears to have been a matter of confirming identity. It communicates what it meant to be a member of this culture and thus resists tinkering or evolution entirely. It is something like *lutefisk* among midwesterners of Nordic descent—a dish that is fairly uncommon in Scandinavia, but is considered to be traditional in the United States. In order to express their background and heritage, Nordic peoples living in the United States cook and eat the dish, even though few people actually admit to liking it. Likewise, the spiced duck recipe in *La cuisinière canadienne* communicates identity as much as a traditional folk dance, song, or dress does—perhaps even more effectively, because we consume it, it becomes us, and in the act of eating, we express identity.

*La cuisinière canadienne* contains other very traditional dishes—for example, *haricot de mouton* (24), in which nubbins of mutton are boiled with turnips, onions, and “farine rotie dans du saindoux,” which is a very early form of a *roux* using lard instead of butter. In fact, it looks very much like *poitrine de mouton en aricot*, a recipe found in Pierre de la Varenne’s *Le cuisinier françois*, published in 1651 (Varenne [1651] 2006, 64). The most interesting thing about this dish is that it derives from the word *harigot*, meaning a lump or piece, and has nothing to do with haricots—a New World bean. By a perverse etymological mix-up, this dish is now usually cooked with beans in France, but *La cuisinière canadienne* has the original, essentially medieval recipe. Even the fourteenth-century *Viandier of Taillevent* has a *hericoc de mouton* (Taillevent 1988, 280).<sup>2</sup>

Another medieval throwback in *La cuisinière canadienne*, though it uses an American ingredient as a substitute and is so familiar today that we scarcely think of it as medieval, is roast fowl—goose served with “compotes . . . d’Atocas” or, as we call it in English, cranberry sauce (1840, 33). Serving a tart fruit-based sauce with wild fowl not only served to complement the gamey flavour but it was also thought to help diners digest the tough meat and to counteract its hot and dry humoral qualities with something sour and humorally cold. It’s a quintessential sixteenth- and seventeenth-century flavour combination that stuck in Canada much as it did in the United States, in turkey with cranberry sauce. La Varenne infamously served turkey with raspberry sauce—something that later chefs mocked as backward after the combination of fruit sauces with meat came to be regarded as obsolete in Europe among fashionable circles.<sup>3</sup> In Montréal in 1840, though, it was still perfectly legitimate, precisely because it was traditional.

Another very ancient dish found in *La cuisinière canadienne* is pork cutlets in Sauce Robert. This sauce, based on onions, underwent a fascinating evolution in France. The version found in Mari-Antonin Carême’s classic, *L’art de la cuisine française au dix-neuvième siècle*, published in the years following his death in 1833, at roughly the same time as *La cuisinière canadienne*, involves onions cooked in butter, a reduction of wine and addition of a demi-glace (in this case, reduced veal stock) and brown mustard (Carême [1833–47] 2005).<sup>4</sup> It is thus a compound sauce based on a *fond* (foundation), which is the base of many different sauces in a professional kitchen. This recipe goes back much further, though, and Carême’s is scarcely different from the version in Massialot’s *Le nouveau cuisinier royal et bourgeois*, the original edition of which appeared in 1691.<sup>5</sup> The version in *La cuisinière canadienne*, is much older, with the onions fried in lard and thickened with breadcrumbs and a little water, which is essentially the medieval version.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Filets à la Sauce Robert*

Coupez les en quatre morceau d’épaisseur d’un doigt, jetez dessus poivre et sel; faites fondre du saindoux dans la poêle, cuisez votre filets doucement retirez et placez dans un plat. Tranchez les oignons, que vous ferez frire avec poivre et sel, dans un peu de saindoux, une poignée de miettes de pain; faites



revenir un peu cette sauce et y autant mis un peu d'eau, versez la sur les filets que vous avez dû tenir dans un plat à part. (*La cuisinière canadienne* 1840, 25–26)

Cut them into four pieces the thickness of a finger, sprinkle on pepper and salt; melt lard in a pan, cook your filets gently, remove and place on a plate. Slice the onions, which you fry with salt and pepper in a little lard, a handful of bread crumbs; thicken the sauce a little by adding a bit of water, then pour [the sauce] on the filets that you have set aside on a plate.

One more very antiquated dish that helps prove this point is *La cuisinière canadienne's* roasted fresh cod.<sup>7</sup> The flavouring with cloves is one very old-fashioned element, but, even more importantly, so is a butter sauce made in a *lêchefrite*, a dripping pan, to which port wine and sugar are added. Sugar in sauce, especially for fish, became obsolete in France by the late seventeenth century. This recipe actually fits squarely in the 1540s and looks very much like recipes found in the *Livre fort excellent de cuisine* (1542), which has a recipe for roasted carp or pike that includes a sauce made of wine spices, sugar, and butter.<sup>8</sup> Jacques Cartier would have been perfectly comfortable eating a dish like this.

*La cuisinière canadienne* is traditional, but I don't want to give the impression that it is staunchly and exclusively French. It actually bears little relation to what people in France were eating at the time it was published. It is, more precisely, Montréalais. Though recipes are categorized as *gras* or *maigre*, meaning containing meat or not—the latter being appropriate for Catholic Lent—there is nothing particularly chauvinistic about this cookbook. Exactly the opposite is true; an entire section is devoted to very English “pouding”—plum puddings—and a variety of other stodgy boiled things that no nineteenth-century Frenchman would touch but that had by this time become common in Canadian cooking among people of all backgrounds.

The most interesting recipe in this cookbook is also, as far as I can tell, uniquely Canadian. *Pouding à la farine de blé d'Inde*, or cornmeal pudding, is neither cornbread nor Indian pudding, which is a kind of slow-cooked mush. Rather, this is a proper English pudding cooked in a cloth, on a tripod for three hours, but served in a uniquely Canadian manner—namely, with

maple syrup: “La meilleure sauce est du sucre d’érable, pour ces sortes de pouding” (“The best sauce for these kinds of pudding is made with maple sugar”; *La cuisinière canadienne* 1840, 54). It seems significant that Montréalers were willing to embrace the English dishes as integral to their heritage—as well as that of the Native American, at least in terms of the ingredients. In this respect, *La cuisinière canadienne* is similar to the first truly American cookbook, written by Amelia Simmons and published in the United States a few decades earlier ([1796] 1984). If anything, *La cuisinière canadienne* is a truly Canadian cookbook, and that’s exactly what it communicates. It doesn’t try to replicate whatever was in fashion in Paris, which would have been very easy to do. Rather, it is proudly local and resolutely backward-looking in its flavour combinations, in a resolute attempt to construct what French-Canadian cooking ought to be.

Another dish with medieval origins is the *blancmange* or, as it is called in *La cuisinière canadienne*, *Blanc mangé*. The original dish was made with a combination of poached capon, which was finely pounded, thickened with rice starch, and flavoured with sugar, almond milk, and rosewater. It still survives in this form in Turkey as *tavuk göğsü*. In Europe, however, the recipe evolved so completely that it is barely recognizable: it is now a sweet milk pudding thickened with cornstarch (or sometimes gelatin) and flavoured with almond extract. As with most modern recipes, this one is quicker and easier, and uses mass-manufactured ingredients. The recipe found in *La cuisinière canadienne* (1840, 97–98) falls somewhere around the midpoint of this evolution. It starts with gelatin made scratch, using veal feet and water, a technique that largely vanished after gelatin packets were invented. This version uses milk, bitter almonds, sugar, cinnamon, and nutmeg, infused and then strained and chilled. It’s not clear whether the author knew anything about the early history of the dish, but if one had to pinpoint this version without knowing the publication date of the cookbook, it would still predate 1840.

Finally, we come to the *tourtière*. Today, the classic recipe is considered to be the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean version made with a variety of meats, including game, cut into chunks, as well as potatoes and other vegetables. The Montréal version is made with ground pork. Both are traditionally eaten on Christmas Eve as a celebratory dish that intentionally recalls ethnic background and binds the community. *La cuisinière canadienne* (1840, 61–64) describes several different varieties, made with mutton, veal,

or even potatoes alone, which is not surprising. Nor is it surprising that the supposedly most traditional *tourtière*, made with venison, is not here; rather, the book features the quintessential Montréal version made with fresh pork, very finely minced and cooked first before filling the pie. It is still made this way.

It is not generally recognized that these grand pies were utterly fashionable in Europe in the early modern period, though they were far more elaborate. *Le pâtissier français* (1653) includes a pie made of ground veal, pork, or mutton, combined with suet, spices, eggs, pine nuts, and currants, and garnished with artichoke bottoms or mushrooms, slices of ox tongue, pistachios, lambstones, sweetbreads, marrow, chestnuts, and verjuice, then the recipe suggests that it can be baked free-standing or in a tart pan (Marnetté 1656).<sup>9</sup> The Québécois version substitutes potatoes and sometimes other vegetables for some ingredients, but it is still very similar to the recipe in *Le pâtissier français*. Although *La cuisinière canadienne* doesn't mention it, the green tomato ketchup often served with *tourtière* also seems particularly antiquated. In medieval France, this condiment would have been made not with tomatoes but with a tart fruit like gooseberries or unripe grapes—but aesthetically, they are equivalent. Again, the medicinal logic of a sour condiment helping to cut through the coarse and difficult to digest meat.

An even more direct connection can be made between the veal *tourtière* in *La cuisinière canadienne* and recipes from the very earliest days of settlement. According to the 1840 recipe, veal (either cut into thin strips or finely ground) is sautéed with pepper, cloves, and herbs, and then the mixture is put into a pie shell. A recipe for *tourtes de veau à la crème* from Lancelot de Casteau's *Ouverture de cuisine* (1604) is almost exactly the same, although it includes cream and a few more spices.<sup>10</sup> *Ouverture de cuisine* is actually the only cookbook written in French in the early seventeenth century at the initial point of settlement, and if *La cuisinière canadienne* was intentionally targeting this period, consciously or otherwise, one would expect many other direct correlations.<sup>11</sup>

Significantly, as Jean-Pierre Lamasson (2009) has shown, these kinds of pie had gone entirely out of fashion in France by the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> But they are still a potent marker of identity in Montréal, a culinary expression that could not be abandoned for the sake of fashion. They remain popular today precisely because they are traditional, and the recipe has been codified and embraced as an integral part of the culture.

The recipe for *Pâtés de Noël*, a kind of mincemeat pie, found in *La cuisinière canadienne* (1840, 65–65) the one recipe most recognizably antiquated. Made of beef tongue, suet, sugar, raisins, apples, a slew of spices, and brandy, it was meant to keep for several months, with the crust functioning as a kind of hermetically sealed container, as was the case with pies in the Middle Ages. Of course, this dish survives in English cuisine as well, but the original version, made with meat, is rarely prepared these days. Despite the name, today's mincemeat pies usually contain only fruit.

The final chapters of *La cuisinière canadienne* are perhaps the most interesting, because they feature exactly the kind of do-it-yourself old-fashioned recipes that have once again come into fashion recently. There is a whole section on homemade liqueurs made with *frere piquant* (prickly ash) or ratafia, which is made with anise, walnuts, or bitter almonds. Fresh berries are steeped in *eau de vie* or rum. The book also features recipes for pickles—cornichons, little onions, beets in a vinegar pickle, and green beans. These were all products one could have easily purchased, but making them from scratch gave a person social cachet—serving homemade versions was a point of pride.

To understand these recipes, one must situate them in the broader context of the period. In the United States, the Presbyterian minister Sylvester Graham was advocating whole grains and natural foods. Although *La cuisinière canadienne* doesn't explicitly state so, this aesthetic is a conscious reaction to the industrialization of food. Think also of the Romantic landscape paintings of this era, with their nostalgia for a way of life perceived to be disappearing. Cornelius Krieghoff's images of rustic life along the St. Lawrence come to mind: they are contemporary with *La cuisinière canadienne*. In the United States, Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper were writing in this same era, in much the same vein. I think this explains the many antiquated traditional recipes in *La cuisinière canadienne*. Of course, people did not each such food all time: cookbooks are generally more prescriptive than descriptive. But insofar as this cookbook reflects a perceived heritage that the author hoped to preserve, it communicated much more than recipes. It informs the reader how to enact identity as a Montréalais.

The message here so strongly communicates identity that a brief comparison with a cookbook published in Toronto might be instructive. Also appearing in 1840, *The Frugal Housewife's Manual* was written by one A.B.

of Grimsby (A.B. 1840). In contrast to *La cuisinière canadienne*, it was never reprinted, and only two copies survive. Many of its recipes were pirated from earlier English cookbooks, and the sections on cultivation were taken from an American Shaker seed catalogue. The recipes represent fairly standard early-nineteenth-century fare: plum cake, sponge cake, pound cake, waffles, custard, bread pudding, mince pie. These were recipes that could be found in most British or American cookbooks of the time. That is, they say practically nothing about identity, and, because they reflect a dominant culture with no need to protect tradition, they communicate very little. That is not to say that cookbooks originating in a dominant culture can't convey a wealth of information, nor is it to say the recipes here are bad—though sales might be an indication—but in the case of A.B.'s cookbook, the recipes have nothing particular to say. There is no powerful social, political, or cultural message written between the lines. Not every cookbook has a deeper story to tell.

Ironically, the recipes in *The Frugal Housewife's Manual* might even have been more practical, fashionable and tasty than those in *La cuisinière canadienne*. Despite the latter's overwhelming success, one must wonder how *La cuisinière canadienne* was first received and, how people used this cookbook years later. It is remarkably backward. Imagine someone trying to cook in a hearth in the early twentieth century, when this cookbook was still in print. At some level, it must have been viewed as a historical piece, something used by Québécois to remember the distant past. But could it have still been used for cooking? Perhaps people adapted the recipes, using modern equipment, and toning down the odder flavour combinations. Or maybe they never used it at all. If the widespread survival of dishes like *tourtière* is any indication, though, the antiquation of this cuisine was intentional; if anything, it stubbornly resisted change precisely because francophone culture remained under threat. Though today, when the *réveillon* *tourtière* enjoyed on Christmas Eve may only offer a brief respite from typical fast food and convenience food, its value lies precisely in the fact that it is time consuming and fairly difficult to make and that as a strange old-fashioned dish, it is all the more powerful a marker of identity. This is a dish that one can bet will not change. Indeed, an Internet search for "tourtière" yields recipes that are scarcely different from these original versions, attesting not only to the homogenizing power of the Internet but also to its profound influence on culture. If anything, the ease with which

information about the dish can now be found will almost certainly assure that the dish will remain unchanged.

#### NOTES

- 1 The first cookbook published in Canada, in 1825, was actually a reprint of Menon's *La cuisinière bourgeoise*, originally published in Paris in 1746.
- 2 This Vatican manuscript reads: "Prenez vostre mouton et le mettez tout cru soubzfrir en sain de lart, et soit despecié par menuiez pieces, des ongnons menuz meiciez avec . . . et deffaictes de boullon de beuf; et mettez du vin du verjus et macis, ysope et saulge et faictes bien bouillir emsemble" (Taillevent 1988, 40). By comparison, *La cuisinière canadienne* flavours the *haricot* with cloves and parsley rather than mace, hyssop, and sage. In any case, the dish had completely changed in France by the nineteenth century, losing the spices entirely.
- 3 See L.S.R.'s jibe, in "L'art de bien traiter" (originally published in 1674), at La Varenne, whose larks in hypocras (spiced wine) and turkey with raspberries were seen as brutishly backward: "Ne frémissiez-vous point déjà au récit d'un potage de sarcelles à l'hypocras, d'alouettes à la sauce douce? . . . Voyons ensemble, je vous prie, un jarret de veau à l'épigramme, un poulet d'Inde à la framboise farci des manches d'épaules à l'olivier" (L.S.R. [1674] 1995, 23). In other words, recipes such as those found in *La cuisinière canadienne* were already considered outdated in France by the late seventeenth century.
- 4 The five volumes of Carême's *L'art de la cuisine française* were published posthumously, between 1833 and 1847, primarily under the editorship of Armand Plumerey. Carême's first name often appears today as Marie-Antoine, but as is clear from facsimiles of early editions of the work, he preferred the Russian spelling "Antonin."
- 5 Massialot's version reads: "Sausse-Robert. Prenez des oignons, & les coupez en dez: passez dans une casserole avec un peu de lard fondu en les remuant toujours; etant demi roux, égoute bien la graisse, & moiulle-les de jus, & laissez mitonner à petit feu, les assaisonnez de poivre & de sel; etant cuits, liez d'un coulis de Veau & jambon: voyez que la sausse soit du'n bon gout, & y mettez un peu de moutarde, & lui donnez de la pointe, & vous en servez eu besoin" (Massialot [1691] 2005, 322).
- 6 In the *Livre fort excellent de cuysine* (1542, fol. 32), the sauce is mentioned with a fricasee of liver. "Coupes voz foyes par lesches & aussi des ongnons par rouelles & saupouldrez de sel puis frises en saing de lart serves tout

chault pouldre blanche dessus, et ainsi pourrez faire de tous aultres foyes comme il[s] ont vue saulce appellee barbe robert.”

- 7 “Il faut extraire l’interieur par les Ouïes; faire un farce d’ognon avec mie de pain, persil, sel, poivre et clous que l’on met dans la morue. On poudre de farine la pièce, avec poivre et sel, et on la place sur un gril dans un lèche-frite, avec précaution; on fait une sauce au buerre, avec vin de porte et un peu de sucre” (*La cuisinière canadienne* 1840, 42).
- 8 “Pour une carpe fresche pour ung becquet, pareillement pour une plye, prenes des oignons, & les frises, ayes de la mye de pain blanc, & le frises tresbien, & apres iettes les oignons avec le beurre bouilly avec la mye de pain ensemble prenes de la canelle ung peu d’espice ung petit de sucre, de la semence de fenouil, puis frises vostre poisson & si vous le voules encores rostir sur le Gril vous le povés rostir, si vous le voules servir tout sec si le serves, & pour le mettre en saulce vous le mettres en une toille et feres le boullon de vin vermeil & du vinaigre, pour especes canelle moix muguette & sucre, et le faictes boullir a court boullon et du beurre dedans” (*Livre fort excellent de cuyisine* 1542, fol. 8).
- 9 This is a translation of the anonymous *Le patissier français* of 1653.
- 10 “Pour faire tourtes de veau à la creme. Prenez douze ôces de chair de veau, & faites cuire, puis prenez demye liure de graisse de boeuf, & hachez tout ensemble, battez trois oeufs cruds, quatre onces de sucre, demye once de canelle, un noix muscade, un peu de sel, demye sopine de creme, bien meslé tout ensemble, & fites votre tourte selon notre fantasie” (de Casteau 1604, 35).
- 11 A more detailed comparison of the two texts would no doubt repay the effort. For example, the *Oeufs à la neige* recipe in *La cuisinière canadienne* (92–93) looks rather similar to Lancelot de Casteau’s *Pour faire neige* (1604, 123). There was actually an even older recipe for this dish, though, called “snow” in England and appearing in the *Proper Newe Book of Cookery* (1545) and many other works in the sixteenth century. There is also an illustration of someone making “snow” in Scappi’s *Opera* (1570, 639).
- 12 Lamasson (2009, 107) quotes Marie Antonin Carême: “This pastry entrée is no longer considered enough of a delicacy to appear on the tables of the wealthy, for its bearing is too uncouth.”

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## **The Dinner Party**

### **Reworking Tradition Through Contemporary Performance**

*Jacqueline Botterill*

Dinner parties can be understood as social and cultural performances. Most of what we know about these performances is however, historical, rather than contemporary, and pertains largely to the British and European upper classes (see, for example, Mennell 1985). While fascinating and instructive, these historical accounts offer little insight into the nature and social significance of the modern-day dinner party in Canada. As a performance, the dinner party has clearly lost some of its traditional formality—but precisely how, and how far, has it evolved? What meanings do we now ascribe to these social occasions, and what do these performances seek to accomplish? In this chapter, I present the results of a study I conducted into the nature and social meaning of the dinner party in its contemporary Canadian setting. Forty-seven people, all living in southern Ontario, from two generational cohorts (under thirty and over forty), shared their reflections on their experiences as both hosts of and guests at dinner parties—events that, I argue, constitute one of the increasingly rare occasions on which people engage in face-to-face socializing in an intimate setting. I am hopeful that the micro-perspective on dinner parties presented in this chapter will stimulate further research and discussion, as well as serving as a point of comparison that can help to illuminate divergent experiences of the dinner party.

No universal blueprint shapes festive eating patterns. Although all cultures construct communal eating customs (Lévi-Strauss 1969), they employ diverse sets of activities, foods, and objects. There is no basis from which to argue that using a fork is superior to chopsticks or one's hand, that eating at a table is more civilized than eating on a mat on the floor. Canada embraces and celebrates diverse eating practices. At the same time, the nation has inherited some dominant eating customs, many of which can be traced to the period of colonization.

British and French eating patterns, in particular, influenced eating customs not only in colonized countries like Canada but around the world (Mennell 1985; Trubek 2000; Mintz 1986). Ken Albala (in this volume) helps us to understand how early cookbooks such as *La cuisinière canadienne* (1840) established a specifically Canadian inflection of French cuisine. As Albala notes, the first cookbook written and published in Canada—acceptably French, yet adapted to colonial circumstances. The diffusion of British dinner parties to Canada also demonstrates efforts to reproduce the ceremonial meals of the Empire. The careful historical work of Elizabeth Errington (2010), for instance, reveals the longings felt by wives of the early political elite in Upper Canada for London's dinner party customs and their attempts to transplant to Canada the dinner parties they had left behind in Britain.

The structure of British dinner parties, which were strongly informed by the French, is generally associated with the bourgeoisie. Around 1850, this class comprised bankers, industrialists, prosperous trades people, professionals, and white collar workers, all of whom enjoyed unprecedented wealth and social mobility within the economic networks established by earlier industrial and merchant revolutions (Seigel 2012). So, too, did the bourgeoisie experience new political power enshrined in democratic legal systems. Norbert Elias (1978) demonstrates how the members of this class expressed their social position through the construction of new lifestyle practices, which included dinner parties. According to Elias, table manners, far from being trivial affectations, reflected shifts in the power structure of the nation. Elias's subtle analysis of the British bourgeoisie acknowledges the strategic, conscious use of particular cultural practices to secure social distinction, but he also shows how less conscious emotions and sentiments shaped the particularities of the bourgeois lifestyle.

Elias focuses on the emergence of the bourgeoisie and its role in determining the canons of civilized behaviour. Unlike the aristocracy, who inherited superior social status, members of the bourgeoisie, despite their growing wealth and political power, had to construct their place in the social hierarchy, frequently asserting it through practices of material consumption. They also had to distance themselves from the working class, that is, those whom they employed or to whom they offered professional services. This struggle for class identity was, however, also reflected in the development of a distinctively bourgeois set of sensibilities, which emphasized refinement, decorum, and a sense of personal privacy. As Elias points out, for centuries prior, members of the aristocratic warrior class had found it quite acceptable to eat with their hands, taking food from communal dishes, to cut meat at table with hunting knives, to sprawl across chairs, and to belch, smack their lips, fart, and otherwise make no effort to conceal the bodily effects of digestion (1978, 57–64). In the eyes of the emerging bourgeoisie, however, such actions were deemed to betray a lack of concern for the feelings of others and to violate a newly valued sense of physical privacy.

Under the evolving conditions of modernity, the proper department of self and the observance of social conventions rose in importance. The bourgeoisie's heightened sense of self-awareness and sensitivity to social interaction choreographed eating patterns that distanced diners from the material and bodily conditions of food consumption. Eating with one's hands was banished in favour of utensils (including the fork and a downsized version of the knife), meals were served on individual plates, and diners were expected to discipline their bodies—to maintain an appropriate posture and suppress all external evidence of internal bodily processes. Embedded in these new conventions was a characteristically bourgeois fear of social embarrassment, against which the rules governing interaction at the table served as a sort of talisman, warding off the possibility of shame and loss of status. The assertion of these new customs, Elias argues, was a strategy that helped the bourgeoisie to construct, however flimsy, a sense of control over sexual urges and impulses deemed animalistic with the veneer of civility. With this civilizing process evident in new eating patterns, the bourgeoisie articulate their social position against that of the aristocracy as well as their power over the working class and colonial subjects.

Ample discretionary income and a servant culture ensured that the Victorian dinner party was special and exclusive. Without a private home

with considerable space, as well as access to abundant and diverse commodities and servants, it was difficult to enact this eating occasion successfully. Traditional feasting rituals were organized by men for men, but women oversaw dinner parties, albeit under their husbands' advisement and with their social interests in mind. Although held in the home, public and private spheres crossed the table at these events, for the agenda of both hosts and guests was often social advancement and status (Habermas 1991, 44–49). The dinner party was not a family meal; it was an adult event, and children, who lacked the requisite training and understanding of the social importance of this event, were excluded. The most coveted guests at the bourgeoisie dinner table included members of the aristocracy, politicians, dignitaries, noted professionals, artists, intellectuals, and prominent business owners (McDiarmid 2008, 48). Customs dictated a special place for guests of honour at the table so that others could recognize who was important and so that hosts, who sat at the ends of the table, enjoyed the best view and were within hearing distance of influential guests (Jameson 1987, 57).

Dinner parties took place at a table in a room reserved for dining. Table talk was key, for it was through conversation that one could learn, display knowledge, and advance socially (McDiarmid 2008, 47). Around the table, diners might become aware of new business opportunities, potential places for their children in elite schools, or possible romantic unions. Alliances could be forged and general class-consciousness reinforced. Borrowing a page from the earlier court dining system, wit and expressiveness were prized at the mid-nineteenth-century dinner party. The manners of the table and the style of conversation promoted openness and candidness; dinner parties also offered reprieve from the formality of Victorian public life by including laughter (McDiarmid 2008, 51). Dinner party games, which were often part of the evening's entertainment, encouraged strangers to play together, speak to one another, make physical contact, and laugh at each other (Logan 2006, 31). Still, despite the acceptance of candour, the spectre of social judgment always floated through the festivities.

Bourgeois women concentrated on creating a correct social mix at the table but also added feminine touches of atmosphere and beauty. The hostess oversaw the menu and had it served in a sequence of courses. Custom dictated that the hosts offer the meal to guests, so it had to be home cooked; however, servants undertook the labour of cooking and serving.

This division allowed the hostess to concentrate on keeping guests happy, ensuring a pleasing aesthetic experience, and exuding charm. A hostess being at ease became a sign of refinement and part of the sign of a “properly” conducted dinner party (Jameson 1987, 59).

Robert Jameson’s “Purity and Power at the Victorian Dinner Party” (1987) offers one of the most detailed and rigorous historical accounts of the Victorian dinner party. Jameson draws attention to how the Victorian dinner party moved guests around the house. While adding interest, movement also allowed the hosts to show off their house, particularly its most prestigious rooms. Guests moved from entryway to reception room, where they received a drink and a small portion of food to stimulate the appetite. The party moved to the dining room next, where most of the evening’s proceedings took place. After dinner, men typically moved into the library or smoking room for private conversation, leaving the women at the table (Rich 2011, 66).

The main meal was served in the dining room upon a large table. Victorian tables sat at least twelve people at considerable distance (Rich 2011, 63). Like the guests who ate around it, the table was wrapped in cloth. Tablecloths and runners made almost universal appearances. Candles, typically secured in large candelabras, lined the table, at the centre of which sat a large spray of flowers and other fresh vegetation. According to Jameson (1987), the hostess paid special attention to these centrepieces, often preparing them herself because servants were seen as lacking the necessary sensibility for such artful displays. The cumulative effect was sensuous, sparkling, fragrant, clean, and atmospheric. The contrast between this environment and the muddy, dung-ridden streets covered in coal dust was stark: nothing spoke more powerfully of the woman’s role as the creator of a domestic sanctuary (Draznin 2001).

Each guest was directed to his or her appointed chair, in front of which was a separate place setting, including a cloth napkin for keeping self and table clean. A series of utensils and stemware framed the diner’s place (Jameson 1987, 57). Servants removed and added dishes at each different course and for each type of food. Varying types of alcohol accompanied each course (Rich 2011, 63). This elaborate array of dishes, stemware, and cloth napkins enabled the bourgeoisie to mediate food—to distance themselves from it. But these dinner party props, the possession of which reflected wealth and good taste, also served as the medium for socialization into the class structure. Children of the bourgeoisie learned the customs of

the table—the correct use of utensils, when to begin eating and when to stop, how to chew food discreetly—so that when they found themselves in the homes of other bourgeoisie, they would be recognized as acceptable. The focus on the quantity and diversity of foods, which were central to previous periods, shifted at the bourgeoisie table to a focus on artful display, the ambience surrounding the experience of dining, and the objects on the table (Jameson 1987, 57–58). The dinner party also highlighted the taste and material wealth of the hosts. The customs they forged became an enduring template for eating.

The expansion of mass production and consumption during the twentieth century enabled a growing number of people to acquire the material means to engage in dinner parties, while visual media such as film and television illustrated the ritual of the dinner party. By the 1970s, dinner parties were such a commonplace form of social interaction that they became the subject of critique. Counterculture movements, filmmakers and theatre producers, and a host of culture theorists exposed the status-driven class pretensions that underpinned bourgeoisie eating habits. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, in his widely referenced study *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979; translated 1984), drew attention to how class dispositions were expressed and struggled over through consumption practices. Bourdieu laid bare the ways in which the bourgeoisie employed elaborate eating habits to express their cultural superiority over others. Luis Buñuel's well-known film *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972) lampooned the dinner party as a domain of class pretentiousness and smug, insular ignorance of the politics of the age. Mike Leigh's satiric comedy *Abigail's Party* (1977) provided theatrical insights into the desperation and small-mindedness characteristic of the suburban British middle class, with its aspirations to upward mobility. Indeed, a study conducted in northern England found that dinner-party hosts continued to concentrate on the importance of social positioning and status. Participants spoke of how they changed the types of foods they served in order to make the best impression on their guests (Mellor, Blake, and Crane 2010).

#### THE CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN DINNER PARTY

But what about the Canadian dinner party? The initial aim of the research reported in this chapter was to gather some primary evidence of how

Canadians understand the dinner party, how they host, what pleasures and values they associate with these eating occasions, and how the dinner party is changing, if indeed it is.

The research was designed with the aim of acquiring a generational perspective in order to compare how older and younger Canadians conceive of the dinner party. In-depth interviews gave participants the opportunity to speak fully and openly, while an open-ended, semi-structured set of questions focused discussions, encouraged consistency, and asked people to consider dinner party experiences broadly. To make people feel comfortable and to ensure that they spoke openly, participants were given the choice of interview site: most chose their homes. Interview length ranged from twenty-five minutes to over two hours, with the average being forty minutes. A total of forty-seven interviews took place, twenty-five with participants over age forty, followed by twenty-two with those under age thirty.

By using an ad hoc method of recruitment—posters at local notice boards, community website Kijiji, door-to-door recruitment, and snowball sampling—I had little difficulty finding volunteer participants. Southern Ontarians demonstrated remarkable interest in sharing their dinner party experiences with me. The sample, neither random nor stratified, is confined to St. Catharines, Ontario, which does not necessarily reflect other parts of the country but does provide a small window onto everyday dinner party practices.

Of the forty-seven interviewees, six were men. Of the six men, two volunteered and four were recruited by their female partners, either because the latter insisted that they be present to accurately account for their jointly hosted dinner parties or because the men were at home during the interviews with their partners. Most participants described themselves as Canadian or Caucasian. Several participants identified with European cultures, and a smaller group identified with those of South Asia and the Caribbean. The lack of diversity within the sample not only cautions against generalizing findings but may suggest that women with Anglo backgrounds identify with and feel confident enough to speak about dinner parties because it is their inheritance.

An iterative analysis that moved from looking for patterns within the data to applying some general theoretical categories was used to produce the themes discussed below. Analysis began by “pawing” the data, which involves transcribing interviews, reading the text, and working with it in

various ways to uncover patterns (Dey 1993). After transcribing and reading the interviews, I converted them into a chart. One column recorded the generational cohort, the next the thematic identifiers, and the third the text. I identified the themes using the iterative process outlined above, compared the responses of the two generations, and interrogated the transcripts in relation to some broad theoretical categories (Glaser and Strauss 1967). In analyzing the transcripts, I considered a series of questions: What is the general structure or narrative of the event that people describe? How is food integrated into the occasion? What material objects are discussed and in what context? How is social interaction manifest? What are the tasks and pleasures of the dinner party?

## TWO GENERATIONS AROUND THE SAME TABLE

A striking feature of the interviews was the remarkably similar ways in which the two generations spoke about dinner parties. Both groups distinguished them from restaurant meals as well as from everyday eating. When asked to contrast dinner parties with restaurant meals, both cohorts associated the dinner party with social intimacy, freedom, and privacy. Both also said they prefer dinner parties to eating in restaurants, although they do appreciate not having to put in the labour when eating at a restaurant. The two cohorts also prefer dinner parties to everyday meals, associating the former with a heightened sense of anticipation, excitement, and anxiety. They agreed that the dinner party meal had to be cooked from scratch. Both said that dinner party meals involve more complex recipes, ingredients, and preparation than regular eating. At a dinner party, they said, eating unfolds over a longer period of time and is more sociable. Everyday meals were associated with speed, simplicity, and eating alone.

### *The Dinner Party Format*

Both generations described a dinner party structure that contains elements of the Victorian dinner party described above, but reworked to suit modern lifestyles. As established by tradition, participants designated the table as the dinner party's sacred site. One young woman, who lives in student accommodations and lacks a table, said she enjoys hosting dinner parties, but stressed that she has to make do by converting a coffee table to an eating surface. She expressed anxiety about her lack of table: "You really



can't do it properly without a table." A young couple said that their current table is too small to be appropriate for dinner parties. They, too, aspire to acquire what they called a "proper" table in the future. All participants categorized eating events away from the table as another kind of event—barbecues, cocktail parties, or buffets, for example.

No evidence in the interviews suggested that the specific places for the host, hostess, and guests of honour have endured. Today's hosts prefer sitting close to the kitchen, not at the head of the table, and contemporary hosts of both generations indicated that they rarely dictate where guests sit. They stressed the importance of allowing people to seat themselves, because it makes guests feel more comfortable. More concern was shown for guests' comfort and ease than for status marking. In fact, one respondent noted that his guests seem conscious that the head of the table was a place of honour and tend to be reluctant to occupy the position. "They never sit at the heads of the table," he commented. "I'm not sure why. I have to invite them to." While people spoke of liking some guests more than others, and several interviewees reported valuing guests who bring humour and erudition to the table, no one spoke of their guests in terms of relative status and importance. Guests were more often friends and acquaintances than bosses or dignitaries.

Both generations said their dinner parties move in the traditional pattern, from living room to kitchen or dining room. Many of the participants' homes did not have formal dining rooms. No one spoke of a clear practice of the men retiring to the drawing room, leaving the women behind. Participants described men and women mixing at their dinner parties, which speaks of more equalized gender relations. The number of women who volunteered for the study provides some indication that women may continue to be the key organizers of dinner parties; however, all of the men interviewed expressed great pleasure in these occasions. Some discussions indicated that the women did not like relinquishing the organizational role. For example, one older woman said, "Since my husband retired, we now fight over who does the dinner party." She expressed some concern that her husband was a better cook than she was and earned more praise from the guests. Men defined dinner parties as somewhat informal gatherings that focused less on conversation than on watching or playing games or media, while their female partners balked at these suggestions. Men also expressed considerable interest in cooking but none at all in dinner party décor.

Both generations decorate their tables with flowers and candles, in keeping with tradition, but they prefer simple centrepieces, describing them as “plain,” “garden-picked,” and “minimal.” In the busy dual-income Canadian household, there is no time for or interest in toiling over ivy and lilies. Both generations showed greater delight in collecting and displaying decorative tablecloths and napkins. People spoke about these items in a way that suggests a connection to fashion: the point, they insisted, is not to use an enduring and finely made tablecloth but to acquire many table linens, mixing and matching and changing them at each party.

Another way in which both generations coordinated their material objects, food, and activities was by using themes. Over half of the participants from both generations spoke of theming their parties. Ethnic and national themes emerged as the most popular, expressing an interest or experience with travel and cosmopolitanism. Time periods (medieval, the future, the Roaring Twenties) and seasonal themes were also common. According to the under-thirty group, these motifs make parties more fun and interactive. Those over forty added that a theme provides a useful organizational focus.

Both generations serve food in courses, almost always three: appetizer, a main course, and dessert. Along with reducing the number of courses, both groups also use fewer utensils, plates, and glasses than was once the case. Everyone preferred a “family style” service—placing food on the table in serving dishes, which are passed around by the guests. Loading individual plates in the kitchen, people said, is time consuming, and it keeps them away from their guests. Participants also believed that guests feel more comfortable when they are in control of the quantity and type of food on their plates. All participants ask people ahead of time whether they have any dietary restrictions: none assume that all people eat meat, wheat products, or dairy items.

All participants said that wine is a dinner party staple. The amount of time spent speaking about wine varied among interviewees, with some providing considerable detail and discussing varietals, taste, and wine regions. Most people, however, distinguished wine chiefly by colour and said they serve both red and white, to cater to people’s preference. Only a few spoke of wine as an integral flavour, a complement to the food. For example, one person said, “The lamb simply does not taste the same without a deep mouthy glass of red.” More commonly, wine was spoken of as

disconnected from food and as served with the expressed purpose of “getting drunk and happy.” Older participants tended to say, “We can’t drink as much as we used to.” The young expressed more sensitivity to cost, which did not prevent wine purchase but encouraged an interest in larger quantities of cheaper wine.

### *The Dinner Party as Social Gathering*

Both generations said they derive positive feelings from dinner party experiences. Some spoke of pleasures related to expressing culinary and decorative creativity, but many identified the primary pleasure of the dinner party as being the act of gathering people around the table for prolonged social engagement. Food was often seen as secondary to socializing. “The food is just a way to get them to the table,” commented one under-thirty participant, while a member of the over-forty group said, “Food brings everyone together.” The most common advice that participants said they would pass along to a novice dinner party host was “Don’t get fussy about the food. The most important thing is to show your guests a good time” (as an under-thirty respondent put it). When asked how they knew that the dinner party had gone well, participants said, “when I can’t get people to leave the table,” “when it goes on into the night,” and “when you hear laughter and loud conversation.” The social interaction at the table was described by others in quasi-religious terms such as “fellowship,” “communion of the table,” and “magic.” Both generations stressed how the richness of social interaction makes the dinner party more pleasurable than everyday meals.

Participants all expressed a desire to create uninterrupted time with guests. Many complained about how home layouts prevent this. The Victorians who relied on servants set a custom of having a private dining room for entertaining. Today, according to the hosts I spoke with, open kitchen plans are unanimously preferred. Representations from both generations said they do not like their partitioned kitchen because it isolates them from their company. Contemporary hosts in addition to socializing with their guests, must prepare the dinner, and if the kitchen and dining room are separate rooms, those two activities can clash. One young woman vividly articulated her concern over working while others enjoyed themselves: “I hate being stuck alone in the kitchen away from everyone. It makes me feel like a kitchen slave.”

Participants reported spending considerable amounts of time preparing for these social events—from three hours to as much as two days. Most participants stressed that preparation allows them to be calm and present in front of guests and to stem the anxiety that accompanies taking responsibility for others. Those under thirty were particularly concerned about displeasing their guests. They invite a mix of people whom they feel will be compatible. They prepare by ensuring that the house is clean and allowing themselves time to shower and to dress suitably. The younger cohort spoke more about dressing up: the dinner party seems to offer them the opportunity to wear some of the fancier clothes in their closet or gives them an excuse to purchase new clothes. Those over forty were more likely to see dressing up as a problem, something that makes their guests feel uncomfortable.

#### MEDIA AND THE DINNER PARTY

The use of media at the contemporary dinner party signifies a significant departure from the Victorian dinner party. The generations differed most notably in their use and opinions of media as it relates to the dinner party. In general, participants police media use, frowning on activities such as television watching, texting, and video gaming since they tend to be disruptive to social interactions and face-to-face communication. However, there was evidence that genders diverged in their opinions of these media. Two male participants spoke of enjoying television viewing during dinner parties, while their female partners insisted that it is not proper to watch television during a dinner party. Board or card games are commonly played after dinner, but several of the female participants questioned the use of video games.

Not surprisingly, those under thirty spoke much more about the issue of texting at the dinner party table than did the older participants. The general consensus was that although texting is part of life, it is rude to do it at the table. Guests appear to understand this, for interviewees said that people prefer to talk instead of text. Still, one specified that she and her friends have set a no-texting rule because they too easily fall into the habit of using their phones. Guests place their cellphones on the stairs as they enter the eating area. She claimed that without phones, conversations deepen. Several young hosts said that they seek to balance their guests'

texting needs with their desire to engage in face-to-face interaction. Several felt that it is fine to text before sitting down at the table, to alleviate a worry or deal with an emergency.

Both age groups considered music appropriate during dinner parties. The music, sometimes matched to the evening's theme, was generally organized by a male host, and some participants spoke about creating elaborate mixes that move the party through different stages. Those who mentioned using music stressed that it has to be well integrated and unobtrusive. One interviewee said that instrumental music or non-English lyrics allow people to attend to each other fully and without disruption.

According to the interviewees, media are necessary for extending dinner party invitations. No one reported mailing invitations through the post, although one young host did so once "just so people could remember what it was like in the olden days." Those over forty invited guests by word of mouth, email, and phone, while those under thirty also sent invitations by texting and through Facebook. The younger cohort spoke of how helpful Facebook is for coordinating parties, describing their social circles as very busy and with different schedules. They mentioned that since they cannot rely on friends being available on the date selected, they use Facebook and Doodle to post their intent to hold a dinner party and then set the date based on how many can attend. Several noted that they have to send follow-up messages to stress that people must be serious about attending, because it is common for people to accept but not appear. These media also allow people to assemble without a great deal of advance planning.

Media are also widely used as reference points for recipes and, particularly for those under thirty, for cooking instruction. Many participants said they have cookbook libraries and enjoy reading cookbooks and receiving them as gifts. Several of the over-forty participants spoke fondly of local community cookbooks that they have contributed to or used. Still, overall, this sample suggests that magazines and the Internet are replacing cookbooks, perhaps owing to their low cost, variety, novelty, and currency in terms of culinary trends.

The media sources used by participants provide such a volume of diverse food information that, at least for these participants, the era of a regional or themed cuisine fashioned around a cookbook has come to a close. Yet the loyalty that these southern Ontario participants showed

toward a common set of Canadian magazines is noteworthy. Canadian publications dominated their choices and, in order of frequency of mention, included *Food and Wine* (offered free by the Liquor Control Board of Ontario), *Canadian Living*, and *Chatelaine*. Each of these publications is inflected with Canadian sensibilities. The interest in regional ingredients, cooking techniques, cooking “heroes,” and “iconic” dishes (which Elizabeth Baird, in this volume, argues shape Canadian cuisine) is reflected in the media that these forty-seven southern Ontarians employed for their dinner party menus.

Many watch television cooking shows, yet find the recipes and menus inappropriate for dinner parties. As one respondent put it, “I watch *Diners, Drives Ins and Dives*, but I’m not going to serve people those huge hamburgers.” Others described Food Network programming as entertaining but not useful for home cooking. The few who take inspiration from television shows pointed to the same two cooks, both of Italian heritage and described as presenting accessible recipes: Rachael Ray (from *30 Minute Meals*) and Stephano Faita (from *In the Kitchen with Stephano*).

Overall, those under thirty mentioned more extensive use of Internet resources. In addition to using recipe ratings to decide what to cook, they find information about cooking time and level of difficulty helpful. Many appreciate blogs, which they found “approachable”: “real people” make the dishes in their homes and break down the recipe into meaningful steps with images. Novice cooks showed a strong preference for new media over television programming as a guide for instruction. One young man discussed the inventive transmedia technique he employs to produce a dinner party menu. He begins by finding an image of a tasty-looking dish, noting that television, with its rich visualization of food, is useful at this stage. He then searches for the dish on the Internet, and, if possible, locates a related YouTube video, finding the how-to demonstrations helpful since they are visually clear and well explained and enable him to control the pace at which instruction is delivered: “I can move it backward if I need to see the step again. It works.”

The young cohort reported documenting their dinner parties to a much greater extent than the older group. Such acts of documentation represent another way in which media are integrated into the dinner party. Three of the over-forty participants showed their dinner party diaries or logs during the interview. Contained in photo albums, scrapbooks, or notebooks, some

diaries were carefully detailed, while others were a more random pile of notes and images. The party logs variously contained dinner party dates, names of guests, menus, recipes, pictures, and notes. Some said they keep the logs for practical reasons: "Look, at my age you tend to forget what you did as the years roll, so this is kind of a calendar." Others said the diaries help them to avoid serving the same dish twice to the same people and to gather favourite recipes in one place.

Those over forty spoke less about taking pictures at their dinner parties. In contrast, almost all of those under thirty acknowledged the presence of cameras at dinner parties—not surprising, considering the widespread use of smart phones, especially in that generation. The younger cohort said that if they do not take pictures themselves, someone will. Those under 30 also said the images are posted on Facebook. These participants said that the images allow them to talk about the party further after it is over, something they find pleasurable. Younger hosts said they like it when people also post compliments about the food and express their enjoyment of the party. One woman said she downloaded the best images, printed them, made a collage, and pinned it to the wall of her entryway. Another interviewee frames snapshots from past dinner parties and uses them to decorate the table at a subsequent gathering. One participant tweets about a dinner party before and after the event. These media extend the life of a dinner party beyond the table and display it visually for a wider group.

## CONCLUSION

This small-scale study suggests that the dinner party continues to occupy an important place in the social and emotional lives of Canadians. The eating occasions described by those I interviewed drew upon shared traditions, yet the emphasis has shifted. The sharp gender divisions of past dinner party practices have dulled, although gender scripts still animate dinner parties. In this small sample, women remain the primary directors of the performance. The more ritualized elements of dinner parties of the past have given way to a less rigid structure, founded in part on a concern for the comfort and enjoyment of individual guests. Participants described fewer and less elaborate centerpieces and a reduced use of tablecloths and complicated place settings, with the focus falling on the creation of a more relaxed physical environment. They also expressed a preference for using

contemporary table settings, rather than heirloom china and linens, suggesting an alignment with commodity fashion cycles. The diminishing role of inheritance and marriage rituals in which the objects of the table were central and bespoke the status of the family and its ancestors, may figure into the transformation of the objects at play. Status now rested on display novel, more so than time-honoured, pieces. The ability to shop well, keep up with fashion instead of displaying the patina of family wealth in a set of aging objects, came to the fore in a society predicated on consumption. Participants still felt that it was important to produce a meal that featured varied and “special” ingredients, yet the number of courses had been streamlined to accord with standards set by restaurant dining: appetizer, main course, and dessert. Perhaps, in the absence of servants, complexities of food preparation and presentation have simply become too much for busy hosts.

Finally, people described their serious commitment to using the dinner party to construct an unmediated space of togetherness and to the mindful preparation and consumption of food, things that are rare in their everyday lives. They value the opportunity for enhanced and prolonged face-to-face communication and convivial social interaction. They both integrate and censor media to support commensality. Although dinner parties continue to act as a means of social positioning, today they appear to serve more as an escape from a widespread sense of social fragmentation and the constant shortage of time, media-saturated environments, and the isolation of eating alone.

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## Canadian Food Radio

### Conjuring Nourishment for Canadians Out of Thin Air

*Nathalie Cooke*

"It is fairly safe to say," wrote Sidney Katz about Canada in 1955, "that the most fascinating subject in the country today is neither sex nor politics, religion nor women's hats—but eating" (11). He based his conclusion on the results of an experiment in which a women's magazine ran two different covers to see which would have greater appeal. One cover displayed a model in an "exotic hat," and the other, "an exotic cake." It seems that the cake stole the show. It also seemed to Katz that "eating" was of literal and conversational interest to a very broad cross-section of Canadians in mid-century Canada and not just a subject to pique the interest of housewives. He denigrated Canadians' tendency to eat 3,200 calories per day of very poor-quality food and, in doing so, joined the expanding conversation about the potential, practical realities, politics, and pitfalls of the way Canadians eat. "Eating," Katz noted, "has become a subject for everyone from psychiatrists to politicians" (11).

Published in 1955, Katz's *Macleans* article coincided with the steady invasion of television screens into living rooms and the subsequent demotion of radios from pride of place.<sup>1</sup> While appetite for conversations about eating and food preparation influenced the choice of magazines' cover pages and articles' subject matter in mid-twentieth-century Canada, conversations about eating and preparing food had been part of the staple

diet of radio programming since its beginnings in the 1920s. Magazines, though, had the advantage of being able to describe and provide images of the foods being discussed, whereas radio could offer its listeners only the discussion itself. Nevertheless, the enduring and consistent presence of radio food shows in programming, from the pioneering programs of the 1920s to the contemporary moment, offers evidence that Katz was not wrong to think that Canadian audiences had an appetite for food talk. The broad question I pose in this chapter is, why do audiences listen to radio programs showcasing conversations about food and eating, and how has food radio nourished Canadian listeners?

In what follows, I offer tentative answers to this broad question by rephrasing it slightly and breaking it down into several more specific queries, which I will address in turn: How did food radio develop in Canada in its early decades? What meanings are ascribed to food when it is served up on the airwaves? How and why did food radio survive the television revolution? And what is the particular appeal of hearing about food without having the opportunity to experience it with the other four senses?

#### FOOD SHOWS AND WOMEN PIONEERS IN CANADIAN RADIO

Radio itself was arguably born out of the human impulse to communicate, and Canada can boast a significant role in launching the medium. Canada was host to historical landmarks such as the first wireless transmission across the Atlantic, which was received in St. John's, Newfoundland, in 1901 (Sterling 2004, 1:258), and the first commercial broadcasting operation, which opened on 20 May 1920 in Montréal.<sup>2</sup> And while Guglielmo Marconi, who is often recognized as the father of radio technology, was the one to successfully receive that 1901 transmission (of the letter *s* in Morse code), it was actually a Canadian, Reginald Fessenden, who transmitted voice recordings on 24 December 1906, while also treating his audience to a violin rendition of "O Holy Night" as a nod to the Christmas season (Stewart 1985, 1).

Food radio, however, is also the product of female pioneers in the industry. With radio channels available in the 1920s, producers quickly realized that content was needed for daytime hours, when audiences were typically female. This need coincided nicely with a supply of highly trained personnel in the form of women educated in the emerging disciplines of

household science and home economics, who could supply radio stations with content that was appealing to the daytime audience. As T. J. Allard explains in unequivocal terms, the result was a positive step forward for women entering the workforce: "Earlier than any other industry, private broadcasting provided senior employment opportunities for women. Few stations did not have one or more women's commentators who quite literally ran their own show" (1979, 54). One such woman in a senior position was Elizabeth Long, who, as Marjorie Lang records, "in 1938 became the first woman hired in an executive capacity by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to direct the women's programs. Her expertise earned her a mandate to run her department on her own authority" (1999, 154).

The full story of women's advancement in radio is considerably more nuanced than Allard's unequivocal statement suggests. It is also a story worth telling, since it offers insights into why women listeners were interested both in what the female radio hosts had to say about food, eating, and women's roles and responsibilities in a world experiencing an increasing rate of change, and in what was said through the very fact of their being given such senior and public roles in the world of radio.

Despite Allard's sense that women's advances in the radio industry were unambiguous, there were significant limits to women's advancement to the senior ranks, and the nature and extent of those limits were, not surprisingly, the subject of curiosity, conversation and sometimes fierce debate.<sup>3</sup> Consider the example of Claire Wallace, a journalist who became the very popular broadcaster of the *They Tell Me* series on Canadian radio. According to Lang, the National Radio Committee proposed, unprompted by a request from Wallace, that the National War Finance Committee, the program's sponsor, raise her salary from \$170 to \$200 per week, at a time when many newspapermen were earning between \$40 and \$50. The proposal caused a media "furor" known as the "Affaire Financial," and the "timorous National War Finance Committee" discontinued the broadcasts as of 23 June 1944 (Lang 1999, 130–31). Hence, Wallace lost not only the potential raise in salary but also her regular role as the show's star personality.

Another check on women's advancement came in the common practice of airing radio programs that created a starring role for a pseudonymous personality. Listeners developed loyalty for the program and the product information it provided, but they also engaged directly with the individual personality through regular listening and mail correspondence. At first

blush, of course, it seems that such radio personalities had significant sway and influence. Upon closer inspection, one comes to recognize that women working under a pseudonym were very vulnerable to layoffs and the societal pressures of their day, since their coming and going from a particular role was not as obvious as it would have been had they developed their professional careers under their own names. Nevertheless, there were many very popular pseudonymous female personalities who wielded considerable influence, such as Susan Agar, known to friends as Mrs. G. R. A. Rice but better known to audience members on the prairies as "The Chatelaine of the Air."<sup>4</sup>

Radio listeners, who developed preferences for the style and characteristics of a particular personality, paid close attention to the individual as well as to her message. In later years, women developed professional personae using their own names, but even during those early decades of radio, there were exceptions to the general pseudonymous rule. On a New York City radio station, the pseudonymous "Martha Deane," supposedly a grandmother from Missouri, was portrayed by the Missouri-born journalist Mary Margaret McBride. But famously McBride managed to keep up the pretense for only three weeks. After this, recounts Christopher Sterling (2004, 2:913), "she gave it all away on the air and admitted that she was no grandmother, merely 'a reporter who would like to come here every day and tell you about places I go, people I meet.'" McBride's subsequent long-standing popularity suggests that audiences appreciated her candour and regarded her forthright and evidently quite genuine enthusiasm as credential enough for their attention.

Canadian listeners also had available to them many programming options from their neighbour to the south. One might well wonder, then, to what extent food radio was affected by US programming. Pierre Pagé, in his entry "Canadian Radio Programming" in Sterling's *Museum of Broadcast Communications Encyclopedia of Radio*, puts the issue in a nutshell. "Much of the development of Canada's radio programming may be seen in light of the country's wish to avoid total domination by US radio," he explains. "Although Canada's French tradition in Quebec made distinct programming easier, English-language programming faced a stiff challenge from the beginning" (Sterling 2004, 1:266). Paul Rutherford (2012) argues that even in radio's first decade, the 1920s, audiences were attracted to the "more polished products of American radio" and by the end of the

decade, roughly 80 percent of the programs available to Canadians were American.

In part, the infiltration of American programming into Canadian airwaves was a function of a certain level of regulatory chaos south of the border that disadvantaged Canadian interests. In Canada, the government established control of the licensing of both radio stations and radio sets as early as 1919. Commercial broadcasting began in 1921, and throughout the decade, negotiations between Canada and the United States over control of radio channels were relatively heated. At times, American operators controlled all the channels, and at other times, when American regulation mechanisms were established and effectively enforced (as in 1921 and again in 1924), six clear channels were freed for Canadian stations (Weir 1965, 97).

In 1926, the same year in which Canada called for a treaty with American regulators, one of the most popular radio shows of the period in terms of women's programming was introduced. On 4 October 1926, fifty women in fifty radio stations across the United States became "Aunt Sammy" (yes, "Uncle Sam's" wife) by reading identical scripts prepared by home economists working for the United States Department of Agriculture (Smulyan 1993, 8). Certainly, both Canadian and American listeners regularly tuned into Aunt Sammy's show, which would become the huge daytime hit *Household Chat*. So, too, did Canadian listeners enjoy such popular American shows as *The Betty Crocker Cooking School of the Air*; indeed, Canadians, like Agnes Quamme Higgins, were among those who personified Betty Crocker on the air, in correspondence, and in stage demonstrations.

There is a robust body of commentary describing the nature and variety of radio programming in the 1920s and 1930s, known as radio's golden age, and recounting a growing sensitivity to advertising as early as the 1930s. This commentary rightly suggests that programming in Canada and the United States was similar. Morleen Getz Rouse, for example, summarizes radio programming for the homemaker during the early decades of radio as "shows to entertain, shows to teach, shows to help raise children, shows that offered conversation, and shows on cooking and shopping" (1978, 316). Soap operas like *Ma Perkins* and *The Guiding Light* fitted into the entertainment category. Cooking shows, though, were more difficult to categorize, and Rouse describes them as some of the "informational" (323) offerings designed to target the housewife's "very special needs"

(316). Part educational programming, part entertainment, cooking shows in radio's early decades were also part marketing ploy. Rouse, with tongue firmly in cheek, explains that Procter and Gamble, the manufacturers of Crisco, launched the Radio Homemaker's Club and "Club members heard Ida Bailey Allen, of cookbook fame, give Monday morning chats about this, that, and Crisco" (323).

Despite the excellent commentary on radio programming, however, what deserves closer scrutiny is how Canadian broadcasters succeeded in casting a very wide net of influence despite limited air space and a much smaller audience than that in the United States. Perhaps the best example of this is the Canadian home authority Kate Aitken.

Aitken was a farm-raised and homegrown radio personality who broadcast under her own name on Canadian-owned and -operated stations. She was successful at maintaining multiple roles and had a significant presence in print media, corporate-sponsored book publishing, cookbook authorship, and cooking stage presentations, in addition to addressing topics ranging from food preferences and preparation to issues of the day. She was the director of the Women's Division of the Canadian National Exhibition in 1927, where she developed programming related to cooking. In 1941, the *Montreal Standard* hired her to become women's editor of the magazine supplement. It is estimated that during that year, her income was as much as \$25,000 from her multiple roles and professional activities (Lang 1999, 187). Gordon Sinclair notes that by 1950, Aitken was receiving some 260,000 letters per year (an average of about 1,000 each weekday) and was giving "about 600 broadcasts and 150 speeches" annually (1950, 8). Sinclair goes on to marvel that "although she's helped somewhat in the above chores by a corps of 21 secretaries Mrs. A. writes her own scripts, hires her radio casts, selects the music and produces the show" (9).<sup>5</sup> In other words, Aitken really *did* unequivocally run her own show. Women tuned in to listen to her radio broadcasts not only to benefit from the information she provided but also to hear from a woman who had turned domestic expertise into a paying career—and who used her own name in a professional capacity.

One can compare the reach and influence of Aitken with that of an American pseudonymous counterpart, Betty Crocker. We know more about the character guidelines for Betty, who was created in 1923 by the advertising department of General Mills's predecessor, Washburn Crosby Flour, than we do about most other corporate cooking personalities. In his



history of General Mills, James Gray (1954, 173) writes that Betty was to be “the eternal and supreme housewife, all-wise, generous of time, advice, sympathy,” and “the stalwart, reliable essence of the maternal.”<sup>6</sup> Everyone who represented her was trained in “a Betty Crocker literary style, written and spoken, a Betty Crocker idiom, a Betty Crocker set of values” (174). But the text in which Betty Crocker figures is considerably larger than the radio drama, and considerably more dynamic. Crocker is a character developed to reflect the changing times. Her portrait, for example, has been revised at least eight times (in 1936, 1955, 1965, 1968, 1972, 1980, 1986, and 1996), each revised image reflecting the contemporary vision of a warm and authoritative figure.<sup>7</sup>

In order to compare mail volume and audience numbers for Betty Crocker with those of Kate Aitken in 1941, an unpublished document from General Mills written in 1948 is helpful.<sup>8</sup> It reveals that in 1941, there were, associated with Betty Crocker, ten staff members, forty-five radio stations, 46,148 cooking school registrations, and “135,819 mail volume.” Between 1939 and 1940, when the radio show discussed pioneer covered-wagon days, “which were a good background for discussions of thrift as it can be practiced today,” there were sixty-five radio stations, 35,389 cooking school registrations (even though a “fee was charged for registration”) and “151,952 mail volume.”<sup>9</sup> Although astounding, these numbers pale in comparison with those of Canadian Kate Aitken, especially when one adjusts for relative population size. So, to answer the question about the American influence on Canadian listeners: they certainly were tuning in to American programs starring pseudonymous hosts like Aunt Sammy and Betty Crocker, but they were also, in significant numbers, listening closely to Canadian talk radio programming and communicating actively with radio hosts such as the beloved Kate Aitken. As they listened to the information offered by these hosts, women surely also saw the irony in the fact that these female radio personalities moved toward greater responsibility and status in the paid labour force and public sphere by embodying significant expertise in the domestic arts of the private sphere?

#### THE MEANING OF FOOD SERVED UP ON CANADIANS AIRWAVES

Even in radio’s earliest days, one primary objective of talking about food on radio involved marketing commercial food products. Listeners quickly

became attuned to the often fuzzy distinction between commercial text and trustworthy unbiased counsel. Earnest Weir (1965, 100) writes that “in the early thirties there was a rapidly mounting sensitivity to commercials. There were even agitations against them, though in length and number commercials were shorter and much less frequent than those cluttering the airwaves today.” Advertisers also worried that daytime audiences were too easily distracted and that precious care and revenue dollars might be wasted on audiences paying too little attention. Sponsored programming was one solution to both of these concerns. Such programming contained oblique references to the sponsors’ products through “sensory appeals,” so that the program itself, rather than merely the commercial breaks, served as the marketing tool. “Successful radio programs reminded [rather than told] listeners of the sponsor’s product—the ‘tinkling’ and ‘refreshing’ music of the Clicquot Club Eskimos suggested Clicquot Club soda to listeners—without direct mention of the product” (Smulyan 1993, 6). Educational programs went one better, because they provided instructions for the use of the sponsors’ products, so “the sponsor could advertise in both the commercials and the program for the same price” and, in turn, “advertisers found in radio a chance to control the material which surrounded their advertisements” (7). What rendered these programs palatable, even enjoyable, was the central personality. When Mary Margaret McBride revealed to her audiences that she was not really Martha Deane, it was surely her warmth and charm that carried the day. The same principle applied to radio “instructors” who portrayed pseudonymous personalities so well that they not only seemed to *be* the personality they portrayed but also, armed with know-how relating to the products they endorsed, seemed like experts who could provide useful information for the homemaker. Betty Crocker herself was one such success story, with “her” parent company, General Mills, launching one of the first radio stations in the United States: wcco in Minneapolis.

Kate Aitken, writing with her characteristic blend of good humour and optimism in the late 1950s, describes the technique of the integrated commercial from the perspective of one who not only hosted her own show but also wrote all her own broadcasts and commercials. Even as she lays bare the rhetorical politics of product endorsements, where the overly explicit marketing plug ran the risk of discomfiting listeners, she nevertheless

defends her own practice on the basis of her endorsing only “excellent” products:

Commercials have become such a controversial subject that this statement will probably sound incredible. *We enjoyed doing the commercials.* We never took a contract unless we were certain it was an excellent product, one with which we were proud to be associated.

Our sponsors permitted me to write the commercials, and I followed the line of the soft sell. It was always a game throwing in the commercial so that it sounded like part of the news. In radio this is called an integrated commercial. Indeed one indignant listener called the sponsor to complain bitterly, “I’m never going to listen to that woman again. She sneaks in those commercials before I know it.” The sponsor didn’t fire me! (Aitken 1959, 143)

What distinguished Betty Crocker from the other corporate spokespersonae and loyalty mechanisms was the clever innovation of a radio talk show that fashioned itself as a cooking “school” and the elaborate execution of its “course development.” In this reformulation, food talk seemed less like product endorsement than like the primary subject matter of a household science class. There were, admittedly, other cooking schools available to Canadian listeners through the airwaves, such as the Radio Cooking School, run by Consumers’ Gas. The program, broadcast on CKCL in Toronto, starred Jessie Read, until she left Consumers’ Gas in 1934 to begin writing a regular food column for Toronto’s *Evening Telegram*. Read went on to star in the first movie devoted to culinary instruction, *Kitchen Talks*, in 1936.<sup>10</sup> What distinguished Betty Crocker’s “classroom of the air,” however, was that it involved both a formal registration process and a written examination at the end of the course. In turn, Betty Crocker’s students benefitted through both a mailed packet of recipes and the opportunity to ask Betty Crocker directly about any particular issue of concern. Mrs. Wm. Zander, for example, asks, “Does meringue always fall some after taken from the oven?” Betty’s response gently reminds her to use a cool oven for meringue and also not to place it too near a draught when removed from the oven.<sup>11</sup>

The educational analogy was explicit. James Gray, in his corporate profile of General Mills, comments that G. S. Kennedy, who supervised the Buffalo broadcasts, used to call himself the “Dean of Betty Crocker University” (1954, 177). Schooling was also the order of the day for all those

who portrayed Betty Crocker. Blanche Ingersoll first personified Betty, playing the role of teacher when *The Betty Crocker Cooking School of the Air* aired each Friday. Ingersoll went on to train other apprentices in the fine art of portraying Betty on the air. "Miss Ingersoll urged the Buffalo interpreter to be 'chatty' and 'offhand.' What she wanted was the tone of the 'friendly visit.' And, she added crisply, 'for goodness' sake avoid the sickening, sweet tones affected by some women broadcasters. Betty Crocker is a sensible sort of person" (177). All those who portrayed Betty, in other words, were held to strict standards.

On the part of the audience members, there was a certain willing suspension of belief. Looking through personal papers of Agnes Quamme Higgins, who herself portrayed Betty Crocker and worked for General Mills before moving to Montréal to take up the directorship of Montréal's Diet Dispensary, one notices that letters are addressed to "Miss Betty Crocker" despite an evident understanding on the part of the audience members that the radio personality was a constructed identity. Indeed, the correspondence between Betty and her listeners contains a number of letters evaluating the quality of an individual's portrayal of the Betty Crocker persona. In one response, Betty seems to position herself as a teacher of those women "now broadcasting my talks." She writes, "I am preparing them just as I always have, and . . . they've tried to give talks just as I would give them, as nearly as possible."<sup>12</sup> Although she signs the letter as Betty Crocker, the pseudonymous nature of her role is nevertheless rendered explicit in the last sentences, when Crocker notes that the listener's "frank criticisms" will surely be of interest to the show's "advertising manager" and the "radio adviser."<sup>13</sup> That is, while writing as Betty Crocker and responding to a letter addressed to her under that name, she does acknowledge the tacit understanding that she is personifying a marketing concept.

The pedagogical model constructed by Betty Crocker's "Cooking School of the Air" anticipated the online classroom of today, where, for example, students can register through an educational technology company like Coursera or EdX in university classes that are offered entirely online. Indeed, a comparison with today's online courses or MOOCs (massive open online courses) can be taken one step further. While EdX is based on a nonprofit model, Coursera runs on a for-profit model. However, Coursera's business model means that profit comes not so much from tuition fees, as would be the case in a traditional educational model, but

rather from corporate clients who are interested in the demographic information and contact information for the best students graduating from the courses. Similarly, for General Mills, the value of Betty Crocker's "classroom of the air" lay less in tuition fees (although the program's success allowed for a nominal fee to be charged in later years) than in the wealth of demographic information that students provided about their cooking practices, food tastes, and particular culinary anxieties that might one day be remedied by product innovations.

Interestingly, the value of this information to the company is articulated very explicitly in the correspondence and did not seem to deter listener engagement. For example, Betty Crocker writes quite openly of this to the aforementioned Mrs. Zander, one of her "students," who was sent a small gift in return for filling out a questionnaire. Note, however, that she positions the information as valuable to her lesson plans rather than to the product development and marketing strategies of her parent company. In other words, she positions herself as teacher rather than as corporate spokespersona: "Perhaps by this time the little relish dish has reached you, so you know that we received the questionnaire all carefully filled out. I was very glad to have these personal comments as they help me so much when making plans for future lessons etc."<sup>14</sup>

That Betty Crocker here positions herself as a teacher is significant for another reason as well. Both the women who portrayed Betty and the persona herself were focused on serving their community. The sheer volume of correspondence, often providing advice that goes well beyond the specific parameters of product marketing, suggests a genuine willingness on the part of the individuals and the company to provide a service. The reality, however, was that these women were working in a corporate setting and served as vehicles of a remarkably effective marketing strategy that relied on well-educated and articulate women to portray corporate spokespersonae; ironically, these women straddled the separate spheres by working in the corporate sector yet mentoring best practices of home food provision for women operating in the domestic sphere.

What intrigues me about this paradigm is not so much the corporate rhetoric of service to the consumer, which can easily be understood as marketing and loyalty development, but rather what seem to be genuine gestures of community building on the part of the individuals who signed their name as "Betty." In part, of course, these can be understood as

generous offerings of one woman to another. However, I suggest that the service impulse was also a key component of the increasing professionalization of women in roles shaped by the emergence of home economics, a social force that unfolded in Canada in the early decades of the twentieth century. Educational reformer Adelaide Hoodless, best remembered as founder of the Women's Institutes, worked to define, shape and promote the discipline at the turn of the century, putting into practice some of the lessons she had gleaned from educators and the American social reformers and philanthropists whom she so admired. Hoodless's interventions brought about curriculum reforms even in the first decade of the twentieth century, including the founding of the Macdonald Institute at Guelph in 1903. In the next few decades, home economics organizations sprang up across the country, and the national Canadian Home Economics Association was founded in Winnipeg in 1939. By mid-twentieth century, then, home economists perceived themselves to be professionals, with the associated responsibilities and advantages that designation implied. One can think of a profession as being characterized in three ways, as involving high qualifications and standards, self-regulation, and service to the community. The role of corporate spokespersonae like Betty Crocker provided one way for highly qualified women to fulfill the third imperative of the professional order—at least for as long as they perceived their corporate role as serving the general community rather than their parent company more specifically.

What, then, can we conclude about possible meanings ascribed to food served on the airwaves? At first glance, it might seem that food talk had much to do with product endorsement, an objective rendered explicit within advertising text and more oblique within the paradigm of radio-based classes. However, under closer scrutiny, one suspects that a genuine service imperative prompted highly skilled women such as Agnes Quamme Higgins or Kate Aitken to share with the broader public their expertise in the domestic arts associated with the private sphere. The meaning of radio food talk for them, in other words, was that it was one viable venue through which they could fulfill the service imperative of what was being increasingly understood as a professional career by mid-twentieth century. For their listeners, the meaning of radio food talk and related correspondence was that it provided valuable information about home food production during a time of rapid soft and hard technological

innovation. Surely, too, it provided important opportunities for outreach and possibly, advancement. Women were able to listen to other women on the radio, providing a welcome opportunity for housewives isolated by practical realities of work-in-the-home to listen in on conversations of interest. In addition, the very popular cooking schools of the air provided them with the opportunity to become students and to participate in a form of advanced education directly related to their vocation.<sup>15</sup>

#### SURVIVING THE TELEVISION REVOLUTION: THE ROLE OF IMAGINATION

Another aspect of the radio landscape in the mid-twentieth century was the definitive march of drama, a staple of evening radio programming, from radio airwaves to television screens, which soon became common in family homes. But did food programming make the same journey? Certainly, the overwhelming popularity of food channels in today's media landscape suggests that Canadians and others communicate about food through television, with the many food-related genres of competition-based and demonstration-style programs. One might justifiably suspect that with the trajectory from radio to television, food disappeared from daytime radio programming. In Canada, the career of Jehane Benoît—a culinary author, commentator, and broadcaster—accelerated as she moved from radio to television, illustrating the impact of the advent of television on food programming. Recently, however, there has been a surprising, pivotal, and largely undocumented return to food programming in radio, even since the advent of Food Network, which became available in Canada in 1997, with Food Network Canada licensed by the CRTC in 2000.<sup>16</sup> What accounts for this enduring popularity of communicating about food on radio, despite the availability of information about food in multiple other communication media?

Kate Ramos, associate editor of *Chow* (San Francisco), argues that food radio is making a comeback because food television has privileged entertainment over education. She writes, "As the selection on TV became more varied, food programs on the radio eventually fell by the wayside. In recent years, however, as the hosts on the idiot box have become more interested in sizzle than substance, radio and podcast food shows have flooded the airwaves" (Ramos 2008). By way of examples, she points to ten shows, including National Public Radio's *Hidden Kitchens* and *Food* podcasts,

American Public Media's *The Splendid Table*, and BBC's *Food Programme*. This same tendency to rebalance the scale to favour educational programming is evident in other US food-oriented radio shows as well, including those on commercial stations. For example, one might think of *Tonia's Kitchen: All Things Foodie* on Corus Radio; *Good Food on the Road* and *Good Food* on KCRW; the excellent *Blue Lifestyle* on CRN Digital Talk Radio; *Slow Living Radio*, *Flavor HD*, and *What's Cookin' Today* on CRN Talk; *Cooking with Marilyn* (Marilyn Harris) on 55KRC; and *Hot Grease* on Heritage Radio Network, as well as the various shows on Food Service Radio.

Radio food shows in Canada also seem to tip the scales toward education and away from pure entertainment. CBC's weekly show *The Main Ingredient* focuses largely on mindful eating: across Canada, local audiences can tune in to hear their favourite personalities offer counsel on eating with due consideration, including Vancouver's Tony and Kasey (of *Tony and Kasey's Best of Food and Wine*, airing since 1997), Manitoba's Larry McIntosh (*Food and Friends with Larry McIntosh*), and Toronto's Christine Cardoso (*Cravings, with Christine Cardoso*). In addition to offering sound food advice, French-language offerings provide insight into the francophone community's love affair with cooking and culinary culture. Radio-Canada's popular *Bien dans son assiette*, for example, airs each evening from Monday through Thursday, with selections replayed in early morning hours. And while *Épicerie* is part of Radio-Canada's television offerings, its hosts are regarded as celebrities and often appear on both English- and French-language radio to discuss food-related topics.

In short, then, one can credibly argue that food radio is alive and well in Canada and, at the risk of oversimplification, that it offers education-oriented programming that complements the television food shows. At the very least, it is inaccurate to suggest that food programming slipped off the airwaves with the advent of television. However, this does raise the question, what is the particular appeal of hearing about food without the opportunity to see or taste it?

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the appeal of cooking shows was surely the practical information they provided. At a time when young brides often lived far from their mothers and with rapid societal change that brought with it technological innovation that eclipsed traditional culinary wisdom, corporate spokescharacters provided valuable insights. Changing times brought challenges. During the Depression, for



example, the radio audience for Betty Crocker's radio show increased exponentially because it provided economical solutions to the dilemma of putting adequate nutrition on the table.

Today, however, when we have so many ways of accessing information, when technological innovation and the fast rate of change have become the new normal, surely the appeal of food radio—and food talk more generally—is not just the information it provides. While there is scant literature on the pleasures of food radio specifically, existing literature addressing the appeal of food conversations on television and of recipes in books offers useful points of entry into the inquiry.

Puzzling over the appeal of food television specifically, Polly Adema notes its ability to offer vicarious pleasure, to blend education with entertainment, and to trouble the waters of social and cultural norms. She argues that “food television incorporates the vicarious pleasures of watching someone else cook and eat; the emulsion of entertainment and cooking; the jumbling of traditional gender roles; and ambivalence toward cultural standards of body, consumption, and health” (2000, 113). But the same does not hold entirely true for food radio, where listeners *cannot* watch someone else cook and eat, the physical body remains *unseen*, the quality of broadcasters' health unknown, and questions of gender roles are often marginal to the conversation. Indeed, food described on radio is removed from the listener, something to be imagined, anticipated, but never tasted.

Adema (2000, 119) argues that we “can read food television as a symptom and a product of our culture's obsession with control, health and ideals of physical beauty.” Surely, food radio is different in kind as well as in degree, for the pleasures of food described on radio have almost entirely to do with imagination and anticipation. As such, they seem much more consistent with the pleasures identified by Adam Gopnik in his meditation on the inevitable appeal of reading recipes. “We reanimate our passions by imagining the possibilities,” muses Gopnik, “and the act of wanting ends up mattering more than the fact of getting. . . . The desire to go on desiring, the wanting to want, is what makes you turn the pages” (2009, 112). Cheri Ketchum's broader analysis of notions of the pleasure and goals of consumer societies such as our own serves to extend Gopnik's case; however, she does seem to suggest that there is pleasure both in anticipating an event and in realizing it. Pointing to Colin Campbell's notion of “mentalist hedonism,”<sup>17</sup> she argues that the “defining features” of consumer

societies are “symbolism and communication” rather than “simply materialism.” “The ultimate goal is often to experience in reality what people conjure up in their minds” (2005, 222).

How can these observations support our understanding of the enduring popularity of food radio? Taking a cue from Gopnik, one answer is that food communicated through the medium of radio allows readers to anticipate and imagine food as they would like it to be. Ketchum might add that food radio provides information and impetus for listeners to prepare in reality the dishes they have anticipated and imagined, and contributes to listeners’ understanding of food’s symbolic and communicative potential.

#### CANADIAN FOOD RADIO: SERVING UP IDENTITY THROUGH DIVERSITY

The consistent appeal of food radio suggests that it offers something more than immediate pleasure for its listeners. It seems entirely appropriate to use the notions of appetite and nourishment to explore this topic. Indeed, the consistent popularity of food radio speaks to listeners’ appetite for conversation about food sourcing, selection, and preparation. But how, precisely, has Canadian food radio nourished its listeners past and present?

As American women’s diaries have suggested (see Riney-Kehrberg 1998), radio food talk established a common sense of identity and provided outreach to women isolated by rural lifestyles. Betty Friedan argued in 1963 that even women living in urban environments and playing the role of home service provider in the private sphere felt distinctly isolated. One might imagine how radio—and later, television—provided a welcome outreach for them. In Canada, by contrast, there are indications that food radio played, and continues to play, a slightly different role. Rather than uniting listeners with a common sense of identity, Canadian food radio serves to underline key elements of the taste of place in a very diverse country. If there is a common Canadian identity communicated through food radio, then that identity is one of diversity, of a gathering of different food practices.

Foundational here are the contributions of radio celebrity Kate Aitken and the Québec food authority Jehane Benoît. Indeed, the combined legacy of “Mrs. A” and “Mme B,” as they were known, is a definition of Canadian foodways that remains predominant today: they are defined by a wealth of diverse and distinctive food products and production techniques. More

specifically, Aitken, who was paid on a flat-fee basis and spent much of her budget allocation on travel (Aitken 1959, 173), brought insights from across Canada and around the world to her Canadian audiences. In the mid-twentieth century, she underscored the regional nature of Canadian cuisines. Jehane Benoît, through her “conseils culinaires” on the long-standing Radio-Canada radio program, *Fémina*, and related recipe books, provided specific examples of cooking locally in Québec and some of the traditional recipes of her region.<sup>18</sup>

Contemporary food radio seems to continue this tradition of emphasizing the diversity of foodways across North America. While discussion of local food and regional foodways by Aitken and Benoît tended to be largely informational, discussion of local foods in the contemporary context takes on symbolic resonance. With the growing popularity of the Slow Food movement and the increasing influence of the gospel of “mindful” eating, sourcing of local ingredients and detailed descriptions of regionally based food preparation techniques are part of the drive to eat mindfully, to eat against the grain of processed foodstuffs and homogenized foodways. By definition, of course, the drive toward mindful eating suggests a perception of the significant presence and momentum of “mindless” eating, and, not surprisingly, the case in favour of “mindless” eating is very seldom made on radio (or anywhere else, for that matter).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, what has been sidestepped throughout this chapter remains to be said. We began with Sidney Katz’s observation, made in 1955, that the topic of “eating” was on the tip of many Canadians’ tongues, and this is all the more evident in Canada today. However, food talk can never approximate the very primary, personal, and sensory act that is eating. While food consumption can be influenced by radio discourse and advertising, and even anticipated as a result of food talk, food—unlike music, for example—cannot be consumed or experienced through radio. It can only be anticipated, and herein lies its specific pleasure. Is it really so surprising, then, that we are now witnessing an increasing fascination with food—and food conversations—during an increasingly mediated and media-saturated era, as the sensory act of unmediated living seems to be slipping slowly and steadily from our grasp?

Ketchum and Gopnik seem to provide two different explanations for our fascination with food talk.<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, Ketchum suggests that we embrace anticipation as a prelude to the real thing, that food talk promises food consumption. In turn, in Ketchum's notion of consumer society as driven by the impulses of the communicative and symbolic as well as the material, food consumption is foundational to consumer society. Not only is the act of eating a material one, but also, through our choice of foods and our understanding of their symbolic potential, food consumption itself becomes a form of communication. On the other hand, by arguing that "the act of wanting ends up mattering more than the fact of getting," Gopnik suggests that we have come to savour and draw nourishment from anticipation, imagination, and the deferred potential that is food talk. If, in Ketchum's formulation, food can be understood as a form of communication, then, in Gopnik's formulation, communication seems to function as a food. One cannot help but wonder, of course, to what extent and for how long a mediated version of food is or will be nourishment enough. However, a significant overlap exists between the two in terms of their assumptions. Most obviously, both acknowledge our insatiable hunger for communication and conversation about food as well as for food itself, which accounts for the continued popularity of food radio. By broaching the subject, both also remind us that this appetite for food talk is not unique to the Canadian context.

#### NOTES

- 1 Radio's dominance was jeopardized soon after the end of the Second World War, with the arrival of television. While television emerged in Britain and the United States as early as 1946 (Allard 1979, 203), it came to Canada only in 1952 (Rutherford 2012). More accurately, one might say that it *returned* to Canada, because television transmitters were operated briefly in Canada as early as 1923, by both CFCF and by CKAC in Montréal, before being "closed by government order" (Allard 1979, 203).
- 2 Robert Armstrong (2010, 23) notes that, "What was later to become the first commercial broadcasting operation in Canada began on 20 May 1920 when the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company, operating with an experimental broadcast licence for Montreal radio station XWA (later called CFCF), participated in the demonstration of a musical performance in Montreal that was broadcast in Ottawa."

- 3 Kate Aitken, herself a formidable force as a female journalist and radio personality, was perhaps the most outspoken critic of the double standard in broadcasting. As late as 1957, upon her retirement, Aitken called the role of women in Canadian broadcasting “deplorable” (Ferguson 2005).
- 4 Despite the limitations of a pseudonym, women could still build up varied, interesting, and significant careers while portraying pseudonymous personalities, engaging audience members across a variety of communication media. Pearl Clarke is one excellent example of an individual who seemed to control her pseudonymous personalities rather than allow them to control her. Trained in food sciences, and living in Montréal in the 1930s, Clarke wrote a syndicated column for the *Montreal Standard* and the *Edmonton Journal* under the name of Mary Moore. In addition, she wrote advertising copy under the name of Harriet Hubbard Ayres for Canada Limited. When she moved to Hamilton, she continued to write under the name of Moore but took up a third pseudonym to write publicity for Mary Miles Fine Foods (Lang 1999, 184).
- 5 Gordon Sinclair is, however, relatively sanguine about the cost of Aitken’s hectic pace. He writes, with characteristically dry humour,

Some critics have suggested that Mrs. A.’s recent around-the-world tour was a little *too* fast for a good reporter. At one point she told her radio audience that she’d left Shanghai’s Cathay Hotel just ahead of the invading Red Army and dashed to the airport by rickshaw. This reporter was in Shanghai seven weeks later and the Reds still hadn’t arrived. And it would take the fleetest rickshaw coolie a good day’s trot to get from the Cathay Hotel to the airport. (1950, 67)
- 6 Gray (1954, 182) writes that one psychologist, consulted about Betty’s “development,” “offered, as model, the concept of the ‘mother figure’ to whom normal men and women turn all their lives to find the springs of confidence.”
- 7 As Susan Smulyan (1993, 9) reminds us, “When General Mills invented Betty Crocker, they copied a trend already widespread in radio. Many radio performers remained unknown. The identity of the Goodrich Silver Masked Tenor was a closely guarded secret, as were the identities of Paul Oliver and Olive Palmer who sang for the Palmolive Company, and Goldy and Dusty, the Gold Dust twins, hired by a cleanser manufacturer.”
- 8 This document is three pages in length and was sent to Agnes Quamme Higgins in 1987 from Jean Toll, corporate archivist at General Mills Inc. My thanks to General Mills archivist Joyce Lopez who recently confirmed that this document is entitled “Betty Crocker Chronology” and was created by Mae Chesnut, a one-time employee of the Home Service Division, in 1948.

- 9 This information is derived from an untitled record of the audience size of Betty Crocker radio programs, written by a Betty Crocker staff member ca. 1940 and contained in a private collection (with grateful acknowledgement to Holly Jonas and family).
- 10 See "Telegram Dietician Signs Film Contract," *Evening Telegram*, 11 March 1936, 14. See also "Three Meals a Day," *Evening Telegram*, 28 March 1934, 48; and Helen Allen, "At the Movies," *Evening Telegram*, 19 June 1936, 36.
- 11 Both the query from Mrs. Wm. (presumably William) Zander, dated 20 December 1935, and Betty Crocker's reply, dated 4 December 1936, are from a private collection (with grateful acknowledgement to Holly Jonas and family).
- 12 Letter from Betty Crocker (written by either Neilsine Hansen or Agnes Quamme Higgins) to a listener, titled "Concerning a New Voice or Person on the Air," undated (but possibly 1936), private collection (with grateful acknowledgement to Holly Jonas and family).
- 13 There are a number of typos in the original text—a function both of its draft status and the practical realities of the era of typewriters. Since they may be distracting for the reader, I have corrected them in the text given here.
- 14 Letter from Betty Crocker to Mrs. Wm. Zander, dated 4 December 1936, from a private collection (with grateful acknowledgement to Holly Jonas and family).
- 15 My thanks to Joyce Hildebrand for these insights.
- 16 Even as I made this assertion, I received an email from Erin Fairbanks, of Heritage Radio Network, celebrating a series of radio programs detailing student food activism during the summer of 2013 and confirming the value of radio as a medium for food communications in the contemporary moment:
- Heritage Radio Network is proud to share a recap of the first annual *Summer of Food*, a compilation of remarkable stories from our Nation's emerging network of student leaders. From New York to California, students left the classroom for the frontlines of the food world, using their summer break to radically rethink our country's food landscape. HRN documented the summer experiences of students of all ages, creating a snapshot of the good food movement during the summer of 2013. ("Heritage Radio Network's 2013 Summer of Food. Brooklyn, NY, 30 August," email from Erin Fairbanks, 13 June 2014)
- 17 Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 89.

18 These include *Les recettes "Fémina,"* which includes recipes aired on shows of the 1958–59 season, and *Recettes et secrets "Fémina,"* which includes recipes aired on shows from September 1959 through April 1962. Both were published in Montreal by Radio-Canada, and bear no details of publication date.

19 I am indebted to Pamela Holway for challenging me to provide answers to what I was tempted to leave as a rhetorical question and for offering her valuable insights.

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# Of Men and Cupcakes

## Baking Identities on Food Network

*Irina D. Mihalache*

Anthony Bourdain hates cupcakes. When asked by the *Seattle Times* to comment on the cupcake craze in North America, Bourdain said, with gravity and annoyance, “Enough” (Tsong 2009). In fact, Bourdain’s dislike for cupcakes is not a surprise for those familiar with his type of performed masculinity: edgy, rough, mysterious, and characterized by “a rejection of domesticity” (Ashley et al. 2004, 165). For Bourdain, endorsing cupcakes—the quintessential symbol of domestic femininity—would act against his performed identity, which has been carefully crafted through various media, from books to reality television. Yet, despite the chef’s dissatisfaction with the frosted dessert, the cupcake remains a very powerful presence within the North American foodscape and in various Food Network kitchens.

Bourdain’s comment on cupcakes is a suitable entryway into discussions about food, representation, and identity because it highlights the fluidity with which a culinary cultural object such as the cupcake can circulate within multiple registers of meaning and inform diverse identities. If, for Bourdain, the cupcake represents a culinary joke and the sum of many things he dislikes—daintiness, domesticity, and nostalgia—for other celebrity and noncelebrity chefs who perform on television, the cupcake can be deconstructed and reassembled in order to signify a range of things—from retro domesticity to hypermasculinity. Therefore, I argue that the baking of cupcakes on food television, specifically Food Network, represents an

informal pedagogical moment in the complex and contradictory process of identity making.

Building on the cupcake's flexible identity, this chapter suggests that the social and cultural value of food television resides in its role of informal educator on matters of performed identities, belonging, and taste. Even if a food show does not specifically instruct the viewer how to cook—which, for some scholars, is problematic because of its lack of immediate educational value—it nonetheless presents multiple entryways into informal learning about processes such as performing the self, negotiating a sense of belonging, and endorsing a specific taste culture or more. In a nutshell, food television contributes to our identities through its various messages about food and cooking. Likewise, food shows borrow from and inform everyday food-related practices, constantly reinforcing and challenging collective identities and taste communities. In my view, the cupcake is well positioned to function as an example of this exchange because it has been co-opted by a multitude of gendered identities, from the vegan pin-up girl to the overtattooed male hipster, and it has been transformed to suit these diverse and often contradictory identities.

Starting from the argument that food television acts as an informal educator in matters of identity and belonging, this chapter explores the transformation of the cupcake from an overtly feminine item associated with an idealized form of domesticity into an almost gender-neutral dessert that can be freely co-opted by men. The cupcake is a rather unexpected object for the shaping of masculinity, given the very powerful bond between cupcakes and feminine aesthetics. At the same time, the playful, spectacular, and versatile nature of the cupcake allows it to function as an empty canvas for the performance of different types of masculinity. The ingredients, decoration, and plating of the cupcake, together with the material culture surrounding both the food and the body of its maker, contribute to different registers of identity that are “taught” through food programming. In this chapter, I address how aspects of cupcake culture have permeated the kitchens of two Food Network male celebrity chefs, Chuck Hughes and Alton Brown, who are as comfortable scooping buttercream frosting onto a cupcake as they are grilling a steak. I suggest that each cupcake reflects the identity of the chef, who, at the same time, is representative of wider taste cultures. My discussion contributes to an underexplored perspective on food television—the value of cooking shows as informal education—and

highlights the cultural significance of the cupcake as a marker of identity. In addition, the chapter traces the process of the cultural co-option that transforms the cupcake from a symbol of domestic femininity to a dessert that is “safe” for men.

#### FOOD TELEVISION: EDUCATION, ENTERTAINMENT, OR BOTH?

Food Network, the first television channel in North America dedicated entirely to food and cooking, had its debut in 1993 and, as Cheri Ketchum points out, “followed early conventions for television cooking shows,” such as “a single cook providing instruction,” before it became the complex lifestyle network known today (2005, 219). In 2000, Food Network Canada was launched after the Canadian Radio-television Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) approved the licence for a Canadian version of the popular network, ensuring Canadians access to food shows, celebrity chefs, and lifestyle lessons. However, the wheels of food television were set in motion much earlier, in the late 1940s, when James Beard and Dionne Lucas pioneered the cooking show on American television. James Beard, “the dean of American cookery,” merged instruction and fun as the host of television’s first cooking show, *Elsie Presents James Beard in “I Love to Eat”*—Elsie being the Borden Dairy Company’s cartoon cow (Collins 2009, 27). The show ran for only one year, from 1946 to 1947. A year later, Dionne Lucas took up the baton with *To the Queen’s Taste*, which was renamed *The Dionne Lucas Cooking Show* in 1949. Lucas’s show had a more didactic take on cooking and focused on developing proper culinary skills in the kitchen. Despite the popularity of both Beard and Lucas, it took one “French Chef” (Julia Child) and one “Gallopig Gourmet” (Graham Kerr) for audiences all across the United States and Canada to believe in the value of watching people cook. Julia Child “was one of the first to present a purely food-centered cooking show as opposed to a homemaking show, and, at the same time, as if by accident, a host-centered show” (73). What Julia Child added to domestic cookery was professional ethos, entertainment (often unintended), and a genuine enthusiasm for the pleasure of cooking. Graham Kerr’s television show has been viewed as the first “to aggressively capitalize on the entertainment potential of the medium . . . the show opened with the snappily-dressed, British dandy of a ball of energy leaping over a tall kitchen chair while holding a full glass of

wine" (106). The standards for cooking shows in North America were set by these two chefs (Adema 2000, 114), who also, through their cooking and performing styles, dictated the mandate of cooking shows: education and entertainment.

Julia Child's cooking philosophy, informed by her desire to educate the American public on how to become better cooks, is often placed in contradiction with the entertaining scope of Food Network. Food Network's true identity was crafted in the United States under the leadership of Erica Gruen, who became CEO in June 1996 and began shifting the network's emphasis "'from people who like to cook to people who love to eat' by making shows personality driven" (Adema 2000, 114–15). Under Gruen's tenure, the first of Food Network's celebrity chefs, such as Emeril Lagasse and Rachel Ray, were crafted in front of live audiences, a technique that was borrowed from other entertainment-centred television genres. This transformation proved successful: in 2006, Food Network reached eighty-nine million homes across the United States. As noted by Signe Rousseau (2012, 17), it had "become the perfect platform for manufacturing celebrity chefs and for turning food into a spectator sport." Rousseau agrees that performance is a natural part of cooking shows, since they are representations of real culinary practice. However, she adds, "it is worth remembering the difference between performance as education—arguably the original point of televised cooking—and performance as entertainment" (17). On a similar note, Pauline Adema (2000, 116) asserts that "food television is not about eating: It is about watching food and being entertained by the personality. For home viewers of . . . cooking shows, being a couch potato, a consumer of food television, becomes more pleasurable than actually cooking and eating."

Adema (2000, 118) characterizes the viewers' relation to food television as one of "vicarious consumption" because "we want to be entertained in the comfort of our own home, we crave a home cooked meal but don't wait to cook it." Because Food Network viewers engage with food visually, watching food being cooked without actually participating in that process contributes to the pseudo-culture generated by modernity more broadly (Adema 2000). Mark Meister (2001) adopts a more critical perspective on food television, arguing that Food Network promotes a discourse of the "good life" born out of modernity without educating consumers about other issues related to food, such as biological and nutritional

characteristics. Thus, “food’s sole purpose, according to TVFN [TV Food Network], is to satisfy the excessive and sophisticated tastes of the human palate. To discuss food in any other way would contradict TVFN’s good life vision” (178). Signe Hansen (2008) contributes to this conversation by pointing out yet another injustice done by Food Network to society—transforming viewers into consumers. She writes, “Consumption of the consumer is played out in two ways: first, by keeping us watching, and second, through food media’s sphere of influence beyond television” (51).

While I believe these commentaries to be fair, I suggest that Food Network has not entirely dropped its educational agenda. On the contrary, I would argue that the network constantly performs unintentional pedagogical acts. Such pedagogical moments are embedded in the performed identities of the celebrity and noncelebrity chefs and in the objects—from kitchen gadgets to aprons—that define their cultural affiliations. The chefs’ tattoos, the frosting on the cupcakes, and the kitchen décor are all aspects of identity that aid the viewers in belonging to, negotiating, or challenging different identities and taste cultures. Therefore, while highly didactic shows such as Julia Child’s *French Chef* are no longer part of Food Network programming, viewers can still learn while being entertained. Of course, merging education and entertainment is not something new to television. However, Food Network seems to be critiqued by academics and other communities more harshly than any other television network for wanting to entertain its audiences. In the following section, I discuss the performance of masculinity on cooking shows in relation to the informal pedagogies that, I argue, are embedded in food television.

#### PERFORMING MASCULINITIES THROUGH FOOD: THE INFORMAL PEDAGOGIES OF COOKING SHOWS

Cooking and its representation on food television are ideal sites for exploring different instances of gender performance, because cooking practices are constantly negotiated along gendered lines. In the gendered history of cooking, the woman is traditionally confined to the private domain of the kitchen, and the man to the professional field of culinary labour. As noted by Alice Julier and Laura Lindenfeld (2005, 3), “When considering gender and food, the most obvious scenario is to analyze what gets called ‘women’s special relationship to food’—that is, an exploration of how

women are materially and ideologically engaged in food production and consumption, most often in ways that re-inscribe particular kinds of social and economic inequality." Rebecca Swenson (2009, 37) notes, however, that "if men are doing more work in the kitchen, our cultural ideas about what is and is not strictly 'women's work' might also be shifting." This reworking of gendered relations with food and cooking often happens in the context of cooking shows, where identities of male and female chefs are crafted and performed to reflect the complexity of the cooking realities in North America. Swenson identifies Food Network, in particular, as "an important site that articulates discourses about gender and cooking, as it is one of the most widely viewed channels devoted to instructing viewers about how to buy, prepare, and consume food" (37). In addition, I believe that through informal and often unintended pedagogical moments, cooking shows offer "lessons" in identity performance and suggest the types of masculinities that can be enacted in the kitchen.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler writes that "performativity is not a singular act, but a representation and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization, in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" ([1990] 1999, xv). Building on Butler's understanding of gender as performed, Hillevi Ganetz (2011, 404) adds that "rather than defining who we intrinsically are, gender is what we are doing at specific occasions." Furthermore, the concept of "everyday" is significant to exploring the process of "doing gender," since performing a gendered self is "embedded in everyday interactions" (West and Zimmerman 1987, 130). Cooking is one of the quintessential everyday acts that positions gender as a matter of "doing." Just as gender is performed in everyday practices, television suggests a series of representations of these everyday realities, representations that both borrow from and recycle everyday acts of performance. Therefore, "concepts such as performance must here not be read as saying that the artists (or others involved in the TV show) are playing roles different from who they 'really' are, but should rather be understood in relation to the theory of performativity as a necessary aspect of all social life" (Ganetz 2011, 404). Thinking about masculinity within this framework, I view the baking of cupcakes in various Food Network kitchens as a performance of an everyday practice in which the identities of the bakers are negotiated through their bodies, the space of the kitchen, and items of material culture.

To explore notions of masculinity in the kitchen, I use the definition provided by Robert William Connell, who writes that “masculinity is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experiences, personality and culture” ([1995] 2005, 71). Because, as Connell adds, “no masculinity arises except in a system of gender relations,” the representation of cooking—a traditionally feminine practice—on television is best observed through an analysis of the borrowings and negotiations that take place in Food Network kitchens. The performative moments that define different types of televised masculinity are forged through a renegotiation of what cooking signifies, which results in the reframing of cooking as a practice safe for men. The male chefs of Food Network respond through their performance not only to other masculinities on the screen but also to the domestic and feminine history of cooking. In addition, the performance of masculinity through cooking allows viewers to reflect on their own identities—to discover, or perhaps question, the communities to which they belong—and to participate in the creation of different systems of representation.

#### CUPCAKES: FROM DOMESTIC FEMININITY TO . . . “BUTCH” BAKERIES

Since the mid-1990s, when cupcakes began to surge in popularity throughout North America, the little desserts have acquired many associations: domesticity, femininity, feminism, sensuality, nostalgia, memories of childhood, the colour pink, vanilla frosting, sparkles, frilly polka dot aprons, vintage cake racks, and even the roller derby culture.<sup>1</sup> In the North American social imaginary, cupcakes are generally a feminine cooking affair. While contemporary cupcakes are imagined as a collage of memories of a fictional domesticity of the 1950s, they do have a place in the history of baking. But, despite its presence in American culture since the late 1700s (Smith 2012, 181), the cupcake has never been as popular and embedded with meaning as it is today. The *Food Timeline* website offers several recipes for cupcakes in cookbooks dating from 1796 to 1871.<sup>2</sup> At that time, the name “cupcake” referenced the quantities of ingredients in the recipe—which included one cup of each ingredient—and sometimes the baking container, which was an actual cup. Only at around the turn of the century did cupcakes start to be associated with children (as favourites to be

brought to school on birthdays) and used for fundraisers (Smith 2012, 181). After World War II, the most famous cupcake was the Hostess CupCake, a mass-manufactured chocolate cake with vanilla filling sold very cheaply in most American supermarkets. Available only in one flavour, size, and decoration, the Hostess CupCake was a symbol of industrialized production of cheap foods rather than of daintiness, domesticity, or nostalgia.

The revival of the cupcake as we know it today—a symbol of nostalgia for childhood and of maternal and domestic femininity—is associated with a small bakery in New York City, Magnolia Bakery, and a very famous television show, *Sex and the City*. Magnolia Bakery presented a new concept to New York foodies—a bakery dedicated entirely to the small and dainty dessert. Nicola Humble explains that Magnolia Bakery inspired hundreds of other bakeries to turn their attention to cupcakes, because “the appeal of the cupcake is clear: it is small: just enough to satisfy but not *too* fattening. . . . It is portable, ideal for fast-paced city life. But above all it is its cuteness, its candy-colored evocation of the innocent joys of childhood” (2010, 112). Soon after the cupcake craze hit most major North American cities, from New York to Los Angeles and Vancouver, the miniature cake piqued the interest of celebrity chefs, who popularized it in cookbooks and television shows. The cupcake quickly gained a prominent place on Food Network, either as the main “protagonist” of food shows, such as *Cupcake Wars*, or in occasional appearances in the kitchens of celebrity chefs. Nigella Lawson’s *How to Be a Domestic Goddess* (2000) and *Martha Stewart’s Cupcakes: 175 Inspired Ideas for Everyone’s Favorite Treat* (2009) are just two of the many popular texts that advocate for the relevance of cupcakes. Such interventions from predominantly female celebrities reassured North American bakers that the little dessert was both a feminist statement and proof of postfeminist domesticity.

The troubling positioning of the cupcake in relation to feminism is linked to its rich repertoire of cultural meanings, ranging from nostalgia for a lost domesticity of the 1950s to empowerment in association with the do-it-yourself movement. In the 1980s, Martha Stewart challenged American housewives to remodel their kitchens and cooking practices according to “educated middle-class standards,” which also resulted in the creation of “a powerful nostalgia for a past of warm, cozy kitchens and the smell of grandma’s baking” (Humble 2010, 111). This fantasy reintroduced the cupcake as the perfect culinary object to bring back such feelings of nostalgia



into the domestic kitchen. However, Stewart's cookie-cutter traditional femininity contrasts sharply with the expressions of other female celebrity chefs, especially Nigella Lawson. Much has been said about Nigella Lawson's culinary promiscuity with respect to her cooking style and overall relation to food. Janet Floyd (2004, 65) writes that Lawson's television show *Nigella Bites* tries to "ignore the notion of the kitchen as a domestic workshop by linking it with sexual gratification." Lawson's performance in the kitchen and her play with food runs counter to conventional norms of kitchen behaviour. In fact, her relation to her kitchen and the food she cooks is best understood through the lens of postfeminist domesticity. "The postfeminist housewife," writes Stéphanie Genz, "is no longer easily categorized as an emblem of female oppression but she renegotiates and resignifies her domestic/feminine position, deliberately choosing to 'go home'" (2009, 50).

It comes as no surprise that in *How to Be a Domestic Goddess*, Lawson uses the cupcake in various flavours, from lavender to Coca-Cola, to suggest the playfulness of the modern woman in the kitchen. Lawson's cookbook brought her considerable criticism from feminist writers who perceived the book as a "manifesto for Stepford Wives" (Hollows 2003, 188). The cover of the book features a single cupcake, "white icing dripping down the side, top inexpertly domed, sugar flower rakishly off-center, as vulnerable in its see-through paper case as a young girl in a nightie" (Humble 2010, 114). Throughout the book, Lawson's cupcakes are lavish and decorated with a hint of sensuality, which contributes to Lawson's image as a "domestic goddess" not simply a prefeminist figure of femininity, a throwback to a "real" past, but as "a point of feminine identification that responds to the contradictions of the present" (Hollows 2003, 190). At the same time, however, this cupcake-baking modern woman references the idealized mom from the 1950s and 1960s, "a fantasy constructed from the advertising images of the 1950s and '60s, a sepia collage of which adorns the book's endpapers" (Humble 2010, 113).

Despite the cupcake's associations with feminine identity and domesticity, its playfulness, versatility, and rather loose historical associations with culinary rules and hierarchies have allowed for its appropriation by a most unexpected population—men. According to David Arrick, chef and owner of Butch Bakery in New York City, the cupcake—when called "Jackhammer," "Big Papi," or "Tailgate"; cooked with bacon, stout, and

rum; and decorated with plaid and camouflage—is 100 percent man-approved. In his “Butch Man-ifesto,” Arrick writes, “Butch it up, Buttercup! These ain’t your grandma’s cupcakes! Our objective is simple. We’re men. Men who like cupcakes. Not the frilly-pink-frosted-sprinkles-and-unicorns kind of cupcakes. We make manly cupcakes. For manly men.”<sup>3</sup> Arrick has borrowed from a visual and material culture associated with a “manly” masculinity crafted from some very stereotypical signifiers: bacon, beer, and military gear. Furthermore, he discards all that he considers to be unnecessary decorations: sprinkles, pastel frostings, or fondant flowers—stereotypes of a feminine cupcake. The result, he claims, is a cupcake for men.

Writing of the new fascination with the cupcake, Nicola Humble (2010, 114) argues that “these cakes are postmodern because they are . . . copies of an original that does not any longer exist, or perhaps never did,” going on to explain that “these miniature cakes speak of the idea of cake, of a yearning for childhood, for pastel-colored reassurance and simple pleasure, for home, for mother, for the smell of baking, for being allowed to lick the mixing bowl.” The cupcake is in fact well suited to assume this postmodern role. Within the hierarchy of desserts, it has never ranked as haute cuisine, and, in comparison to more glamorous baked treats such as the *éclair* or the *pain au chocolat*, it has largely gone unnoticed in culinary history. The very simplicity of the cupcake transforms it, however, into an almost blank canvas for new interpretations and appropriations. When recently reinvented as a nostalgic nod to the 1950s, the cupcake was co-opted by the craft and do-it-yourself culture, which is also traditionally associated with domesticity and femininity. However, the versatility and playfulness attached to the cupcake translate into multiple instances of appropriation that correspond to diverse masculinities. Such masculinities can be best observed through a close analysis of two Food Network celebrity chefs, Chuck Hughes and Alton Brown, who, like Arrick, engage in the baking of cupcakes while negotiating the practices involved in making the dessert in order to put a masculine touch on the final culinary product.

#### LESSONS IN MASCULINITY: TATTOOS, “GOOD EATS” AND CUPCAKES

Chuck Hughes, a Montréal-based celebrity chef and restaurateur, is best known for his cooking show, *Chuck’s Day Off*, and for his two trendy restaurants in Old Montréal, *Garde Manger* and *Le Bremner*. *Chuck’s Day Off*

is filmed on location in Hughes's restaurant and shows the chef cooking for a variety of diners ranging from his parents to the local firefighters. On the Food Network Canada website, the show is described as follows: "Sandwiched in between the mouth-watering recipes are rock & roll reality segments that give the viewer insight behind the scenes of the city's hottest restaurant and into the life of one of the food world's rising stars. The end result is addictively delicious television." Readers also learn that "Chuck loves food. So much so his favorites are tattooed on his arms: bacon, lemon meringue pie, lobster and arugula just to name a few."<sup>4</sup> And, according to Chuck Hughes, a cupcake might be the subject of his next tattoo. In an episode of his show aired in May 2013, Chuck cooks a meal for his all-female "wait staff" that concludes with a platter of red velvet cupcakes with mascarpone frosting. While prepping the cupcakes for the oven, Hughes confesses, "I love these so much, I think I'm gonna get one tattooed. But I haven't decided where yet." He spends very little time decorating the cupcakes and, in a rebellious gesture, scoops the mascarpone cheese on top of the cakes with a spoon, "smothering them with icing" ("The Wait Staff"). The dainty frosting, typically done with a piping bag, and the additional décor such as mini sugar flowers or sparkles are totally missing from his red velvet cupcakes. Associated with femininity, such markers of the "other" gender are avoided so as to assert that baking and decorating cupcakes can be done in a masculine yet playful way.

The playfulness and casualness of these gestures and of Hughes's overall relation with the cupcakes are signifiers of his performance in the kitchen, which is marked by a straightforward masculinity with a touch of childlikeness, visible in his fashion style, tattoos, kitchen gadgets, restaurant décor, and language. The sum of his performative acts is translated in the way he talks about, bakes, and decorates the cupcakes. Hughes's identity as a chef and restaurateur—but also as a representative of young, health-conscious foodie hipsters—is forged through a series of practices that identify him as being at the intersection of different cultural groups. For example, he wears the markers of his passion—foods and gadgets—on his body through a collection of tattoos. While tattooing shows his toughness, the subject matter of his body art adds an ironic twist to the overall tattoo culture. Asked in a recent interview how "a manly man" operates in the kitchen, Hughes replied that cooking like a man means "reading that recipe but making it your own" by "adding a certain spice, making it a different

way" (Brodie, n.d.). Substituting cream cheese with mascarpone in his icing and decorating the cake with a spoon are signs of difference and creativity that specifically represent masculinity, at least according to Hughes.

For Alton Brown, being unconventional is not an intentional goal of his culinary performances, despite the fact that his shows are innovative and different from anything on Food Network. Brown is best known in the culinary world for his concept show *Good Eats*, described by Cooking Channel, a spinoff of Food Network, as follows: "Pop culture, comedy, and plain good eating: Host Alton Brown explores the origins of ingredients, decodes culinary customs and presents food and equipment trends. Punctuated by unusual interludes, simple preparations and unconventional discussions, he'll bring you food in its finest and funniest form."<sup>5</sup> Each episode focuses on a single dish or ingredient, explaining its cultural history, the best cooking methods, the most suitable gadgets, and even its chemical composition. The show was launched in 1999, ran for thirteen seasons on Food Network, and continues to air on Cooking Channel at the time of writing. It is one of the most popular and long-lasting shows on food television. Each episode is developed as a story in which Alton Brown performs different roles, ranging from superhero to mad scientist, in order to entertain and educate. One of the *Good Eats* episodes, titled "Honey, I Shrunk the Cake" and aired in 2008, was dedicated to cupcakes.<sup>6</sup>

In an attempt to take back the cupcake from the "highbrow snarf and urbanated sharps" and offer it back to ordinary Americans, Brown displays a masculinity that combines geekiness, eccentricity, a thirst for knowledge, and constant self-deprecation. At the same time, his masculinity is also recognizable and mainstream in that it encourages simplicity and lack of fuss. Therefore, while Brown does not scoop frosting onto his cupcakes with a spoon, he, like Hughes, displays a minimal concern for decorations. He explains that using a miniature spatula instead of a traditional piping bag makes the decorating process "not too fussy." What solidifies his discourse of "not too fussy" cookery is the simplicity of the ingredients that make up the cupcake. Brown does not wish to be different through the addition of any unnecessary ingredient, so he opts for the combination of eggs, sugar, flour, baking powder, milk, oil, and vanilla, ingredients typical of most cakes. He demystifies the cupcake, making it accessible for those uninterested in the cupcake craze generated by bakeries such as Magnolia in New York City. To do so, Brown makes a series of sarcastic references

to the elements that make the cupcake a cupcake, such as the wrapper or the frosting. For example, he mentions with annoyance that “a lot of people don’t think it’s a cupcake unless they get the Christmas time effect of unwrapping the cupcake.” In his performance, Brown recycles a multitude of popular cultural types to craft a masculinity that is highly recognizable and likable.

## CONCLUSION

The versatility of the cupcake and its lack of “proper” culinary history make it into a dessert that invites play. The visual potential of the cupcake, as the base for spectacular decorations, coupled with a “no rules apply” attitude in terms of ingredients and flavours, translates into multiple instances of appropriation—such as Chuck Hughes’s use of the cupcake as an outlet for manly creativity or Alton Brown’s geeky, “no frills” approach to the dessert. Audiences watching male chefs bake cupcakes on food television are thus witnessing a parade of performances of masculinity founded on the reinterpretation of a historically feminine dessert. In other words, the expressive capacity of the cupcake provides scope not only for the negotiation of masculine identity, of the tattooed man-child and the nerdy scientist, but also for the public display of that identity. I argue, then, that, quite apart from lessons in cooking, food television offers a series of informal pedagogies which bypass the question that many scholars have asked about food television, namely: does watching food television make us into better cooks?

## NOTES

- 1 This statement is based on my own observations of the ways in which cupcakes have been represented in mainstream popular culture and co-opted by various communities, from roller derby “girls” to tattooed hipsters. More specifically, I consulted (1) multiple cookbooks dedicated entirely to cupcakes, such as *Martha Stewart’s Cupcakes: 175 Inspired Ideas for Everyone’s Favorite Treat* and *The Cupcake Diaries: Recipes and Memories from the Sisters of Georgetown Cupcake*; (2) special issues of food magazines and sections of lifestyle magazines focusing on cupcakes; (3) websites of North American cupcakeries and bakeries; and (4) all seasons of *Cupcake Wars*. At the moment, very little exists in the academic literature on contemporary

- cupcake cultures. This chapter is part of a larger study about the cultural representations and appropriations (co-optation) of cupcakes.
- 2 "Cupcakes," *Food Timeline*, 2000, <http://www.foodtimeline.org/foodcakes.html#cupcakes>.
  - 3 Arrick's manifesto was formerly available on the Butch Bakery website, <http://www.butchbakery.com>. The site no longer exists, but his words are quoted in numerous food blogs: see, for example, "The Cupcake Question," *Grains of Earth*, 2013, <http://www.grainsofearth.org/the-cupcake-question/>. See also *The Butch Bakery Cookbook* (Arrick 2011).
  - 4 "Chuck's Day Off," *Food Network*, n.d., <http://www.foodnetwork.ca/shows/chucks-day-off/>.
  - 5 "Good Eats," *Cooking Channel*, 2015, <http://www.cookingchanneltv.com/shows/good-eats.html>.
  - 6 Although the full episode (season 11, episode 17) is no longer available online, a portion of the show can be viewed at <http://www.foodnetwork.com/shows/good-eats/11-series/honey-i-shrunk-the-cake.html>.

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## Snapshots of a Canadian Cuisine

*Elizabeth Baird*

It was good fortune that transformed my passion for cooking into a career. In the early 1970s, publisher James Lorimer invited me to write a cookbook about Canadian food, encouraging me, a modern languages graduate and French teacher, to think beyond my southwestern Ontario roots and my family's repertoire of recipes. *Classic Canadian Cooking: Menus for the Seasons* was the result, and it provided my entry into a career in food. After its publication, I freelanced, contributing a weekly column, "Canadian Cookbook," to the *Toronto Star*; teaching cooking classes; appearing frequently on Peter Gzowski's CBC radio programs and on CTV's *Canada AM*; and writing cooking articles for magazines, notably *Canadian Living*. In 1987, I was named food editor at *Canadian Living*, a job I prized until I retired in 2009.

During my tenure with the magazine, I felt that there were two aspects of cooking that *Canadian Living* should cover. First, I wanted to profile our nation's regional food—things like Saskatchewan's turkey suppers and rhubarb-saskatoon pie, cedar-planked Atlantic salmon from Nova Scotia's south shore, Acadian meat pie, Ontario's peameal bacon on a bun, and Prince Edward Island's lobster chowder. Second, I wanted to invite readers to cook dishes from ethnic communities, using food as a way of connecting people. Thus, *Canadian Living* introduced many new-to-Canada cuisines, including a Portuguese family dinner and recipes from the Afghan Women's Catering Group. Charlottetown, PEI, was the site of a supper prepared by women of the Lebanese community. A Sephardic Jewish family in

Montréal cooked a Moroccan Seder meal. Food activist Anita Stewart shared the extraordinary experience of a Coastal First Nations potlatch. Kathy Lee invited readers to her family's Lunar New Year's feast. When space constraints in the magazine eliminated full-length features, we used two-page cooking lessons that provided step-by-step instructions on how to make potstickers, baklava, and gnocchi. And we slipped recipes like Vietnamese pho or Punjabi samosas into recipe-driven stories to add variety, setting them into context with an explanation of ingredients or special techniques.

The magazine has enjoyed a wide following, and issues are regularly passed along and collected. During my years as food editor, its reputation for reliable well-tested recipes encouraged people to experiment with new recipes, whether harira, a lentil soup served at day's end during Ramadan, or the latest twist on Nanaimo bars. The magazine helped cooks realize what was possible in their own kitchens. It provided inspiration for occasions that marked the year: a Canada Day barbecue, the perfect turkey and stuffing for Thanksgiving, and sweet treats for birthday parties, anniversaries, or baby showers. *Canadian Living* provided a reference for what is Canadian, for Canadians new and old.

Cookbooks, television, and new media provided more outlets for the Canadian Living food philosophy, often to new and younger audiences. At the time, I don't think the food department thought that *Canadian Living* was shaping Canadian cuisine; however, the sheer bulk of recipes must have influenced what and how Canadians cooked at home.

While media like *Canadian Living* can influence the direction of Canadian cuisine, they're also significant to understanding what Canadian cooking is. In my almost forty years of publishing on Canadian cooking, both as a food editor and cookbook author, I have come to believe that a number of building blocks are essential for a recognizable cuisine. These include regional ingredients, distinctive cooking techniques, codification through cookbooks and "heroes," and iconic dishes. Canada offers these in spades, and they all combine to create a Canadian food.

First, there are regional ingredients, like cod on the Atlantic coast, caribou in the North, five species of salmon on the Pacific coast, inland freshwater pickerel and goldeye, bison, wild rice, fiddleheads, maple syrup, and corn. Canada has four seasons; for First Nations, that meant preserving enough food for the frigid winter. These foods required hard, often dangerous work to harvest and process. Consider the buffalo. Before guns

and horses, bravery and skill were required to lure the animals to a cliff, stampede them over, and butcher the thousand-kilogram beasts at the bottom. Buffalo provided an incredible harvest. In addition to the fresh meat to cook and satisfy immediate hunger, they also provided meat to dry as pemmican, skins for blankets and clothing, bones for tools, and sinews for sewing and snowshoe webbing. Nothing was wasted. Similar diligence went into preserving the salmon harvest on the West Coast, fire-drying wild rice, and planting corn, beans, and squash so that the corn stalks supported the beans that nourished the soil, covered by squash vines that retained the earth's moisture. Every spring, eastern First Nations made maple syrup by repeatedly freezing and removing the top layer of water from the sweet unfrozen sap, leaving the progressively thicker syrup at the bottom of containers.

What's significant about these regional ingredients—salmon, bison, maple syrup, fiddleheads, and corn, for example—is that they still play a major role in foods we recognize as Canadian. An outing to a sugar shack in eastern Canada is a rite of spring. An August corn roast—what could be more Canadian? At First Nations powwows, attendees look forward to burgers, with bison patties tucked into fried bannock. When Canada's Governor General entertains at Rideau Hall, these iconic ingredients inevitably appear on the menus.

As for distinctly Canadian cooking techniques, remnants of early cooking and preserving methods linger in the jerky and buffalo snacks of the Prairies, lyed corn found in Six Nations cookbooks of our era, the popular candied salmon sold in British Columbia, and trendy foraged fiddleheads. European settlers learned to use these foods and appropriated the techniques, but their very being belongs to the First Nations.

Another way to trace a cuisine through its evolution is through written records like cookbooks. Canada's first cookbook, *La cuisinière bourgeoise*, was published in 1825 in Québec City by Augustin Germain, its author known only as Menon. The book dates from 1746 and, by the time it reached Lower Canada, it was a classic in France, even translated into English. It was successful in Québec, reprinted in many editions, and it helped imprint French as the model for Québec cooking and identity.

The first Canadian cookbook in English was *The Cook Not Mad*, published in Kingston, now Ontario, in 1831 by James Macfarlane. Its recipes were lifted entirely from a cookbook produced in 1830 across Lake

Ontario at Watertown, New York. While *The Cook Not Mad* contained recipes that could as easily have appeared in British cookbooks, of interest are the dishes made with North American ingredients: cornmeal, cranberries, pumpkin, crookneck squash, and candied watermelon rind, a replacement for hard-to-find citron. Noteworthy too are the book's many tasty and timeless recipes—hard gingerbread, for example—that have found their way into kitchens of historic museums like Fort York National Historic Site, where the Officers' Mess Kitchen operated around the same era as the cookbook.

A breakthrough in the Canadianization of cooking in English-speaking Canada came via Catherine Parr Trail's *The Female Emigrant's Guide, and Hints on Canadian Housekeeping* (1854). Here, Trail introduces newcomers to life in Canada—nonstop hard work. The book reflects a transition from British to Canadian ways of life, influenced by contact with First Nations and their foods and with more experienced settlers. *The Guide* includes recipes for cooking game and local fish, notably venison and the pike-like muskellunge, and details sugaring off, ice fishing, and substitutions of wild leaves and bark for tea and charred roots for coffee. Its many recipes range from wild rice as a savoury side dish, or as a sweet custard, to cranberries made into a sauce or a jelly. To familiarize newcomers with the novel ingredient, corn, Trail scrapes fresh corn off the cob to add to pancakes and fritters or to boil "like peas, with butter and pepper for seasoning; this obviates the ungraceful mode of eating corn so much objected to by particular persons" (Trail 1854, 118). She goes on to entice readers with cornmeal in familiar British dishes like Indian Pound Cake with lemon, nutmeg, wine, and brandy, or Indian Tea-Cake with currants or caraway seeds and molasses, ginger, and nutmeg. She includes North American dishes such as Johnny-Cake and Suppone, the latter a cornmeal porridge, eaten hot with sugar, butter, and milk, and when cold and firm, sliced, fried, and buttered for breakfast.

A national cuisine also has heroes. What would French cooking be without Escoffier, or British cuisine without Isabella Beeton? Canada also has standouts like Mme Jehane Benoît, whose Québec flair made her a darling of television.<sup>1</sup> Kate Aitken, from a generation earlier, was Canada's titan of the kitchen via radio, personal appearances, and cookbooks.<sup>2</sup> Consider too, cookbook author Savella Stechishin, Canada's first home economist of Ukrainian heritage, and the mythical and prodigious Edith Adams.<sup>3</sup>

But even as these icons slip into the memories of old-time cooks, new ones emerge, through television, restaurants, cookbooks, and new media. People like Michael Smith, Lynn Crawford, Michael Stadlander, Martin Picard, and Vikram Vij and Meeru Dhalwala inspire Canadians to consider food as a career and to cook for pleasure. These new heroes popularize new ingredients and lay the groundwork for cooking dishes first tasted in ethnic restaurants.

National cuisines usually have iconic dishes. As pizza makes you think Italy, kimchee links to Korea, and croissants are to Parisian breakfasts as eggs and bacon are to the United States. We have inherited from other countries many dishes that are well established in Canadian kitchens: scones and shortbread from Scotland, salads from Greece and Nice, and Italian standards like lasagna. In my experience, shared dishes aren't enough to "make" a distinctive Canadian cuisine. There have to be dishes we can claim as our own, by ancestry or by sheer volume. Butter tarts and their Québec cousin, *tarte au sucre*, serve as examples. Longer settled by Europeans and more isolated than much of Canada, Québec contributes *tourtière* and *poutine*. Perhaps we can say "as Canadian as baked beans, split pea soup, corn on the cob, perogies, Montréal bagels, saskatoon pie, lobster rolls, Nanaimo bars, beaver tails, macaroni and cheese, and grilled cheese." Serve with beer.

A national cuisine has strengths. Canada has three that are so obvious we rarely reckon their importance. The first is home baking. Historically a necessity, the heat and drudgery of baking was eased with the popularity of wood burning cook stoves. The love of baking can start with Granny hauling out the mixing bowl for a batch of cookies. Children are hooked by the sugar and butter, but also by the idea of accomplishing something important enough to enjoy themselves, and to share. Elsewhere, such as in France, pastry is an art not often practiced at home. It's to the *boulangerie* for croissants, not baking blueberry muffins at home. Our skill is expressed in the fundraising bake sales that pervade the workplace and bazaar scene, the fall fair pie contests, cookie exchanges, and the making of items for our rites of passage—birthday, wedding, and anniversary cakes. Home baking is a significant contributor to Canada's cuisine.

A second strength is barbecuing—or, as Americans say, grilling. Barbecuing has neatly dovetailed into the reality of contemporary family cooking where sharing tasks is a given. Barbecuing is convenient—all

you need to do is turn a knob. The gas is there, the flames immediate. No charcoal to light, no wait for the coals. While outdoor cooking is usually seasonal, Canadians don't pack their barbecues away for the winter. Entertaining in warm weather almost invariably happens around the barbecue, with the rallying call, "Come for a barbecue." The appliance somehow takes the angst out of having company, turning occasions into friendlier, more casual affairs.

While the third strength may seem minor, preserving has been vital to Canadians having enough food for the winter. Thanks to freezing and the availability of year-round fresh food, we no longer need to salt pork, dry salmon, or can vegetables. But preserving lives on. There has been a resurgence of preserving books and classes over the past decade. Getting together to make marmalade or pickles is gaining in popularity. The Canadian repertoire of chili sauces and dills has been augmented by chipotle salsa, chardonnay jellies, pickled fennel, and antipastos. In some neighbourhoods, September is announced by the aromas of peppers roasting and tomatoes being made into sauce. Preserving is a choice, either for our pleasure or for our culture.

Possibly the most significant future contribution to Canadian cooking will be made via the emerging cooking profession. Back in the 1960s and 1970s, when I started to write about food, most chefs were Europeans, and there were limited choices for professional training in Canada. Teachers at existing schools were also often European, and being a serious chef meant working in traditional cuisines in large institutions and hotels. Cooking did not have the prestige of medicine or law. But all this has changed, thanks to cooking shows, global travel, busy lives, a mania for eating at the hippest restaurants, and chefs and cooks who are the new rock stars. Cooking as a profession has been totally rebranded. Excellent professional cooking schools are releasing a veritable army of creative, trained chefs and cooks with new ideas, new appreciations of seasonal cooking with local ingredients, better skills, and respect for and curiosity about the cuisines of newcomers to the country. Many of them are reworking traditional foods for a contemporary audience. With more prestige than home cooking, professional cooking will invariably play a large part in shaping the future of Canadian cooking.

The future of Canadian cuisine will also be shaped by new media. For instance, at a conference organized in February 2013 in the Toronto area

by Food Bloggers Canada, trend mistress and marketer Dana McCauley challenged bloggers to “find out what the Canadian food experience is.” Among the attendees was Edmontonian blogger Valerie Lugonja ([www.acanadianfoodie.com](http://www.acanadianfoodie.com)), and she took up the challenge with a call to identify our Canadian voice:

So what is it that makes Canadian Food Bloggers unique? What do we bring to the collective table that is undeniably Canadian? Why is it so difficult for us, as Canadians, to get a handle on the uniqueness of our own culture? The vastness of the Canadian landscape contributes to this conundrum, yet other countries are as vast and present a clear cultural front to the world. And Canadian food. What is it, really? That would be an important bit of information for a Canadian food blogger to consider.

Already more than fifty bloggers have joined Valerie Lugonja in writing monthly posts about topics on a particular Canadian product, ranging from the Tamworth pig to Red Fife wheat.

It's these many voices of blogs, television shows, websites, community events, cookbooks, newspaper and magazine articles, young chefs—along with the recognition of Canada's heritage ingredients, heroes, and dishes—that will fine tune our cuisine as it grows out of a tasty mix of First Nations, English, French, Jewish, Chinese, Greek, Japanese, Italian, West Indian, South Asian . . . and more to come. Let's not be impatient. We've laid out the ingredients—let's give them time to cook. And let's talk about it.

#### NOTES

- 1 In a career that spanned the 1930s to the late 1980s, Madame Benoît, as Jehane Benoît was known, wrote over thirty cookbooks, notably the *Encyclopedia of Canadian Cuisine*, for which she travelled the country collecting recipes. She was a broadcaster, owned her own cooking school, operated a restaurant in Montréal, and became well known in English-speaking Canada thanks to her regular appearances on CBC's afternoon magazine-style show *Take 30*, with host Adrienne Clarkson. The 1960s and early 1970s were the heyday of the show. Later in her career, she was an enthusiastic advocate for microwave cooking.
- 2 Known as “Mrs. A.,” Kate Aitken was the cooking authority in English-speaking Canada from the 1930s well into the 1950s, owing mainly to her popular CBC Radio cooking and advice shows. From 1938 to 1952, when

Kate Aitken was the director of the Women's Division of the Canadian National Exhibition, thousands of women lined up for cooking classes. *Kate Aitken's Canadian Cookbook* is still very much in print, and in use.

- 3 Like Betty Crocker, Edith Adams is a fictional persona, created by the *Vancouver Sun* and made real through cooking shows and seventy-five years of cooking advice and recipes by a succession of home economists, chefs, editors, and writers. Despite her fictional status, she played a big part in cooking, especially in British Columbia. She produced the food pages for the *Sun*, gave cooking lessons and demonstrations, ran recipe contests, responded to countless readers' telephone calls and recipes, and produced numerous cookbooks.

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# Everybody's a Critic

## A Memoir

*John Gilchrist*

Food critics have been around since the days of the ancient Greeks. Those of the moneyed classes would cruise the Mediterranean looking for, among other things, regional delicacies and cooking techniques. They might find excellent sea bass off what is now the Dalmatian coast or new ways of harvesting sea salt outside Rome. They tasted, they drank, they talked, and they wrote about their culinary adventures (Toussaint-Samat 1992).

In antiquity, restaurants did not exist—the French invented them in the 1700s as a way to “restore” oneself—so the Greeks and their culinary descendants, the Romans, would meet in their homes to dine. They reclined on couches and ate long into the evening, drinking wine and mead in copious amounts. They talked of many things—politics, religion, the economy. And, of course, the food (Barer-Stein 1999; Sokolov 1991). These culinary events were a marker of the quality of life to which they aspired. Luxurious meals showed them to be members of the upper class, wealthy and successful. Without restaurants, of course, there were no restaurant critics, but many writings on culinary technique and dinner conversation survive, such as Athenaeus's *The Deipnosophists* (n.d.), a weighty work about dinner table philosophers that comprises fifteen books filled with dinner chat between guests. Had restaurants existed in 200 BC, perhaps Athenaeus would have been a critic.

In contemporary Western culture, restaurant critics are considered to be an exalted breed. They have (one hopes) highly honed palates, a depth of culinary knowledge, and the ability to construct a cogent, lucid, and objective evaluation of a restaurant and the dining experience it offers. It's something many of us would like to do: eat, for free, the best foods, drink the finest wines, and then gloat about the experience—or trash it—in an opinionated way. The image of a bespectacled, bearded, tweedy gent with a British accent pops to mind as the stereotype of the restaurant critic, scowling over a pot of bouillabaisse, delicately dissecting a meal.

But restaurant writing is, in reality, a profession that few people know much about. Even those of us who have worked in the field for years don't really understand it and have little awareness of how other writers work. How much are we paid? Can we claim the meal as a business expense? Do we make a reservation under a pseudonym? Do we take notes? Photos? Talk to the chef? Just how do we do it?

These are questions I've been asking for thirty-five years. Since 1980, I've reviewed restaurants weekly for CBC Radio in Calgary. That would be somewhere around 1,800 restaurants in total. (I never really kept track at the beginning; I thought this might be a year or two gig and then I'd run out of restaurants. How little I knew.) I was writing restaurant reviews for a local magazine (*Interface*, long gone) when I got the call from CBC. I was only twenty-six and was scared silly by the weight of influence that a CBC review could have on a restaurant. I was fairly well travelled—I'd been to Europe and Asia and across Canada—and I had grown up on a farm, so I felt I had a good grounding in food, but I had nowhere near the knowledge I felt I should have. Nor did I have any credentials.

So I read everything I could read about food. I tasted everything I could find to taste. I cooked different kinds of cuisines from different cookbooks to try to understand how foods come together. I adopted the perspective of a learned customer, never pretending that I was a chef or someone highly knowledgeable in the field but considering myself an interested diner who liked to learn about food and enjoy it. When I came across something unfamiliar to me, I was happy to say so.

So what have I learned and what questions have I answered over the years?

1. Although I have no specific credentials (I'm not a chef, I'm not a journalist), simply being on CBC as the network's acknowledged restaurant critic bestows automatic credibility. Doing your research and speaking with authority helps, too. There is an assumed objectivity (CBC doesn't take ads—yet), so there's little potential of conflict or perceived leverage.
2. Radio is a different beast than the written word. As my first producer told me, "You have five minutes of radio. You have to be entertaining and keep people from changing the station." Restaurant critics are in the entertainment business.
3. Radio has ruined my sense of punctuation (never that good, truth be told), since it's all about breathing and vocal pace. Commas and semicolons are irrelevant if you run out of breath. Writing for print requires a much greater focus on correct grammar and punctuation.
4. Reviews are written to size. For radio, it's five minutes of air; for newspapers, it's 700 words; for magazines, 450 or 250 or 175, depending on the client. You have to be able to write to size.
5. And write to tone. Each publication has its own style. Some are edgy, some breezy, some formal. The writer's style must be adapted to the publication.
6. People generally like to hear about new and unique restaurants.
7. A good review can fill a restaurant for at least three weeks. The more unique the cuisine and the more unusual the location, the more business will increase. The initial impact will taper off, but revenue levels will probably always be higher than they were before the review.
8. A bad review may or may not hurt a restaurant. If, for example, a restaurant given a bad review on CBC Radio doesn't have a strong CBC listener demographic, it probably won't be affected. If, however, it does skew toward a CBC listener profile (older, well educated, well paid, interested in dining out), it will probably see decreased sales for at least a couple of weeks. It may also see a surge of support from its loyal clientele who disagree with the review.
9. Every restaurant has a story. That story may be about the bathrooms, the way the server takes your order, the soundtrack, or the cutlery. It

- may also be about the food, but writing about food becomes boring very quickly. I look for the narrative behind the food to support the review and to give it colour. The narrative is always shaped to the number of words allocated for the piece.
10. Good restaurants are easy to write about. Bad restaurants are even easier. Boring restaurants are the hardest; they tend to make boring reviews.
  11. Restaurant reviewers pay for their meals, or at least they should. It helps maintain objectivity when reviewing.
  12. I make a reservation under a pseudonym, one I've used for decades. When I started reviewing restaurants, I thought it might be fun to make up names as I went along. That was fine until I showed up at a busy restaurant one night and couldn't remember who I was. Since then, I've used one name.
  13. I don't take notes or photos during meals. I do collect menus—now mostly available online—to refresh my memory. But for the most part, I believe that I will easily remember the most interesting points about the event, which will always be enough to fill my column. It's only five minutes of radio or a 700-word column, after all.
  14. The best part of the job is meeting the people who pour their life's blood into restaurants and those who choose restaurant work as their career, which usually happens after the review. I've learned so much about different cultures from sampling the foods, researching the history, and talking to the people. I've been invited to an Ethiopian wedding in Addis Ababa, watched rustic bread baking in Paris, dined on the freshest seafood in Rome, and been shown the culinary sights of Bangkok—all because of relationships with Calgary restaurateurs.
  15. The biggest change in the Canadian culinary scene is the emergence of the Canadian chef. They're talented and well trained, and they understand both the local market and the products produced here. They're creating a true Canadian cuisine that is the equal of any in the world.

So that’s how I’ve always done it and what I’ve learned. But what about the future of restaurant reviewing? In the past few years, I’ve seen many changes in the media. When I started reviewing restaurants, and for many years after, there was a small cadre of Calgary food writers who did this kind of work professionally. That group—various newspaper, magazine, and radio writers—didn’t change much for years. Restaurants, food, and chefs weren’t sexy then; they were relegated to the soft side of media.

After about twenty years on radio, I added a restaurant column in the *Calgary Herald*. It isn’t a review column; it’s a column on the restaurant industry and its people. We debated whether to include my photo in the column—I’d always been incognito on radio. This was about 2000, at the beginning of the digital age, and we decided to include it, figuring that if anyone really wanted to know what I looked like, it was easy enough to find out.

Then came Food Network. People watched television cooking shows with buff chefs in competition. Food became sexy and chefs became rock stars. No longer were they relegated to the back rooms, never to be seen. The kitchen became the focal point of the restaurant; we all wanted to see the chef prepare the food. New shows appeared, ratings went up, and culinary schools filled with students. No longer was cooking a profession that you took up if you couldn’t do anything else; it became a hot commodity.

Around 2008, things began to change in how food-related content was delivered in media. Blogs became popular, and every aspiring food writer had to have one. People wrote about their food experiences—cooking, shopping, travelling, dining—on their blogs. Photos were included and digital conversations ensued. There’s a broad range of quality on food blogs, ranging from barely coherent to witty, engaging, and intelligent. Many blog entries seem to focus on a single dish or specific aspect of service; some are simply complaints with little background. Many sites have fallen by the wayside as bloggers realize they’re a lot of work with little return.

Websites also had (and can still have) a certain cachet. Some writers built their own, but many abandoned them in favour of blogs. Restaurants have taken to websites, however, as places to post their menus and their stories, as well as contact information and reservation connections. Facebook

became a key way to convey more information in a timely manner, but having such a broad focus, it remains a sideline player.

And then came Twitter, allowing us to broadcast real-time comments and photos as we eat, much to the consternation of our dining partners. Some writers love it; others loathe it. It has the advantage of conveying instant information to your followers. (As advantages go, this one is at best questionable. Twitter's main purpose seems to be to let you know that there's a great party happening that you haven't been invited to.) It has the disadvantage of taking you out of the moment.

It didn't take the restaurant industry long to catch on to the new technology and to the people who use it. The restaurants themselves started blogs, Facebook pages, and Twitter accounts, in addition to their websites. And they created events and invited the more influential bloggers and twitterazzi to attend. They fed them and wined them, in the hope of receiving positive comments in their media. It worked. Whether it actually generates increased paying traffic remains unclear. More research is needed in this area.

In the process, the restaurant industry has co-opted restaurant writing. There has always been an uneasy relationship between the two—we, the food writers, have to speak with them, we get to know them, we may develop biases—but now the process has clearly crossed the line. Who goes to a free event with loads of customized food and fancy wine and says bad things about it? Most of the new breed of writers see little wrong with this. I go to some of the events myself, but I never use any of the experience in a review. It seems, though, that many of the new writers think this is what food writing is all about. They spend little time learning about different food cultures; I've had bloggers tell me they don't write about certain kinds of food because they don't know about them. They seem content to keep their knowledge narrow and light. Not everyone, of course, should be painted with a negative brush—some of the new writers are very good and quite diligent. But the system has changed, and for many readers, critics like me have become irrelevant. The public can gather so much information from so many sources that a critical review is lost in the digital noise.

At the same time, many media outlets have reduced or eliminated their restaurant and food review sections. It seems antithetical in an era when food has become sexy, but many see it as a cost-cutting measure and are willing to give over the role of food communication to the public. As a result, many of my colleagues across North America have lost their jobs.

My assumption is that when I retire in a few years—if I last that long—I will not be replaced. Or if I am replaced, the new position will be quite different from my current one. But until then, I will stick to the rules I've adhered to for over thirty-five years and keep reviewing restaurants in the old-school way.

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PART THREE  
FOOD CONTROVERSY







# Making the “Perfect Food” Safe

## The Milk Pasteurization Debate

*Catherine Carstairs, Paige Schell,  
and Sheilagh Quaille*

Pasteurization, named for the famous French bacteriologist Louis Pasteur, involves heating milk to a high temperature and then cooling it quickly, a process that destroys the disease organisms that multiply easily in raw milk. Since 1991, pasteurization has been required across Canada, but even before that, it was extremely common: many municipalities required that all milk sold be pasteurized, and both Ontario and Saskatchewan had laws mandating pasteurization. When pasteurization became compulsory across Canada in 1991, there was little debate about it, but, over the past decade, a movement in favour of raw milk has grown, based on the idea that pasteurization may be destroying beneficial as well as harmful bacteria. The current popularity of raw milk is related to the broader raw food movement, whose proponents believe that raw foods deliver health benefits that may not yet be recognized by mainstream doctors and nutritionists. Raw milk advocates argue that people should have the right to consume the foods that they believe are best for the health of their families (see, for example, Gumpert 2009; Millar 2010). But public health officials insist that pasteurization continues to be the best way to deliver a safe milk supply.

The controversy over pasteurized milk is not new. When the compulsory pasteurization of milk was proposed in the first half of the twentieth century, Canadians debated the health benefits of raw versus unpasteurized milk and questioned whether legislation requiring pasteurization was

the appropriate response to safety concerns. Until very recently, most historians considered pasteurization to be a public health triumph: according to their narrative, forward-thinking doctors and public health officials imposed it, despite opposition from farmers and some members of the public. After it was put in place, infant and childhood mortality from diarrhea, tuberculosis, and typhoid dropped substantially (MacDougall 1990, 97–106; Sutherland 1976, 56–70).

The publication of *Nature's Perfect Food*, by historical sociologist Melanie Dupuis (2002), complicated this narrative by pointing out that pasteurization is not the only option for improving the safety of milk. Other options included tubercular testing, or a certification process that carefully controlled the conditions under which milk was produced. Dupuis, an American, argues that pasteurization served the interests of large dairies who could afford the new technologies involved: she concludes that pasteurization was the result of an “industrial bargain”—an alliance among consumers, large industry, and intensive farmers that aimed to provide “cheap nutrition” (Dupuis 2002). More recently, in the Canadian context, historian Jane Jenkins (2008) has argued that opponents to pasteurization in New Brunswick were not “anti-modern”; rather, they believed that there were better alternatives to pasteurization in terms of improving the safety of the milk supply. Andrew Ebejer (2010) has shown the degree to which the pasteurization debates in Ontario were tied into growing concern about the cost of milk and concentration in the dairy industry. Alan Czaplicki (2007) demonstrates that progress toward pasteurization in Chicago was uneven and contested. Even public health officials sometimes supported hygienic measures and tubercular testing over pasteurization as a way to ensure the safety of milk. Likewise, Susan Jones (2004) shows that many doctors were deeply suspicious of pasteurized milk in the early part of the twentieth century: they worried about the nutritional value of pasteurized milk and feared that pasteurization would allow milk producers to be unsanitary.

This chapter emphasizes that in Canada, most milk was pasteurized long before compulsory pasteurization measures were put in place and that public health authorities worked in close cooperation with the larger dairies to make the case for pasteurization. It was the large dairies who spoke most effectively in favour of pasteurized milk; their advertising claimed that pasteurization ensured that their product was safe. As other chapters

in this volume suggest, corporate communications were often the most effective means of encouraging Canadians to change their food habits. The opposition to compulsory pasteurization was weak, at least in comparison to the better-known public health controversies over vaccination and fluoridation. The opposition that did exist centred on the impact that pasteurization would have on the food system. Pasteurization allowed for the milk of many cows to be pooled without multiplying the health risks to the consumer, and opponents believed that this was not the safest way of providing milk. They argued that inspection and tubercular testing would be more effective in producing a safe and healthy milk supply while also allowing for the existence of small farms. They also believed that pasteurized milk was less tasty and less nutritious than raw milk.

#### THE PROGRESS OF PASTEURIZATION

The pasteurization movement was spearheaded by the large dairies that adopted pasteurization well before it became compulsory. Pasteurized milk kept longer without souring and was safe to drink: it made sound business sense to large dairies that were pooling milk from many cows and distributing the milk over long distances, making the risk of milk-borne illness much greater. At least initially, public health authorities and doctors were far from unanimous in their support of the idea: throughout the 1910s and 1920s, some doctors and sanitary inspectors feared that pasteurization allowed dairies to take sanitary shortcuts; they worried that the pasteurization process was not always carried out correctly and expressed concern that pasteurized milk was less digestible, especially for babies (Black 1911; Shireff 1912; White 1924). By the 1930s, public health officials were more fully in support of pasteurization, although a few still expressed concern about compulsory pasteurization. The shift was indicative of a larger transition. As it became clear that specific and identifiable microbes could be countered through measures like chlorination, vaccination, and pasteurization, the principles of sanitary science (which prioritized cleanliness above all else) were being left behind (Tomes 1998). Because the issue rarely came to a public vote, most people did not give pasteurization a great deal of thought: they bought pasteurized milk because the larger dairies told them that pasteurization was a safer choice for their families. This left the opposition to pasteurization in the hands of small dairy producers who could not

afford to invest in pasteurization equipment or a few health food crusaders whose views were well outside of the mainstream.

Compulsory pasteurization was a remarkably slow process. The first dairies to adopt pasteurization did so just after the turn of the century, and by World War I, it was increasingly common for the milk in Canada's largest cities to be pasteurized (see table 12.1). The first cities to introduce compulsory pasteurization were Saskatoon and Toronto, in 1914, although the regulations in Saskatoon still allowed raw milk to be sold with a special permit (Jeff O'Brien, pers. comm., 28 June 2013). In 1938, when Ontario became the first province to implement compulsory pasteurization, only five of Canada's largest cities had embraced it—Windsor introduced it in 1926, Hamilton in 1928, and St. Catharine's in 1929 (Murray 1934, 31). But even where pasteurization was not compulsory, it was extremely common. By the early 1930s, 72.4 percent of the milk sold in Canada's twenty-four largest cities was pasteurized (Murray 1932, 259). The third annual report of the Committee on Milk Control, presented at the June 1937 meeting of the Canadian Public Health Association, indicates that by that date, 95 percent of all milk in Montréal was pasteurized, while in Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Vancouver, more than three-quarters of all milk sold was pasteurized ("Reports from the Annual Meeting" 1937, 462). In the years after World War II, Saskatchewan introduced compulsory pasteurization in towns with a population of more than a thousand, while other cities, including Vancouver and Québec City, mandated pasteurization. Although no other provinces passed compulsory pasteurization laws, the amount of pasteurized milk being consumed increased steadily, as shown by a study published in the *Public Health Journal (Canada)* and Health League of Canada surveys (see table 12.2).

**Table 12.1** Percentage of milk pasteurized in major Canadian cities

|      | Toronto | Winnipeg | Vancouver |
|------|---------|----------|-----------|
| 1905 | 0%      | 0%       | 0%        |
| 1910 | —       | —        | 10%       |
| 1913 | 80%     | —        | —         |
| 1915 | —       | 65%      | 75%       |

Source: Boudouin 1918.

**Table 12.2** Pasteurized milk consumed, 1951 and 1964

|                      | 1951       | 1964   |
|----------------------|------------|--|
| Ontario              | 99%        | 100% except in a few northern settlements            |
| Québec               | 85%        | 92% in cities and towns with a population over 1,000 |
| British Columbia     | 85%        | 99% in urban areas; 97% in rural areas               |
| Manitoba             | 65% to 70% | Percentage unknown, but milk was usually pasteurized |
| Saskatchewan         | 35%        | 90%  |
| Alberta              | 32%        | 90% to 95%   |
| Nova Scotia          | 55% to 60% | 99%  |
| New Brunswick        | 88%        | Percentage unknown, but milk was usually pasteurized |
| Prince Edward Island | Unknown    | 99%  |
| Newfoundland         | Unknown    | 75% but fluid milk consumption very low              |

Source: Library and Archives Canada, Health League of Canada fonds, MG 28, I 332, vol. 109, files 1 and 9.

To understand the debates over pasteurization, one needs to understand the importance of milk to the diet of Canadians and especially to the diet of children. Historically, fluid milk was not a particularly valued food, nor was it a very safe drink. Even societies that consumed a lot of dairy products tended to use fermented milk products such as yogurt, which lasted longer and contained less lactose. But from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, milk was touted as one of our most valuable foods. Early milk advocates looked to the Bible for inspiration, arguing that humans have always been herders and milk drinkers (Dupuis 2002, 25–27). Cow’s milk had long been regarded as a substitute for mother’s milk, and as wet-nursing declined and more working-class women were employed outside the home, the sale of fluid milk grew as women increasingly substituted cow’s milk for breast milk (Levenstein 1983, 75–94). At the same time, temperance supporters encouraged the consumption of nonalcoholic beverages, including water and milk.

By the interwar years, Canadian doctors and nutritionists were recommending that Canadians, and especially children, drink enormous quantities of the white beverage. In a 1921 pamphlet titled *Canadians Need Milk*, Helen MacMurchy, the well-known author of the Canadian government's "blue books" on child care, told parents that children needed at least a quart of milk a day and that "more children are delicate and sickly from the want of milk than from any other cause." She claimed that parents who deprived their children of milk were "wronging their children and depriving them of their indispensable food." (MacMurchy 1921, 3). E. W. McHenry, Canada's best-known nutritionist, declared that milk was the most valuable "protective food." He explained that nutritional surveys showed that the most common dietary defects were a lack of protein, calcium, and suboptimal supplies of vitamins. Foods that made up these deficits were called "protective" foods, and milk, which is high in protein and calcium and is easily digested (or so he thought), was the best food for combatting the most common nutritional deficiencies. He pronounced, "Every scientific expert in nutrition would agree that a liberal use of milk improves health, provided the milk is safe and does not spread infectious disease" (McHenry 1938, 295). The widely circulated 1930s nutritional pamphlet titled *What to Eat to Be Healthy* prominently displayed pasteurized milk on its cover and recommended that children drink one and a half pints of milk, and adults at least half a pint, every day.<sup>1</sup> While milk consumption never rose to recommended levels, there was a steady increase in the consumption of fluid milk from 320 pounds per person per annum in 1880 to 360 in 1900 and 370 in 1920 (Urquhart 1993, 114). Consumption gradually reached a high of 460 pounds per person per annum at the end of World War II but fell to just under 400 pounds per person per annum in the early 1950s, or approximately four-fifths of a pint per person per day (Statistics Canada 1955, 14).

But milk could be a dangerous food. Bovine tuberculosis was a real risk, especially to children: in the 1920s, medical authorities believed that at least 10 percent of extrapulmonary tuberculosis in Canada in children under fourteen years of age was of the bovine variety. Research done in England and Germany suggested that somewhere between 6 percent and 10 percent of the deaths from tuberculosis in children under the age of five were probably due to bovine tuberculosis ("Human and Bovine Tuberculosis" 1926). When it attacked the bones, the disease could lead to significant disability,



including deformations of the spine. But thanks to the culling of tubercular cattle and the increased incidence of pasteurization, bovine tuberculosis was rare in Canada by the end of the 1930s (McCuaig 1999, 177).

A survey of milk-borne disease across Canada over the twenty-five years stretching from 1912 to 1937 determined that there were almost 9,000 cases of illness and 703 deaths during that period, although it is worth pointing out that more than two-thirds of the deaths could be traced to a typhoid epidemic in Montréal in 1927 that was actually traced to a dairy that sold pasteurized milk (Defries 1938, 259). Much of this dairy's milk had mistakenly passed through the plant without being pasteurized ("Montreal Typhoid Fever Situation" 1927). Another problem, probably underreported, was undulant fever, which caused very high fevers, headaches, and weakness for several months. The number of deaths caused by undulant fever was low, but the consequences for the adults who contracted it could be severe in terms of time lost to illness (McNabb 1934). In 1938, the Department of Agriculture estimated that approximately 2 percent of all cattle under supervision were positive for *Brucella abortus*, the pathogen that leads to undulant fever (Marriott 1938).

Pasteurization provided a simple solution to the problem of dangerous milk, but there were other possible solutions as well, including certifying milk production. Henry L. Coit, a New Jersey physician, devised a system for certifying milk in 1892 after the death of his son from the consumption of contaminated raw milk (Wolf 2007, 140). In Canada, medical milk commissions or medical societies took responsibility for certifying milk production (Parry 1926). Usually, these organizations required that doctors and veterinarians check the health of the employees and herds regularly; in addition, the milk was tested for bacteria, and there were strict rules about how the milk was handled. This process was expensive; certified milk cost 18 to 20 cents per quart, compared to 6 to 13 cents for uncertified milk.<sup>2</sup> Some doctors, dairy producers, and members of the public believed that certified milk was a better product because certification forced the farmer to be more sanitary; they worried that pasteurization, although it killed germs, would give licence to dairy farmers to allow pus, blood, straw, dirt, and other contaminants into their milk.

In addition to pasteurization and certification of milk, there were also efforts to reduce the spread of bovine tuberculosis through testing and culling of dairy herds. Beginning in 1897, the Dominion Department of

Agriculture offered to test cattle for bovine tuberculosis free of charge. By the late 1930s, approximately one-third of all cattle in Canada were being tested regularly, and nearly all of the cows providing milk to major urban centres had been tested. The federal department offered tuberculin testing under three separate plans, some of which provided compensation to farmers who had to slaughter cattle that tested positive. As a result of these programs, the department estimated that the rate of bovine tuberculosis in Canada was less than 3 percent by the mid-1930s (Cameron 1938). Even so, the testing of cattle was not a perfect solution. Cattle could only be tested so often, and occasionally, a cow acquired tuberculosis before the next routine test took place. Also, there were diseases that could not be prevented through the testing of cattle. For example, septic sore throat, scarlet fever, and typhoid fever did not come from the cow but from the handlers of unbottled, unpasteurized milk (Brown 1938).

#### THE CAMPAIGN FOR COMPULSORY PASTEURIZATION

One of the earliest and most important proponents of pasteurization in Canada was Charles Hastings, an obstetrician whose infant daughter had died of typhoid caused by drinking raw milk. In 1908, Hastings became the chair of the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) Milk Commission, which was established to investigate the status of milk supplies across the country and to pass legislation to secure a safe milk supply. When Hastings became the medical officer of health in Toronto in 1910, the CMA Milk Commission decided to turn over its efforts to Toronto's Department of Health. Hastings forged an alliance with local Member of Provincial Parliament W. K. McNaught, who urged the provincial legislature to establish a commission to investigate the means by which the milk supply could be made safer. In 1911, the Province of Ontario passed a law giving municipalities the power to pass bylaws regulating the production, handling, and sale of milk. Toronto immediately passed a milk bylaw that placed strict regulations on the handling of milk, although it did not make pasteurization compulsory. Three years later, when a bylaw mandating pasteurization was passed, 80 percent of the milk sold in Toronto was already pasteurized (Hastings and Elliott 1915; MacDougall 1990, 98–104).

Another strong proponent was Alan Brown, the autocratic physician-in-chief at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children (also known as Sick Kids).

Brown, who gained much renown for his advocacy of child and maternal health and for his role as physician to the Dionne quintuplets, frequently pointed out that after the passage of Toronto's compulsory pasteurization law in 1914, all of the children suffering from bovine tuberculosis at Sick Kids came from outside of the city of Toronto (Arnup 1994). Brown was often credited for convincing Premier Mitch Hepburn to pass a law mandating compulsory pasteurization in the province of Ontario, after giving him a tour of Sick Kids, where he saw children suffering from bovine tuberculosis (McCuaig 1999, 170).

The leading force behind the pasteurization campaign from the early 1930s to the 1960s was Gordon Bates, the founder of the Social Hygiene Council of Canada. In the early 1930s, the Social Hygiene Council, which had previously been concerned primarily with venereal disease, took on pasteurization as a way to expand the reach of the organization. Bates was an innovative communicator who stressed the value of pasteurization in newspaper articles, pamphlets, exhibits, and film. The council developed an exhibit titled "The Value of Pasteurization," which travelled to health exhibits and fairs. At a typical event, children were shown health films, toured exhibits, and were given a glass of milk.<sup>3</sup> The council also circulated articles touting the value of pasteurization, which ran in weekly newspapers across the country.<sup>4</sup> In the 1930s, when the Social Hygiene Council became the Health League of Canada (HLC), the organization took over the mandate of the Ontario Committee for Safe Milk.<sup>5</sup> The Ontario Committee for Safe Milk had been a broad committee that included public health workers, social service organizations, insurance companies, milk producers, milk distributors, women's organizations, and the Canadian Public Health Association. The committee distributed more than a hundred thousand pamphlets promoting pasteurization. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company of Canada and the Ontario Milk and Cream Distributors Association largely covered the costs of the pamphlets (Bell 1934).

The Health League strongly believed in promoting health messages through new media, and in 1936, the organization received permission from Famous Players to distribute pamphlets on the need for the pasteurization of milk at the showings of the Hollywood blockbuster *The Story of Louis Pasteur*.<sup>6</sup> The league delivered radio addresses on the value of pasteurized milk and mounted large exhibits at the Canadian National Exhibition (1938, 1939) and the Royal Winter Fair (1938). Through its magazine, *Health*,

which had a wide circulation among doctors who placed it in their waiting rooms, the organization emphasized the importance of consuming pasteurized milk.<sup>7</sup> They also lobbied summer resorts to serve pasteurized milk and published lists of resorts that did serve it. During the war, they published a manual for municipal and provincial committees interested in securing compulsory pasteurization.<sup>8</sup>

In 1943, the league launched an all-out campaign for pasteurization in Québec, releasing a series of fifteen-minute talks by eminent physicians and professors that were broadcast over CBC stations in the province. Several of these were reprinted in *L'Union médicale*, which was sent to "all French-speaking physicians" in North America.<sup>9</sup> Nearly every newspaper in the province ran editorials in favour of pasteurized milk, while dozens of organizations—including women's clubs, chambers of commerce, and service clubs—sent resolutions to the government encouraging them to pass legislation mandating pasteurization.<sup>10</sup> The campaign convinced the city of Hull to adopt compulsory pasteurization but failed to convince the provincial legislature.

In the late 1940s, the league cooperated with the National Film Board to produce two short films: *Your Morning Milk* and *Pure Milk*. The films provided information about the nutritional value of milk, the production process, and the importance of pasteurization.<sup>11</sup> The league released a series of articles for publication in local newspapers promoting the pasteurization of milk and contacted organizations across the country, urging them to go on record as supporting the pasteurization of milk.<sup>12</sup> Signed resolutions were received from the Canadian Congress of Labour, the Canadian Order of Foresters, the Chief Constables Association of Canada, the Girl Guides Association, provincial teachers' associations, and the Canadian Nurses Association, among many others.<sup>13</sup> The league also continued to produce a wide array of pamphlets and posters promoting pasteurized milk.

Gordon Bates, the general director of the HLC, had a bombastic style and little patience with opponents. During the Québec campaign for pasteurization in 1943, the league suggested that children prepare armbands or lapel cards saying: "I may be the next Quebec child to die from drinking raw milk."<sup>14</sup> Bates had unwavering faith in the rightness of the medical profession and little understanding of why people might be suspicious of the claims of leading medical bodies. In its pamphlets, the league stressed that all leading health organizations had endorsed pasteurized milk.<sup>15</sup>

Bates often claimed that as many people had died from drinking raw milk as had died on the battlefield.<sup>16</sup> When questioned about the claim, he reasoned that “this is almost certainly true because human beings die from infected milk every day in all countries of the world, while serious wars are rare.”<sup>17</sup> In any case, he did not worry too much about playing loose with the facts if he believed it would advance his cause. Additionally, he had little patience with people who were unconvinced of the merits of pasteurization. Bates told one opponent that he was “unspeakably silly” and reprimanded him for not being more grateful to the doctors who were trying to help him, while in another letter, he asserted that the opponents of pasteurization were selfish farmers who were willing to sell milk that crippled children.<sup>18</sup> In one of the articles circulated to newspapers by the Health League in 1945–46, he condemned pasteurization opponents as “ill-informed and selfish.”<sup>19</sup> On occasion, even his supporters urged him to tone down his rhetoric.<sup>20</sup> Another of Bates’s weaknesses was that he never seemed to realize that people in other parts of the country did not always take well to a Toronto-based organization telling them what they should do to improve health in their locality, especially when Bates was always promoting what Toronto and Ontario had done to reduce infant mortality, insinuating that other parts of the country were backwards or less concerned about the health of their children.<sup>21</sup>

The Health League had the firm support of the larger dairies and their organizations. In 1929, the *Canadian Dairy and Ice Cream Journal* included a model pasteurization law in its pages.<sup>22</sup> In 1936, the journal editorialized: “Every Medical Officer of Health, every progressive Sanitary engineer and every wide-awake milk plant operator will agree that the final goal is UNIVERSAL PASTEURIZATION of all milk supplies in every municipality.”<sup>23</sup> The Ontario Milk Distributors’ Association had Gordon Bates address their annual convention on the importance of pasteurization (Bates 1935). The Saskatchewan Dairy Association went on record as favouring compulsory pasteurization in 1921. Twelve years later, the Ontario Milk Producers’ Association and the Ontario Milk and Cream Distributors’ Association urged their province to adopt compulsory pasteurization (“Public and Safe Milk” 1934, 50). In the late 1920s, the Milk and Cream Distributors’ Association blazoned on their letterhead “Universal Pasteurization Our First Objective” (Bell 1929). The National Dairy Council also promoted pasteurization.<sup>24</sup>

The Health League's pasteurization campaign also gained the support of most of the newspapers across the country. When compulsory pasteurization was under consideration in Ontario in 1934 and again in 1938, dozens of newspapers editorialized in favour of the measure, while only a handful expressed reservations. In Montréal, the two largest newspapers, the *Montreal Star* and *La Presse*, both editorialized in favour of pasteurization.<sup>25</sup>

#### THE FIGHT AGAINST PASTEURIZATION

While the larger dairies promoted pasteurization, small producers worried about how much pasteurization equipment would cost. When the Ontario legislature debated compulsory pasteurization in 1938, A. W. Downer, a Conservative member from Dufferin-Simcoe, was cited in the 30 January issue of the *Globe and Mail* as complaining that the price of milk was high enough already and that pasteurization would only add to the costs and create further difficulties for the small dairies. Instead, he advocated inspection and compulsory testing of herds. Because the federal government paid for the testing and farmers were compensated when cattle were slaughtered, this option was less expensive for producers. In a letter that appeared in the *Toronto Daily Star* on 2 April 1938, one dairy farmer complained that pasteurization would increase his costs by 80 percent. He was particularly angry that farmers would need to purchase back their own milk, at a 100 percent markup, because of compulsory pasteurization. His chosen alias, "Uncivilized," suggests the extent to which some rural people felt singled out and ill-treated by this legislation. A month earlier, another dairy farmer, William Shook, of Clarkson, Ontario, had likewise expressed outrage over the idea of selling his milk to dairies for 3.5 cents a quart and being forced to buy it back at 13 cents a quart.<sup>26</sup> To ease these concerns, the Ontario government passed an order-in-council indicating that compulsory pasteurization did not apply to milk intended for consumption by the producer.<sup>27</sup> In fact, pasteurization did not have a noticeable effect on the retail price of milk. In Ontario, during the 1938 debate, it was estimated that pasteurization would increase the price of milk by less than a cent per quart.<sup>28</sup> In Vancouver, the director of the Division of Laboratories at the Provincial Board of Health countered by pointing out that a quart of pasteurized milk in that city sold for only a dime, while unpasteurized milk was actually more expensive, at 11 cents per quart.<sup>29</sup>

Small producers and their sympathizers correctly believed that compulsory pasteurization would lead to growing concentration in the milk industry. One regular (and angry) correspondent to the Health League, Dr. C. G. S. Baronsfeather, of Edmonton, called pasteurized milk “a Yankee Racket to smash the small man and get a monopoly of the milk trade in North America.”<sup>30</sup> A pamphlet authored by K. W. Gunn, of London, Ontario, titled *Pasteurized Milk: Unnatural Milk and Broken Children*, complained that pasteurization was a “commercial process that has permitted the formation of monopoly and high prices.”<sup>31</sup> Another opponent, this time from British Columbia, raged that the dairymen of North America were being reduced to serfs while “large pasteurizing dairies were allowed to grow into the greatest monopolistic empire the world has ever known.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, after compulsory pasteurization was introduced in Ontario, the number of dairies fell substantially (Berry 1938; Milk Committee of the Canadian Public Health Association 1941).<sup>33</sup>

Others objected to the compulsory nature of pasteurization. The manager of the advertising department of the *Calgary Herald* wrote a letter to Bates in 1936 saying that he was not opposed to pasteurization but that he thought that people should also have the right to obtain natural whole milk from a “properly inspected and supervised single herd source.”<sup>34</sup> Another person complained about the government telling the average man “what foods he may and may not use.”<sup>35</sup> This, of course, had long been the reason behind many people’s opposition to vaccination, and it would play a major role in the fluoridation debates that wracked Canadian cities in the 1950s and 1960s.

Some opponents worried that pasteurized milk would not have the same nutritional benefits as raw milk: as knowledge of vitamins became widespread, many argued that pasteurization reduced the vitamin and mineral content in the milk. In an October 1938 letter to the *Toronto Daily Star*, one consumer—who had read an article in the London-based magazine *Armchair Science* according to which pasteurization “definitely” lowered the food value of milk—questioned the support of the medical profession for pasteurization.<sup>36</sup> In another letter to the *Star*, J. H. Schofield, of Kitchener, argued that Ontarians were eating too many processed, refined, and devitalized foods. Raw milk would help keep people safe from disease.<sup>37</sup> Such concerns seemed perennial. Writing to the *Halifax Herald* in 1925, a school principal opposed compulsory pasteurization in

that city because he believed that drinking fresh milk was crucial to children's health: he included a photo of a child who he said had gotten rickets from drinking pasteurized milk.<sup>38</sup> Two decades later, a BC letter writer asserted that his doctor had told him that pasteurization changed the calcium in the milk so that babies could no longer assimilate it.<sup>39</sup> An opponent in rural Ontario asserted that more illness was caused by malnutrition among children fed with pasteurized milk than was caused by raw milk.<sup>40</sup> Nutritionists countered that although pasteurization did slightly reduce vitamins C, B1, and B2 in milk, the B vitamins were already consumed in sufficient amounts in other foods and the vitamin C content of milk was so low that its destruction was of minimal import (McHenry 1934).

A few opponents raised the possibility of other health risks. A Dr. W. E. Wessels threatened that a growing number of doctors believed that the increase in cancer had to do with the increased use of pasteurized milk.<sup>41</sup> An older man from Vernon, BC, complained that pasteurized milk made him constipated—when he switched back to using raw milk, he had no problems with regularity and people commented on how well he looked. He said that his milk dealer always kept raw milk on hand for babies.<sup>42</sup> Others protested that pasteurized milk did not keep children safe from harm. A number commented that even though the Dionne quintuplets had all been fed pasteurized milk, they still suffered from diseased tonsils.<sup>43</sup> A Dr. Nowell in Vancouver claimed that more children in the Barnardo homes in the UK came down with tuberculosis after the homes switched from raw milk to pasteurized milk.<sup>44</sup>

Occasionally, critics of pasteurization commented that people in rural areas were healthier than people in urban areas and that this could be accounted for by the fact that they drank raw milk. R. E. K. Pemberton, who published a three-part antipasteurization piece in the left-wing *Canadian Forum*, argued that the incidence of tuberculosis was much lower in rural areas. He sarcastically added, "The wretched farm people, deprived of the blessings of pasteurization and condemned to drink the raw milk which transmits tuberculosis, nevertheless resist the disease more successfully than their more favoured cousins in the cities" (Pemberton 1941, 249). Some of those who were for pasteurization countered that children in the country were actually less healthy than children in cities, who drank pasteurized milk. Manning Doherty—a former Ontario minister of Agriculture who served as head of the Health League's Milk Committee—asserted that "it



is time that the children of our villages and country-side should have similar protection."<sup>45</sup> The HLC, in its publication *Canada's Health News*, claimed that "country children are peculiarly subject to such affections as bovine tuberculosis, undulant fever, septic sore throat, typhoid and paratyphoid fevers, scarlet fever and diphtheria" ("Milk News" 1938, 1-2).

A final argument in favour of raw milk was that milk was designed by the Creator to be the perfect food for humans. A letter from pasteurization opponent K. W. Gunn asserted that "natural milk is a marvelous finished product conceived and given to us by an all wise Creator for the benefit of the human race."<sup>46</sup> An antipasteurization radio broadcast in Alberta emphasized that it was important to eat foods in as natural a state as possible. The author claimed that "when the creator finished his handiwork he is reported to have said it was very good" and threatened that "we will suffer unless we choose habits of life which harmonize with the never changing order of Divine Law."<sup>47</sup> This, of course, was one of the reasons for milk's reputation as a "perfect" food during the nineteenth century.

Overall, opponents to pasteurization were most concerned about cost, the impetus that pasteurization would give to centralization in the dairy industry, and the possibility that pasteurized milk was less nutritious and less digestible than raw milk. Even so, opposition to pasteurization was not strong, at least in comparison to the other public health measures such as fluoridation and vaccination. Partly, this had to do with the issue of compulsion. Even cities like Toronto, which was an early adopter of pasteurization, allowed for some sale of certified milk, although it was a very small part of the market. Unlike the water supply, milk remained a private commodity: just as people were more prepared to buy fluoridated toothpaste than they were to have fluorides added to their municipal water supply, they were happy enough to purchase pasteurized milk, as long as they had the possibility of choice. Even pasteurization's proponents appreciated the complexity of the pasteurization issue. They expressed concern about the possibility that pasteurization would allow farmers and dairies to pay less attention to sanitation and worried that pasteurization might not always be carried out appropriately. They believed that milk was a vital food, especially for children, and were sympathetic to the concern that pasteurization might increase the cost of milk.

## CONCLUSION

By the 1930s, a growing consensus existed among doctors, public health officials, and sanitary inspectors that pasteurization was a useful tool, but there was never complete unanimity. As a result, pasteurization proceeded slowly, and the debate over pasteurization was fairly nuanced. While a few public health advocates, such as Gordon Bates, failed to understand how anyone could oppose the measure, other government officials were more sanguine—they promoted milk inspection alongside pasteurization and were sympathetic to the concern that pasteurization might increase the cost of milk or cut down on the consumption of milk. Meanwhile, as the distribution of milk became concentrated in the hands of a few large dairies, rates of pasteurization increased, so that long before 1991, when the Canadian government mandated pasteurization, it was rare for Canadians (other than those who lived on farms) to drink raw milk.

Interestingly, today, we are seeing a resurgence of interest in raw milk. In Ontario, dairy farmer and raw milk advocate Michael Schmidt has received widespread media attention for his legal struggles, which he chronicles on his blog, *The Bovine* (<https://thebovine.wordpress.com/>). In March 2014, the Ontario Court of Appeal upheld his 2011 conviction for selling raw milk, and the Supreme Court subsequently refused to hear the case (Perkel 2014; Canadian Press 2014). In British Columbia, Alice Jongerden operated the largest herd share in Canada, until the Fraser Health authority shut her down. Jongerden is no longer involved in the cowshare, but she continues to speak in favour of raw milk to audiences across the country.<sup>48</sup> The Canadian Constitution Foundation, a libertarian organization, has supported Schmidt's legal efforts, while the Canadian Consumer Raw Milk Advocacy Group and the Natural Milk Coalition of Canada fight for the right for Canadians to consume raw milk. In many respects, their arguments are similar to those used in first part of the twentieth century, although they have been updated to address twenty-first-century health concerns such as allergies. Raw milk supporters fear that pasteurization might be destroying beneficial as well as harmful bacteria and believe that raw milk may play a role in preventing asthma, allergies, and other health problems (see, for example, Millar 2010). The popularity of raw milk is related to the broader raw food movement, whose proponents believe that raw foods deliver health benefits that may not yet

be recognized by mainstream doctors and nutritionists. The proponents of raw milk also argue that people should have the right to consume the foods they believe are the healthiest. While a few foodies and parents will continue to seek out raw milk from small operations, drinking raw milk seems unlikely to become a mass movement. Our industrialized food supply system ensures that it is in the interest of both producers and consumers to ensure that milk remains pasteurized.

#### NOTES

- 1 Library and Archives Canada, Health League of Canada fonds, MG 28, I 332 [hereafter HLC], vol. 107, file 8.
- 2 Premier Mitchell Hepburn Election Campaign, "Memorandum on Pasteurization of Milk," Archives of Ontario, RG 3-12. See also "Pasteurization," *Family Herald*, 16 March 1938; Hastings and Elliott 1915.
- 3 *Social Health* 7, no. 6 (1931): 5, HLC, vol. 107, file 3.
- 4 Newspaper clippings, HLC, vol. 107, files 27 and 28.
- 5 Minutes of the Budget committee, 6 January 1932, found in HLC vol. 4, file 15, and Minutes of the Preliminary Committee to Consider Ways and Means of Organizing a National Movement for Safe Milk, 4 November 1935, found in HLC, vol. 106, file 14.
- 6 Gordon Bates, general director of the HLC, memo to J. Robbins, Ontario Milk Distributors' Association, 11 April 1936, HLC, vol. 106, file 14.
- 7 "Health Educational Materials, 1942-43," HLC, vol. 107, file 12. See also MacGregor 1942; Bates 1940.
- 8 *Manual on the Pasteurization of Milk*, ca. 1941, HLC, vol. 107, file 12.
- 9 Memo written by Émile Vaillancourt, "Pasteurization of Milk," 18 May 1943, HLC, vol. 107, file 18.
- 10 Émile Vaillancourt to Gordon Bates, 2 June 1943; and "Le Ministère de la Santé et du Bien-être social a reçu des résolutions au sujet de la pasteurisation du lait dans la province, de la part des associations dont les noms suivent," [1943], both in HLC, vol. 110, file 8.
- 11 Script from *Your Morning Milk*, n.d.; script for *Pure Milk*, 18 June 1946, both in HLC, vol. 108, file 12.
- 12 Health League of Canada annual report from the 28th annual meeting, 17-19 June 1947, 32-35, HLC, vol. 9, file 23.
- 13 These resolutions are in HLC, vol. 109, file 22.
- 14 Health League of Canada, "Pasteurization in Quebec," press release, n.d., HLC, vol. 110, file 8.

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- 17 Letter written by Gordon Bates to Dr. Louis Roux, letter #1 (possibly unsent), HLC, vol. 108, file 19.
- 18 Gordon Bates to F. Junkinson, 2 October 1939; and Gordon Bates to O. O. Hines, 11 November 1939, both in HLC, vol. 107, file 9.
- 19 Gordon Bates, "Pasteurization of Milk," July 1946, HLC, vol. 107, file 19.
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- 24 "Creamery Town Rotarians Hear Dairymen's Address," *Renfrew Mercury*, 27 September 1934, HLC, vol. 107, file 27.
- 25 "Ontario's Milk Bill," *Montreal Star*, 25 March 1938, HLC, vol. 108, file 1; "Pasteurisation," *La Presse*, 18 November 1938, HLC, vol. 107, file 29.
- 26 Shook quoted in "Pasteurization Proposal Is Opposed by Farmers," *Toronto Daily Star*, 1 March 1938.
- 27 "Pasteurization Rule Confined to Sales," *Toronto Daily Star*, 14 July 1938.
- 28 "Pasteurization of Milk to Be Made Compulsory," *Renfrew Mercury*, 3 March 1938, HLC, vol. 107, file 29.
- 29 C. E. Dolman, "Pasteurization of Milk," radio address broadcast on CJOR, April 1938, HLC, vol. 107, file 3.
- 30 Letter from C. G. S. Baronsfeather, 22 February 1939, HLC, vol. 107, file 11.
- 31 K. W. Gunn, *Pasteurized Milk: Unnatural Milk and Broken Children*, ca. 1936, HLC, vol. 106, file 19.
- 32 W. E. Wessels, "Natural Milk President's Letter," 13 April 1938, HLC, vol. 106, file 23.
- 33 As these sources indicate, in communities that had been home to large numbers of raw milk dairies prior to compulsory pasteurization, these dairies tended to give way to pasteurizing plants as well as a decrease in raw milk dairies. For example, in 1938, Fort William had nine pasteurization plants and nine dairies selling raw milk; by 1941, there were twelve pasteurizing plants and no raw milk dairies. Similarly, Kenora had sixteen raw milk dairies and two pasteurizing plants in 1938; by 1941, the town had five pasteurizing plants and no longer had any raw milk dairies.
- 34 John E. Waddell to Gordon Bates, 21 February 1936, HLC, vol. 106, file 18.

- 35 Letter from K. C. Maclean to Gordon Bates, 11 May 1939, HLC, vol. 106, file 23.
- 36 "Pasteurized Milk," *Toronto Daily Star*, 29 October 1938.
- 37 J. H. Schofield, "Milk Pasteurization," *Toronto Daily Star*, 17 December 1938.
- 38 H. H. Blois, "Final Effort to Force Compulsory Measure on Halifax Consumers," *Herald* (Halifax), 16 March 1925.
- 39 "Ready to Be Convinced," *Free Press*, 15 July 1945, HLC, vol. 107, file 19.
- 40 Keith C. Maclean to Gordon Bates, 11 May 1939, HLC, vol. 106, file 23.
- 41 W. E. Wessels, "Natural Milk President's Letter," ca. 1938, HLC, vol. 106, file 23.
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- 43 Keith C. Maclean to Gordon Bates, 11 May 1939, HLC, vol. 106, file 23; K. W. Gunn to Gordon Bates, 23 June 1939, HLC, vol. 107, file 11.
- 44 "Raw Milk and TB," *Victoria Times*, 27 January 1938, HLC, vol. 108, file 4.
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- 48 See "Alice Jongerden, B.C.," *Canadian Consumer Raw Milk Advocacy Group*, 2013, <http://rawmilkconsumer.ca/farmers/alice-jongerden/>.

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## **Kraft Dinner® Unboxed**

### Rethinking Food Insecurity and Food

*Melanie Rock*

More than ten years ago, as a postdoctoral fellow in public health with a newly minted PhD in anthropology, I began to study Kraft Dinner as a point of entry into community-based responses to persistent inequities in the health outcomes of Canadians. At the outset of these investigations, I neglected to give any thought whatsoever to milk as a crucial but separately added ingredient, despite the clear indication of this ingredient in the preparation instructions and nutritional information printed on the box. Had I done so, my interest in Kraft Dinner would have been so much easier to justify. Instead, public health colleagues, social science colleagues, journalists, and food activists often assumed that I would be critical of the nutritional deficiencies of the package's contents, the powdered cheese's apparent artificiality, and the deskilling in the realm of food preparation. These concerns, it would appear, reflect in part how Canadians tend to communicate about Kraft Dinner. Rarely is milk mentioned in the same breath (or paragraph) as Kraft Dinner in Canada. Secure access to milk tends to be presumed, even when Kraft Dinner features in discussions and gestures concerning poverty. Yet insecure access to milk due to a lack of money is pervasive and pernicious among people living in poverty across

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Canada. In fact, milk insecurity is often the epitome of food insecurity in Canada (McIntyre, Williams, and Glanville 2007). With this chapter, I hope to play a modest part in recasting how Canadians communicate about Kraft Dinner, so as to raise awareness of what impoverishment feels and tastes like in this country.

In the Canadian context, food insecurity means “the inability to obtain sufficient, nutritious, personally acceptable food through normal food channels or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so” due to a lack of money (Davis and Tarasuk 1994, 51). Approximately 10 percent of Canadian households experience food insecurity to varying degrees, and food insecurity has consequences for both physical and mental health. Food insecurity begins with the worry about running out of money to buy food, which is followed by dietary compromises and strict rationing within the household. In the most severe cases, children are deprived of food for a whole day or more (Health Canada 2007).<sup>1</sup> Charities are not “normal food channels,” yet, across Canada, charitable redistribution through food banks is routine (Tarasuk and Eakin 2003). More than 450 food banks, across every province and territory, are affiliated with an umbrella organization called Food Banks Canada, whose affiliates together serve approximately 85 percent of the people receiving charitable food assistance throughout the country.<sup>2</sup> These food banks are supplied in two ways. More than half of the supply comes from corporate donations, with the remainder donated by individuals (Tarasuk and Eakin 2005). As individuals, Canadians commonly donate Kraft Dinner to food banks for charitable redistribution. Canadians do not commonly donate milk, and not all food banks are equipped to handle corporate donations of milk or to purchase milk with individual donations of money.

What might the popularity of individual donations of Kraft Dinner tell us about how Canadians communicate with and about food? This question anchors the present chapter. The intent of this exercise in cultural critique is not only to interpret what has already been said and written about food insecurity in Canada but also to grapple with the silences in popular culture as well as gaps in the academic literature. Misunderstandings and partiality are important to consider, for they too represent dimensions of communication in relation to food (Elliott 2009, 388). Consequently, this chapter attempts to “read into” silences and gaps, as opposed to reading strictly for manifest content. I submit that the iconic status of Kraft Dinner

as a charitable food donation is deeply emblematic of Canadian society, representing cultural practices of eating, sharing, and generosity, but at the same time, it represents an abiding ignorance, and even denial, of deeply ingrained inequity in this country.

#### THE SOCIAL LIVES OF KRAFT DINNER

Canadians hardly require an introduction to Kraft Dinner, as it is so regularly consumed throughout the country, regardless of income and education levels. While Kraft now sells this product in many formats, and imitation products are colloquially called “Kraft Dinner,” the original version remains highly popular. This original version of Kraft Dinner is sold in a colourful rectangular cardboard box. Each box contains 225 grams of narrow, dried macaroni tubes made from enriched wheat flour and a white packet that contains fluorescent orange powdered cheese.

A mass-produced commodity such as Kraft Dinner might seem like a single object, yet it does not have one common “social life.” Rather, each box of Kraft Dinner has a different social life or “biography” (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986), even as trends or tendencies may be discerned. Methodologically, the “social life of things” approach directs attention to how a particular object or class of objects may change hands and change status over time and as the object or objects in question are made to travel over social and geographic distances. Theoretically, this approach emphasizes that what appears to be the very same thing can have very different uses, meanings, and consequences in different sets of hands and in different circumstances. In addition, theorizing the social life of things foregrounds people’s preferences and values, differences in people’s capacity to exert influence and exercise choice, and processes of social stratification that may range from subtle to overt.

As Charlene Elliott (2009) has demonstrated for the entwined history of butter and margarine in Canada, tracing a food’s social lives is productive when one is seeking to examine both the problematization and the normalization of consumption. In fact, tracing the trajectories of objects, like food-stuffs, can illuminate cultural values and power dynamics precisely because the politics of knowledge and the politics of value are indistinguishable in many contexts (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986). Regarding communication about and with food, this fundamental insight from the anthropological

literature on the social lives of things is important to bear in mind, because when people donate food for charitable redistribution, they do so from a position of relative privilege and based on limited knowledge of where their donation will ultimately end up. By implication, some degree of misunderstanding is not only possible but probable across the social distances bridged by Canadian food banks: that is, between those who offer and those who receive food donations. The social lives of a commonly donated food can therefore be revealing about what is known, imagined, and misconstrued in mainstream Canadian society about the nature, experience, and impact of poverty.

The acts of eating and digestion transform food into its nutritional components, and life depends on the absorption of these nutrients. The social lives of purchased and donated foods thus extend into human bodies to such an extent that ingested food and human bodies eventually become indistinguishable. More generally, as discussed by Arjun Appadurai (1986), the moment at which an object ceases to have a social life is not always clearly discernible. One reason for this ambiguity is that knowledge of or misinformation about what became of a given object can be integral to that object's social life. Furthermore, powers of imagination confer value on things and influence their circulation. An object can also be dismembered or repurposed. Sometimes an object is obtained precisely to be destroyed, surrendered, or rendered into something else. Food is, in some senses, destroyed by the act of eating, and ingested food does quite literally become something else, by ultimately melding with the consumer's body. As the saying goes, "You can't have your cake and eat it too." Overall, for Appadurai (1986), a given thing's social lives are replete with sacrifices, and he explicitly discusses monetary expenditures as well as gifts in these terms. In fact, Appadurai contends that each instance of giving, purchasing, or surrendering something is an act of sacrifice. The emotional states of all concerned in a given act of sacrifice are, for Appadurai, indicative of social status, social distance, people's values, and the politics of knowledge. Thus, sacrifice imbues the social lives of mass-produced foodstuffs such as Kraft Dinner, and as the contents of each standardized package of Kraft Dinner dissolve into a human body, Kraft Dinner quite literally lives on.

Mass communication technologies augment the potential of a mass-produced item such as Kraft Dinner to acquire social lives by figuring in people's memories and imaginations. Kraft Dinner connotes both comfort

and poverty, as illustrated by a few lines in the Canadian pop song, “If I Had a Million Dollars,” by the Barenaked Ladies:

If I had a million dollars,  
We wouldn’t have to eat Kraft Dinner  
But we would eat Kraft Dinner  
Of course we would, we’d just eat more.<sup>3</sup>

With a different twist on the same theme, a recent advertisement in Québec depicts a male professional gleefully consuming Kraft Dinner within his upscale residence and then covertly slipping the telltale cardboard box into a neighbour’s recycling bin.<sup>4</sup> Particularly given the extent to which dietary consumption has been problematized in Canada through narratives about public health (Elliott 2007), whenever Canadians communicate with one another by purchasing, donating, ingesting, writing about, or talking about Kraft Dinner, or even by refusing any association whatsoever with Kraft Dinner, these actions have repercussions for people’s bodies and selves.

This chapter is based on two main ways of tracing some of Kraft Dinner’s many possible social lives, with a focus on individual donations for charitable redistribution. One way involved semi-structured interviews. Leading up to these interviews, participant-observation research took place with members of a community-based coalition on poverty, which confirmed the ubiquity of Kraft Dinner as a charitable food donation in Montréal and documented some dilemmas posed by such donations for charitable organizations (Rock 2006). The other way of tracing this product’s social lives involved collecting and analyzing media coverage mentioning Kraft Dinner, which also informed the interviews (see Rock, McIntyre, and Rondeau 2009). The analyzed media coverage included items that I helped to bring about by deploying Kraft Dinner as a communicative device in an effort to increase sensitivity to Canadian experiences of poverty (Rock et al. 2011).<sup>5</sup>

#### KRAFT DINNER: TASTY, QUICK, AND EASY TO STORE? IT DEPENDS

To assist with tracing the social lives of Kraft Dinner, interviews were conducted in 2004 with eighteen food-secure francophone residents of metropolitan Montréal. The sample represented diverse perspectives on and

experiences of Kraft Dinner, as the participants ranged in age from early adulthood to senior citizens. Furthermore, the sample included people whose history of employment had involved Kraft Dinner, including someone who had worked on the assembly line in the Montréal factory where Kraft Dinner is boxed and a former product representative for Kraft in the province of Québec. Most of the participants' work as paid employees, volunteers, or both brought them into direct contact with food-insecure people or encompassed advocacy for social justice.

These interviews brought to light three qualities that make Kraft Dinner seem especially suitable for donation. First, Kraft Dinner has a reputation for being palatable among the eventual recipients. Asked why food donors tend to favour it, one social worker said, "I have the impression it's [given] because it is seen as a simple product that is well-known."<sup>6</sup> Another social worker provided a similar explanation. "People still have the impression that working-class people enjoy it," she said, "despite everything."<sup>7</sup> A community activist recalled that her grandmother often prepared Kraft Dinner for her as a child, since she would walk to her grandmother's house for lunch on schooldays. Later in life, when raising children of her own on a fixed budget, she returned to Kraft Dinner, but as an evening meal toward the end of the week, when she felt tired, and at the end of the month, when money was tight. As another example, a man who worked for a union at the time said, "You might serve it to your own kids, to your own family, or even to yourself. In the end, you make it yourself."<sup>8</sup> The association of Kraft Dinner with palatability was especially pronounced in the context of children, thus suggesting that donors are aware of child poverty and are trying to respond sensitively or sensibly when donating Kraft Dinner.

Second, these interviews highlighted the perception that Kraft Dinner is an easy-to-prepare meal in a nutritionally complete package. A lawyer remarked: "It's easy to prepare and we assume, I suppose that people assume everyone knows how to prepare it."<sup>9</sup> An archivist elaborated: "Simply put, there's the idea of a complete meal, in the sense of protein, pasta. Instead of giving a package of white spaghetti, you give a kit that is a meal."<sup>10</sup> Later on in the interview, however, this participant pointed out that the cardboard box does not contain any butter or margarine, nor does it contain any milk. In fact, the preparation instructions printed on the cardboard package call for the addition of one to three tablespoons (15 to 45 ml) of either butter or margarine and one-quarter to one-half cup (50

to 100 ml) of fluid milk, depending on whether the traditional or Sensible Solution™ instructions are to be followed. Yet, repeatedly, the notion of Kraft Dinner as a complete meal in a box was foregrounded in interviews. “You have water [to boil the pasta in]! Butter, margarine, you have these too!” said a college professor.<sup>11</sup>

Third, these francophone Montréalers emphasized that Kraft Dinner is suitable for donation because this product is safely and conveniently stored. A social worker speculated, “Since it’s not expensive, people will rarely buy just one box. They will buy three or four. So you might buy a case. When you have a case at your house, and people come by for food donations, you have a lot. So why not give even half?”<sup>12</sup> As highlighted once again in this excerpt, Kraft Dinner would not come to mind or to hand as a food donation if donors did not themselves purchase this product for consumption at some later date. The lawyer cited above had worked his way through law school as a product representative for Kraft, and at the time, he recalled, Kraft Dinner was unusual for containing a dairy product while also having a long shelf-life. This feature of Kraft Dinner made it a popular order in rural areas as well as for supermarkets and smaller neighbourhood-based stores in urban areas. The participants consistently stressed that food banks discouraged donations of goods that are perishable. Implicit here was that the time between donation and consumption was unknown and that the ultimate recipients were also unknown. Giving away a box (or two, or even ten) of Kraft Dinner did not appear to be too much of a sacrifice, and donors may have felt reassured that their gestures of solidarity would ultimately reach and be appreciated by recipients.<sup>13</sup>

Yet the views of the recipients themselves engendered a very different set of perceptions. Low-income mothers have plainly said that the properties of Kraft Dinner described by the francophone Montréalers cited above do not hold true in their particular circumstances, because they rarely have enough money to last until the next cheque.<sup>14</sup> And milk, which is needed to prepare Kraft Dinner according to the instructions and for the sake of nutrition and palatability, is strictly rationed yet often lacking in households headed by low-income mothers (McIntyre et al. 2002; McIntyre et al. 2003; McIntyre, Officer, and Robinson 2003; McIntyre, Tarasuk, and Li 2007; McIntyre, Williams, and Glanville 2007; Williams, McIntyre, and Glanville 2010).

Advertisements, websites, and over fifteen hundred items that originally appeared in English-language newspapers from across Canada were examined as part of inquiring into the social lives of Kraft Dinner. Of these, 155 mention food banks explicitly. Therein, attention tends to focus on the donors, and the tone is often celebratory, with an emphasis on civic generosity. Much of this coverage resonates with the themes drawn out from the interviews with francophone Montréalers and outlined above.

On occasion, the media coverage hints at the fact that Kraft Dinner forms part of a monotonous diet for low-income Canadians, whether or not they receive charitable food assistance, and at the fact that receipt of food charity can feel stigmatizing: for example, a newspaper article reported, “The Ryders don’t use the local food bank. When asked how they feed a family of five on their limited income, Travis responded, ‘We eat a lot of Kraft Dinner.’”

The newspaper quotation that best resonates with what low-income mothers have reported about Kraft Dinner is the following: “A 42-year-old single mother of three . . . makes the rounds of alleys at night scrounging for returnable bottles so she can buy milk for her kids. . . . The children eat a lot of watered-down Kraft dinners ‘but they don’t complain as long as it fills them up,’ she said.” In fact, Canadian newspapers rarely report on the extent to which socioeconomic circumstances and policies from multiple sectors and levels of government exert influence on population health. Canadian reporters and editors face numerous challenges when seeking to convey stories of this nature (Gasher et al. 2007). Out of a sample of 4,732 items originally published in Canadian daily newspapers, Hayes and colleagues (2007) found only nine items that deal with income as an influence on human health.

In light of the paucity of media coverage on poverty as a cause of ill health and the tendency for Canadian media to emphasize how those who are food-secure experience Kraft Dinner, even in stories about food insecurity, I initiated media advocacy (Wallack and Dorfman 1996). An experienced media relations specialist developed a comprehensive strategy that included a news release in print and video formats. The key messages were that poverty is a public health problem, that millions of Canadians live with food insecurity, and that ignorance of poverty exists in mainstream culture.



A news conference took place to facilitate interviews with reporters. The resulting coverage included online bulletins, radio interviews, and television stories on regional and national broadcasts, all highlighting that food-insecure Canadians are often obliged to eat Kraft Dinner prepared without milk because they have run out of money for food. The media advocacy encouraged donating money to food banks instead of boxes of Kraft Dinner, but it also stressed that charitable donations cannot prevent food insecurity from occurring. In sum, however compassionate the intent, the popularity of Kraft Dinner donations to food banks was presented as indicative of widespread misinformation about poverty and ill health in the Canadian population.

Overall, responses to the media advocacy illustrated the symbolic potency of Kraft Dinner in Canada. For example, consider the following response, which was posted to the website for CBC.ca: "This story informed me that my best intentions, while good, are misguided. I will be looking up what my local food bank needs before blindly donating next time." A few posts referred to donating money instead of packaged foods. As one citizen wrote on the CBC.ca website, "When I donate to the food bank, I do it as cash. Hopefully then the food bank will buy real food for those in need."

The advocacy messages about the advantages of donating money rather than packaged foods such as Kraft Dinner were facilitated by the involvement of James McAra, the chief executive officer of the Calgary Food Bank. He explained that his organization could redistribute more than four dollars' worth of food for every dollar received. (That ratio has since increased to 5 to 1 [McAra, pers. comm., 1 March 2013].) Prior to becoming involved in repurposing Kraft Dinner for media advocacy, I had never considered that a food bank might negotiate directly with industry suppliers. Moreover, the Calgary Food Bank uses cash donations to purchase fluid milk and other perishable items for redistribution to households and community-based agencies.

Vitriolic responses were posted online, too: for example, "If the food bank recipients don't like it or think we are just emptying out our cupboards, then I say, 'Hey Dude/Dudette: GET A JOB.'" Yet many people experiencing food insecurity in Canada do, in fact, work for pay (McIntyre, Bartoo, and Emery 2014; Persaud, McIntyre, and Milaney 2010). The Calgary Food Bank reports that 38 percent of clients who accessed the

Food Bank from 1 September 2013 through 31 August 2014 had at least one employed person in the household.<sup>15</sup>

Suspicion was also expressed about social research in several online responses, including this one: “What I would like to know is: a) How this study could possibly help the people in question? and b) How many needy families could have been fed with money wasted on this study?” Resistance to the messages on linkages between poverty and ill health had been anticipated, albeit in a general way, but suggestions that social research itself might be seen as a poor investment were unexpected.

## CONCLUSION

The continued existence of food banks and the perennial popularity of Kraft Dinner donations cannot be explained by the recipients’ needs for food alone. In fact, because of the nature of food insecurity in Canada, more Kraft Dinner in their diet may be the last thing recipients need. Why, then, do Canadians continue to donate Kraft Dinner en masse?

I have attempted to respond to this question through consideration of Kraft Dinner’s social lives. More specifically, this chapter highlights that the social lives of Kraft Dinner donated by individuals for charitable redistribution diverges from, but also entwines with, the social lives of Kraft Dinner eaten by food-secure Canadians. Donated boxes of Kraft Dinner are often rerouted from “normal food channels” (Davis and Tarasuk 1994, 51), because individuals initially purchase them in grocery stores, often with their own families in mind. Canadians who are food secure tend to think about Kraft Dinner as a palatable meal-in-a-box that is simple to prepare and easy to store. These symbolic associations are regularly reinforced in the mass media and help guide Canadians’ purchases—and donations—of Kraft Dinner.

It follows that routine shopping for groceries is germane to the social lives of Kraft Dinner that is consumed in both food-secure and food-insecure households. To refute the notion that shopping for mass-produced commodities is a simple-minded chore, Daniel Miller (1998) draws on classic anthropological theories of sacrifice.<sup>16</sup> Sacrifice is often thought of as giving up something of value for the sake of someone else out of altruism. Sacrifice also tends to be thought of as an extraordinary act or gesture. Anthropologists, however, have long discerned that many forms of sacrifice

are routine. Both ordinary and extraordinary sacrifices are made to shore up or confirm the moral worth of the givers. In addition, even when these recipients are supernatural beings—but also when recipients are close friends, family members, or strangers—sacrifices are often intended to influence the actions, sentiments, thoughts, and life course of recipients.

Miller (1998) emphasizes all of these points in focusing on familial consumption. Shoppers spend time and money in provisioning for their families, out of love. At the same time, taking care of their families is supposed to confirm the generosity and good character of the shopper, in their own eyes and in the eyes of family members. Yet as they select goods for their families, shoppers may actively imagine the intended recipient, to the extent of seeking to shape the eventual recipients' bodies, appearance, status, and emotions—and even their futures. When the proffered purchases are presented to the recipient, they may therefore continue to represent the purchaser's intentions, so much so that shoppers may vicariously experience consumption and feel that some part of them lives on within the recipient. Consequently, when shoppers cannot afford desirable goods to offer to their families, they might suffer.

Miller's (1998) theoretical reworking of shopping as a set of prosaic sacrifices does not distinguish goods remaining on the outside of people's bodies from those that enter into people's bodies. In this chapter, however, I suggest that consumption of things that remain visibly external to bodies is different in important respects from things that are literally incorporated.<sup>17</sup> I take incorporation to be integral to Kraft Dinner's social lives, and when Canadians donate Kraft Dinner, they certainly intend for their gift to be consumed as food. I have come to believe that individuals who donate Kraft Dinner are engaged in a prosaic form of sacrifice that, to varying extents among donors, could be consciously oriented toward sharing substance with and exerting influence over the lives of recipients. The intended influence could very well stem from compassion. At the same time, media coverage surrounding donations of Kraft Dinner strongly suggests that donors benefit emotionally. Donors may hope or even believe that their little sacrifices are enough, but no matter how generous the donors and how well managed the redistribution system, food charity cannot dissolve the emotional and physical ramifications of food insecurity.

Unboxing Kraft Dinner for the purposes of cultural critique and out of concern for population health and equity directs attention toward milk.

This ingredient is not included within the box, yet its availability is often crucial in both nutritional and emotional terms for food-insecure consumers. When Kraft Dinner is literally unboxed for consumption in a context wherein milk is readily affordable, a very different social life or trajectory for the product is expressed than is the case when the ultimate consumers are bereft of milk owing to a lack of money. Similar to people in other industrialized countries (Nimmo 2011), Canadians tend to take their access to cow's milk for granted, to the extent that milk scarcity among those living with food insecurity did not prompt or guide my initial interest in tracing the social lives of Kraft Dinner. The fact that the social life of a Kraft Dinner box comes to a crossroads depending on whether milk (or, more to the point, money to buy milk) is on hand at the point of consumption escaped my notice for some time, as I focused intently on the material contained within the box, on the packaging and publicity, and on histories and lore surrounding Kraft Dinner.

The simultaneous association of Kraft Dinner with poverty and with comfort is fascinating in itself, but over time, I have become increasingly concerned with the lack of discussion or apparent regard for the extent to which Canadian experiences of poverty entail milk scarcity. Secure access to milk is beyond the reach of low-income people throughout Canada. Public policies that influence people's income status are largely responsible for this situation, including policies in the areas of social assistance, minimum wages, taxation, and pensions. Furthermore, the price of milk is set through public policy (Williams, McIntyre, and Glanville 2010), and "surplus" milk may literally be thrown away once quotas have been reached, as a matter of public policy (McIntyre, Glanville, and Hilchie-Pye 2011). Efforts to attenuate food insecurity by subsidizing milk purchases for low-income households have so far come to naught (McIntyre, Glanville, and Hilchie-Pye 2011). By comparing interview transcripts and media coverage with scholarly research and by speaking to experts on food insecurity in Canada, milk scarcity became conspicuous in its absence. Put bluntly, milk is rarely represented when food-secure Canadians deploy Kraft Dinner in reflecting on and reacting to food insecurity. The widespread acceptability of donating Kraft Dinner for charitable redistribution, yet with no guarantee whatsoever that milk will be accessible at the point of consumption, is an action that speaks louder than words. This donation practice strongly suggests that misinformation about the emotional and material depths

of poverty in Canada helps to direct the social lives of the boxes of Kraft Dinner that end up being distributed as food charity.

Disquiet with apparent unpredictability in money's social lives might help account for the propensity of Canadians to respond to messages about food insecurity by donating Kraft Dinner rather than by giving money to food banks or, better still, by supporting public policies to alleviate income insecurity.<sup>18</sup> Might donors want to know that the very packages of Kraft Dinner that they have handled, and often purchased initially with themselves and their families in mind, will meld with the bodies of anonymous people? Might charitable redistribution then allow the social lives of donors' sacrificial choices to continue, in the experience and bodies of other people, in ways that promise to affirm the donors' own morality and good fortune? To the extent that food charity constitutes a form of sacrifice, might donors sometimes anticipate a secular form of transubstantiation—that is, a material extension of themselves within someone else's body? And might other donors respond perfunctorily to food drives out of a sense of obligation or feel less preoccupied with where their gift ultimately ends up than with displaying generosity? Inquiring into how Canadians communicate vis-à-vis Kraft Dinner has thus raised multiple questions without definitive answers, yet the rich anthropological literature on sacrifice in the social life of things is consistent with all these possibilities.

While the questions raised by more than a decade of inquiry into Kraft Dinner's social lives are necessarily speculative, it is important to recall that the social lives of Kraft Dinner will always comprise more than the sum of the parts contained within the box. Examinations of food insecurity in Canada will remain incomplete and perhaps ineffective, when it comes to policy and social change, unless concerted efforts are made to attend to the symbolism of different foods and of money. The nutritional properties of food are important, but there is more to food than basic materiality.

#### NOTES

- 1 If anything, existing data may underestimate the magnitude of the problem because women appear more likely than men living in similar circumstances to report food insecurity when responding on behalf of the household unit (Matheson and McIntyre 2014).
- 2 "Membership," *Food Banks Canada*, 2015, <http://www.foodbankscanada.ca/About-Us/Organization/Membership.aspx>.

- 3 A similar product that is sold throughout the United States as Kraft Mac and Cheese® also connotes comfort and poverty among Americans (Locher et al. 2005; Sheldon 2004).
- 4 “Kraft Dinner plaide coupable,” *InfoPresse*, 6 June 2013, <http://www.infopresse.com/archive/index/42185>.
- 5 Direct quotations from interviews originally appeared in Rock, McIntyre, and Rondeau (2009). Direct quotations from the collected and analyzed media coverage also appeared previously in Rock, McIntyre, and Rondeau (2009) whereas direct quotations from readers’ or listeners’ responses to media coverage that resulted from the advocacy that I initiated appeared previously in Rock et al. (2011).
- 6 “C’est parce que j’ai l’impression que ça correspond à un produit simple, qui est connu.”
- 7 “On a vraiment la perception que c’est aimé dans les couches populaires, en fait, je pense que c’est une perception que c’est aimé, le Kraft Dinner, malgré tout.”
- 8 “Tu peux en servir à tes enfants, à ta famille, ou même t’en servir pour toi-même, c’est que dans le fonds, tu le prépares toi-même.”
- 9 “C’est facile à préparer et on présume, je suppose qu’on présume que tout le monde sait comment le préparer.”
- 10 “Simplement, l’idée repas complet, dans le sens protéines, pâtes. Au lieu de donner un paquet de spaghettis blancs, tu donnes le kit, qui est un repas.”
- 11 “On a de l’eau! Le beurre, la margarine, t’en as!”
- 12 “Comme c’est pas cher, c’est rare que les gens vont acheter une boîte. Ils vont en acheter trois à quatre, donc ... faique t’achètes une caisse. Quand t’en as une caisse chez toi, pis que les gens passent pour le magasin partage t’en as beaucoup fait que ... pourquoi pas en donner peut-être même la moitié, tsé?”
- 13 While an in-depth application of the concept of solidarity lies beyond the scope of this chapter, the term is used advisedly here, to mark individual and collective responses to the needs of others (Prainsack and Buyx 2012).
- 14 This data comes from a secondary analysis of individual interviews and focus groups conducted for research led by Lynn McIntyre (see Rock, McIntyre, and Rondeau 2009).
- 15 “Fast Facts,” *Calgary Food Bank*, 2015, <http://www.calgaryfoodbank.com/fastfacts>.
- 16 Miller’s (1998) examination of shopping emphasizes classic anthropological theory, supplemented by continental philosophy (Bataille and Strauss 1990, in particular; Hubert and Mauss [1898] 1964). The starting

point for Appadurai (1986), similarly, is sacrifice (following Simmel [1900] 1978), which foregrounds the apparition of value through actual, imagined, and proscribed exchanges of one thing or person against another.

17 This line of argument builds on insights from scholarship on organ transplantation, pharmaceuticals, illegal drugs, and smoking. While a large body of literature exists on these topics, several works have been especially inspirational: see Bell (2011, 2013); Bourgois and Schonberg (2009); Dennis (2011, 2013); Frohlich et al. (2012); Lundin (1999); Lock (2001); and Mykhalovskiy (2008).

18 For further discussion surrounding moral trepidation regarding monetary exchange, see Simmel ([1900] 1978) and Bloch and Parry (1989).

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# **Hipster Hunters and the Discursive Politics of Food Hunting in Canada**

*Rebecca Carruthers Den Hoed*

Despite the widespread belief that humans are evolving beyond primitive hunter-gathering toward modern settled agriculture, wild foods remain “integral” to the diets and “livelihoods of agricultural peoples” (Guijt, Hinchcliffe, and Melnyk 1995, 5). In Canada, for instance, families forage for roadside berries to make jam and wine; anglers catch trout to sauté for dinner; trappers eat and share cuts of the lynx and beaver they snare for fur; and hunters trek into the backcountry to shoot and pack out moose to grind, slice, freeze, and dry for winter. Although wild foods cannot always be (easily) commodified and sold in Canada, the sale of select wild foods, wild food experiences (such as guided hunts), and wild food byproducts (such as tanned hides) support the livelihoods of countless Canadian families as well as the bottom line of several large-scale industries (tourism and outfitting, for example).<sup>1</sup>

Yet wild foods remain a largely “hidden harvest” in Canada—often overlooked by outsiders and variously marginalized or exoticized by food writers, entrepreneurs, activists, and scholars.<sup>2</sup> The chapters in this volume illustrate this point nicely: they centre around foods and ingredients produced within agricultural food systems—pasteurized milk, frosted cupcakes,

packaged beef—and if they mention wild foods at all, it is in reference to Canada’s distant past (chapters 6 and 10) or to culinary adventures (chapter 5).<sup>3</sup> This pattern, however, extends well beyond the current volume. Canadian food writing and scholarship, in general, focuses on agricultural foods and either overlooks wild foods or relegates them to the margins. To put this claim to the test, scan three burgeoning areas of Canadian food research and activism—alternative food networks, food security and sovereignty, and ethnic foodways. You’ll find few mentions of foraging, hunting, or fishing, and when you do, you’ll find they appear in reference to the more remote edges of Canadian history, geography, economy, or culture. While wild foods have been identified as key players in the construction of Canadian cuisine and culinary tourism destinations (see, for example, Everett 2007; Jacobs 2009; Spray 2001; Spray Starks 2007), even this corner of the scholarship associates wild foods more with Canada’s remote, rural, northern, and coastal regions than with its relatively “central” cities and locales.

Wild food provisioning figures most prominently in Canadian scholarship on food security. Even there, however, it is relegated to the margins—discussed as a topic of concern primarily in studies of northern, remote, mostly Aboriginal communities. This pattern is visible in a report prepared by Statistics Canada (2009) on human activity and the environment. Acknowledging that “gardening, hunting, fishing and harvesting wild foods such as mushrooms, nuts, and berries are activities carried out by many Canadians,” the report notes that these activities “contribute food to our food system that is typically not captured by our statistical measures” and concedes that “recent surveys” focus on “the use of country food by the Inuit,” described as “the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic who live mostly in coast communities in the North” (15). Although scholars have made great strides in recognizing, valuing, and monitoring wild food provisioning in northern communities (see Duhaime 2002, for example), their work represents the bulk of wild food research in the country, leaving readers with the impression that wild food provisioning is consequential only (or mostly) in those cultures and landscapes farthest flung from the nation’s geographical and cultural centres. This misrepresentation—while unintended—does the field a disservice. Wild foods, after all, are integral to the diets and livelihoods of a range of Canadians—be they urban, rural, or peri-urban; Aboriginal, settler-descendant, or new Canadian; northern, central, or southern; lower-, middle-, or upper-class.

In this chapter, I examine one particular kind of wild food provisioning—hunting—to begin broadening the current view of wild food provisioning in Canada. While studies of hunting as a wildlife management tool abound, we know little about hunting as a contemporary mode of food provisioning, except as it is practiced in northern, remote, or rural communities. What we do know, based on statistics collected by federal and provincial ministries, is that many Canadians probably consider hunting an ordinary mode of food provisioning. In 2012, roughly 5 percent of Canadians (1.74 million people) were active hunters.<sup>4</sup> In 2014, licensed Canadian hunters harvested an estimated 1,717, 025 wild fowl nationally and—in Alberta alone—an estimated 45,143 mule and white-tailed deer, plus 7,846 elk and 7,748 moose.<sup>5</sup> Most harvested animals are eaten or donated (to food banks or directly to families), since leaving edible meat in the field is a punishable offence, according to provincial “wastage” regulations. This means that a significant amount of hunted game meat (as opposed to ranched or farmed game meat) is making its way into the homes and kitchens of Canadians.

Rather than settle for a partial view of wild food provisioning, I examine below recent calls to renew hunting as a mode of food provisioning and compare the discursive fields within which these calls conceptualize and rationalize hunting as a way to put food on the table—or on the floor, as is the custom in the North (Gombay 2010, 30).

#### DISCOURSES OF FOOD HUNTING IN CANADA

In this chapter, I take a discursive approach that draws on the work of Michel Foucault. According to Foucault, a discourse is more than just talk and text; rather, it is a set of symbolic practices that demonstrates some regularity in how it renders reality—that is, it structures and delimits how people conceptualize reality and conduct themselves within it. In Foucault’s view, rather than merely representing reality, a discourse constitutes reality, forming the objects and subjects of which people speak, defining legitimate ways of knowing, and setting norms for proper conduct (Foucault 1972). Insofar as it shapes what can be thought, said, and done, a discourse is perhaps best thought of as “a technology of thought” (Miller and Rose 2008, 30) or an instrument of power. However, the power of any given discourse is never totalizing, since multiple discourses are always in

circulation, some competing, others reinforcing each other. This opens up room for resistance—for alternative and unintended patterns of thought and behaviour to emerge at the seams and cracks where discourses meet, part, and overlap (Foucault 1972, [1997] 2003).

Working from within this perspective means taking seriously the discourses that structure thought and action in the domain of food hunting—for instance, the discourses commonly foregrounded in historical and critical studies of hunting in the West, whether patriarchal (Kalof, Fitzgerald, and Baralt 2007; Kheel 1996), anthropocentric/animistic (Gupta 2006; Jepson 2008), scientific (Cartmill 1993; Dizard 1994; Harker and Bates 2007; Knezevic 2009), or religious (Cartmill 1993). However, much of this research focuses on sport hunting and consequently overlooks the discursive tensions and contestations specific to food hunting.<sup>6</sup> Studies that focus more narrowly on modern-day food hunting in Canada depict a discursive field characterized not just by conflicting views of how hunting makes us human, connects us with animals, or marks us as differently gendered but, more specifically, by long-standing antagonisms between Aboriginal peoples and the state regarding the “proper” definition, value, and governance of hunting knowledge and practice.

### *State Discourses of Hunting: Conservation, Preservation, Colonialism*

On one side of this divide lies the state: a loose collection of government agents and government-sanctioned agencies all vying for control of Canada’s wildlife populations, wilderness areas, and the people living off (or on) them. For much of the twentieth century, state and state-sanctioned actors have exercised near-complete control over the Canadian “wild,” rationalized and legitimized by a powerful combination of conservation, preservation, and colonial discourses. While Jan Dizard’s (1994) study of hunting in the United States highlights discourses of conservation and preservation in competition with each other, Canadian scholarship emphasizes the exceptional power of these discourses when used together to rationalize centralized state control over wildlife and wildlands and to denigrate and exclude mostly Aboriginal and lower-class meat-hunters from rich hunting grounds and relevant policy arenas (see, for example, Colpitts 2002; Kulchyski and Tester 2007; Sandlos 2007). Similarly, in a study of the evolution of hunting policy in Alberta, Brian Louis Calliou (2000) offers an interesting legal perspective on the use of conservationism to exclude Aboriginal peoples from their hunting grounds.

The Canadian state's autocratic approach to wildlife (and hunter) management emerged, in large part, from its adoption of a conservationist rendering of reality, one in which nature is an object—a natural “resource”—to be counted and controlled by humans using rational principles so that “surplus” populations can be commoditized. A healthy bison herd, for instance, can be commoditized as a tourist attraction and “surplus” elk as quarry for paying (that is, licensed) hunters. While North American conservationism denies economic value to dead wildlife (in other words, to wild meat)—since more money can be made from living wildlife than from dead (Geist 1988)—conservationist principles underlie the commoditization of access to wildlife and of the opportunity to hunt, with the latter allocated by law, through the distribution of licences and tags. A conservationist rendering of reality, however, has also provided the rationale for denying certain people access to wildlife and hunting, namely, those who refuse to submit to the scientific wildlife management principles espoused by the state. Labelled “wanton” or “unruly” destroyers of wildlife, these hunters—mostly Aboriginal, lower-class, utilitarian “meat” hunters—have historically been banned from hunting grounds, punished for harvesting wildlife using the logic of their own local knowledge(s), and marginalized in policy discussions (Sandlos 2007; Kulchyski and Tester 2007).

Coupled with this discourse of conservation, however, is a discourse of preservation: one that romanticizes the intrinsic worth of nature—of “wilderness” areas untainted by human intervention—and that seeks to preserve the last bastions of untamed nature from the taint of human development, greed, and industry (Sandlos 2007). In a preservationist rendering of reality, humans need to be excised from sacrosanct wilderness areas—or, at least, their visitation needs to be strictly circumscribed—so that what few pockets of Edenic nature remain can thrive without human meddling (Sandlos 2007, 11–12, 35; Colpitts 2002, 5–9). Within this logic, Aboriginals are typically stereotyped as “primitive” peoples once able to live in a close harmony with nature yet lamented as a “fallen” race, “tainted” by their contact with European “guns, whisky, and unscrupulous traders” and rendered “incongruous in a wilderness landscape” (Sandlos 2007, 12).<sup>7</sup> Add to this the conservationist condemnation of Aboriginal hunters as wanton, unruly, and wasteful destroyers of wildlife, and Aboriginal peoples are twice condemned—ruled “inimical” (12) to the “right” management, consumption, and preservation of Canada’s wildlife because of their

reliance on local (rather than Western scientific) knowledge to guide harvesting practices and their degenerate “fall” from grace following exposure to European settlers.

While preservationism is, in some ways, at odds with conservationism—given their different views of the value of nature, as either intrinsic or economic, and their characterizations of humans, as either tainted and less worthy than nature or rational and uniquely positioned to “manage” nature—no clear dichotomy divides these two discourses. In fact, Sandlos (2007, 11) argues that “the bureaucratic movement to protect wildlife in Canada was flexible enough to accommodate both the antimodernist desire to preserve wildlife as the most visible remnant of an authentic but fading wilderness and the modern faith in bureaucratic management as a means to cultivate and manage wildlife populations for recreational and commercial purposes.” Together, these two discourses helped usurp local “sovereignty over the wildlife commons” (64) and consolidate state control over wildlife (and human hunters).

To make matters worse, both preservationist and conservationist discourses in North America are—to this day—underwritten by colonial discourses of class and racial superiority. In the domain of food hunting, this means that hunters, already denigrated and condemned for their “unscientific” practices and unsuitability as protectors of the “wild,” are also weighed, measured, and found wanting by colonial discourses that assert the inherent superiority of genteel European traditions over those of Natives and working-class settlers and immigrants. From this colonial mentality springs the North American celebration of “sportsmanlike” hunting (wherein animals are given “fair chase,” harvested with a single shot, etc.) and the denigration of utilitarian subsistence hunting (wherein animals are slaughtered “unfairly” using nets, boats, lights, etc.) in popular culture and policy (Colpitts 2002, 62–103; Sandlos 2007, 9).<sup>8</sup> Even though the principles of sportsmanlike hunting are hardly scientific—for example, “fair chase” in no way contributes to the “scientific” management of wildlife—they suffuse wildlife management discourse in Canada and are enshrined in wildlife acts and hunting regulations, thanks to the influence of upper-class sportsmen on policy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Sandlos 2007, 143; Colpitts 2002, 63–102).

While sportsmen often do eat what they hunt, their talk and thinking foregrounds the dynamics and intrinsic value of the hunt itself—the



physical and intellectual challenge, the moral edification, the rejuvenating exposure to nature—and downplays the notion of the provisioning of food. According to this mindset, hunting for food is assumed to be of interest only to those going hungry, scraping by, or living hand-to-mouth: in other words, it is base, shameful, and vile—a marker of one’s lower standing in social (and quasi-evolutionary) hierarchies and something to be “bred out” of local hunters by the state through a shift away from subsistence and toward sport hunting (Sandlos 2007, 143–44, 166–92). While it might be tempting to claim that modern-day food hunting in Canada is no longer shaped by such discourses, one has only to examine popular opinion about “subsistence” hunting to see evidence of lingering prejudice. As Gombay (2010) points out, the term *subsistence* is so laden with unkind value judgments—about Aboriginal groups presumed to be “eking out a bare existence” (11)—that the term has become burdensome to contemporary research.

#### *Aboriginal Discourses of Hunting: Tradition and Rights*

On the other side of this discursive divide are Aboriginal hunters who conceive of and practice food hunting in very different terms. While often accustomed (or resigned) to working within Western discourses of wildlife management and preservation, many Aboriginal peoples insist that traditional discourses better reflect and render the reality of food hunting as they understand it. In such renderings, both hunters and their prey are active participants in the hunt. Rather than existing as objects to be “managed” by humans, animals listen and watch human hunters, deciding who will succeed and who will fail in the field. Hunters who properly honour their quarry (for example, by killing only animals who present themselves during the hunt) and who show compassion for other humans by sharing meat with those in need are honoured, in turn, by animals who give their lives so that “good” hunters may eat and live on (Nadasdy 2003, 80; Gombay 2006; Schmidt and Dowsley 2010). Traditional discourses frame hunting as both a food-provisioning and a community-building activity—not as a management tool or sport. Moreover, since food procured through traditional hunting can only ever be earned through good relations between humans, animals, and the land, only hunted food counts as “real” food, and it is always consumed with an awareness of the place, people, and animals from which it came (Gombay 2010, 29).

Such traditional renderings of the domain of hunting—tied to notions of traditional ecological knowledge (or “TEK”) within Aboriginal culture—were, until recently, ruled out by state actors as illegitimate and irrational. Yet they remain integral to sense making and food provisioning in Aboriginal communities (Nadasdy 2003; Schmidt and Dowsley 2010), and they provide these communities with a means to resist and reverse the discursive logics mobilized and championed by government actors to govern human hunters, hunted wildlife, and those who consume wild meat (O’Neill, Elias, and Yassi 1997; Searles 2010).

A similarly subversive function is played by Indigenous rights discourses, which Aboriginal peoples increasingly use to (re)assert their sovereignty and counteract state discourses that have historically declared them unfit for participation in wildlife policy. Indigenous rights discourses constitute Aboriginal peoples not as colonized peoples, backwards savages, or wards of the state but as sovereign nations with special rights set out in treaties signed with the federal government (Kulchyski and Tester 2007, 165). Such a rendering of reality has, historically, allowed Aboriginal peoples to claim (or be “granted”) hunting privileges based on their status as the “original occupants” of the land and on the promise of such privileges under treaties (Kulchyski and Tester 2007, 176; Sandlos 2007, 48).<sup>9</sup>

More recently, the reality rendered through Indigenous rights discourses has prompted calls for improved food sovereignty in Aboriginal communities through a network of policies designed to protect the ability of these communities “to define their own models of production, food distribution, and consumption patterns” (Pimbert 2008, 3)—in other words, their right to hunt, fish, and forage for traditional wild foods. How these calls for food sovereignty will play out—especially in a discursive field already dominated by Western scientific wildlife management and centralized bureaucratic control—remains to be seen.

So far, the future for Aboriginal subsistence hunters looks both promising and foreboding. Traditional ecological knowledge is increasingly acknowledged and respected by Western scientists, and Indigenous rights claims have encouraged the state to shift away from its autocratic tendencies toward comanagement of natural resources. Despite these changes, though, wildlife policy in Canada remains dominated by Western discourses (Sandlos 2007, 107). Negotiations and partnerships between state

and Aboriginal actors remain framed by the “language games” of the state and biased in favour of scientific managers (Nadasdy 2003, 119). Some researchers have argued that “TEK” itself has been subsumed by scientific-bureaucratic discourses and now refers less to traditional ways of life than to compartmentalized knowledges valued for their use to wildlife managers (Nadasdy 2003, 122; Forbes and Stammler 2009).

The discursive antagonism between Aboriginal and state actors, it seems, still lingers—shaping and delimiting public opinion, policy, and practice about “pantry” hunting in Canada. Understandably, then, Canadian scholarship continues to focus on this antagonism. However, the question remains: Is this antagonism a fair representation of the discourses shaping contemporary food-hunting practices in Canada, or does it overlook other ways of conceptualizing, valuing, and practicing hunting “for the table”?

#### CALLS FOR A RENEWAL OF FOOD HUNTING IN CANADA

I contend that there are indeed other ways to conceive and conduct food hunting in Canada and that these are currently overlooked in the literature. One alternative, in particular, has recently made newspaper headlines, yet it remains unacknowledged in studies of wild food provisioning in Canada. This newsworthy hunting alternative—hipster hunting—represents a new beast afield, with advocates conceptualizing hunting in terms very different from those of both Aboriginal hunters and state-sanctioned (sportsmanlike) conservation hunters. In fact, celebrations of hipster hunting invoke a discourse about food quality that rarely figures in discussions of contemporary hunting—although it does feature prominently in studies of trendy food alternatives. So the questions I ask are these: To what extent and how does hipster hunting represent a new way of thinking about and doing food hunting in Canada? And how does it figure relative to the discursive field of food hunting already well documented by scholars?

To answer these questions, I examine hipster hunting alongside other recent calls to renew food hunting in Canada. Currently, only two groups are making such calls: urban hipsters celebrating hunting as a way to provision “quality food” and Aboriginal communities celebrating traditional food systems as a way to improve and reclaim their food sovereignty and food-related health.

### *Campaigns to Renew Traditional Aboriginal Food Systems*

Postcolonial and postsettlement dietary changes in Aboriginal communities have been drastic and destructive (Kuhnlein 1996). In northern Manitoba, for instance, Aboriginal families have, over the span of just three generations, transitioned from eating *only* traditional foods to eating *none* (Fieldhouse and Thompson 2012). Such rapid dietary change is blamed for widespread health problems (diabetes, obesity, heart disease, anemia, tooth loss) and for shortened lifespan. Indeed, “people living in Inuit Nunangat [the four Inuit regions of Canada] can expect to live a decade less than people living elsewhere in Canada,” in part because of diet-related chronic disease (Owens et al. 2013).

While researchers are beginning to highlight the importance of traditional foods in urban, off-reserve populations (see, for example, Elliott and Jayatilaka 2011; Chan, Receveur, and Sharp 2011), campaigns currently focus on the challenges faced by Aboriginal communities that are more acute in Canada’s North. Many, if not all, Aboriginal communities in Canada still suffer from the impact of forced settlement, restricted access to land and equipment, a loss of traditional knowledge, dwindling provisioning and consumption of traditional foods, the high cost and low quality of store-bought foods, increasing dependence on store-bought foods, and widespread food insecurity and poor nutrition (Fieldhouse and Thompson 2012; Ford, Lardeau, and Vanderbilt 2012; Kuhnlein and Receveur 1996; Skinner et al. 2013; Thompson et al. 2012; Turner and Turner 2008; Wesche and Chan 2010). But these are all felt more acutely in the North, where food prices are twice as high, store food selection more restricted, store foods more processed, the growing season shorter, unemployment higher, and incomes lower than in the south (Ford, Lardeau, and Vanderbilt 2012). In addition, the difficulties that northern Aboriginal peoples encounter in accessing land and wildlife are exacerbated by the rapid growth of mining, hydro-electric development, and oil and gas exploration in the Canadian Arctic and by the impacts of climate change (Parlee and Furgal 2012).

But in addition to this emphasis on traditional foods in the North, a loose coalition of actors is currently trying to renew traditional foodways (including hunting) in Aboriginal communities across Canada. Researchers, for instance, are calling for a renewal of traditional food provisioning and consumption as a way to combat the poor nutrition, sedentary lifestyle, high rates of diet-related disease, and food insecurity in Aboriginal communities

from northern Ontario, to Manitoba, to coastal British Columbia: traditional foods, researchers argue, are more nutritious and prevent chronic disease (Fieldhouse and Thompson 2012; Ford, Lardeau, and Vanderbilt 2012; Skinner et al. 2013; Thompson et al. 2012; Turner and Turner 2008; Wesche and Chan 2010). Aboriginal peoples echo some of these views, especially the idea that traditional foods are more nutritious than store-bought foods, but they add that a return to traditional foodways would improve their food sovereignty and counteract the slow cultural and spiritual death—not just the physical ailments—that Aboriginal peoples are currently suffering (Food Secure Canada 2011; Gombay 2010; Pufall et al. 2011). In response, community leaders and state officials have implemented programs to encourage hunting, such as harvester support programs that offer financial support for hunters who provide meat for the community (Aarluk Consulting Inc. 2008) and country food programs that supply facilities and equipment for dressing, cleaning, and storing wild meat.<sup>10</sup>

This push for food hunting in Aboriginal communities can be understood as both an attempt to recover from the fallout of years of state intervention into Aboriginal ways of life—rationalized and mobilized by state-adopted discourses of conservation, preservation, and colonialism—and to reclaim some of the traditional discourses (ways of life) and sovereignty lost in the process. As such, these campaigns can be understood as emerging from the established discursive field of food hunting in Canada—the historical and discursive antagonism between Aboriginal hunters and state actors—which has already been so well documented by scholars.

These campaigns, however, do not consist of simple opposition to or rejection of state-sanctioned discourses, nor do they celebrate an idealized return to precontact Aboriginal traditions and rights. Rather, voices within these campaigns speak from tangled positions somewhere “in between” the two poles. Researchers, for instance, simultaneously decry the destructive influence of Western scientific discourses on Aboriginal communities, champion a return to traditional food systems, and invoke Western scientific discourses (nutritionism, for example) to explain the need for a return to tradition (see Turner and Turner 2008, for example). Likewise, Aboriginal peoples reportedly feel conflicted about the scientific discourses that, for so long, have framed discussions about traditional foods: on the one hand, they prefer to use local knowledges, rather than scientific assessments, to

judge when foods are safe to eat; on the other hand, they invoke nutrition science to assert that traditional foods are good to eat (Pufall et al. 2011). Studies by Nicole Gombay (2006, 2010) suggest that similar ambiguities and tensions regarding traditional foods and traditional food provisioning can be detected in relations between Western profit-seeking market economies and indigenous sharing-based vernacular economies in the North.

Such tensions and contradictions highlight the complexity of calling for a renewal of traditional hunting in the North from within a discursive field long dominated by Western scientific and bureaucratic discourses. Scientific discourses continue to be invoked, for example, even in the context of efforts to counteract their devastating effects on Aboriginal traditions and health. Such tangled ways of talking reveal that there is no absolute or perfect discursive ground to stand on or speak from in efforts to renew food-hunting traditions—only hybrid positions emerging from a confluence of different, often competing discourses.

### *Campaigns to Popularize Hipster Hunting*

In stark contrast, efforts to popularize hipster hunting express confidence that “quality” food can be had by those with who hunt the “right” way. As promoted in popular media by food bloggers and journalists, hipster hunting—food hunting for young urbanites—is increasingly celebrated as the ideal way for trendsetters and conscientious eaters to provision natural, organic, hormone-free, ethical, sustainable meat, all under their own steam. Food bloggers such as Kristeva Dowling ([www.howlingduckranch.com/blog](http://www.howlingduckranch.com/blog)), Melanie Epp ([www.onehundredmilemel.blogspot.ca](http://www.onehundredmilemel.blogspot.ca)), and Kevin Kossowan ([www.kevinkossowan.com](http://www.kevinkossowan.com)) promote hipster hunting using stories of hands-on hunting and culinary adventure, while food journalists pick up these stories and (re)package them for wider audiences (see, for example, Shore 2013; Moss 2011).

Perhaps not surprisingly, efforts to reignite interest in food hunting among urbanites stand apart from those addressed to remote northern Aboriginal communities. Drawing on notions of food quality, advocates of hipster hunting seem far removed from the discursive antagonisms between the state and Aboriginal peoples. However, the discursive dimensions of hipster hunting aren't entirely new: they draw on conservationist, preservationist, and colonial views of hunting, but they reframe these views in terms of food quality.

Food quality is, quite simply, central to the way hipster hunters conceive of and conduct “good” food hunting, both afield and in the kitchen. As the Alberta-based food blogger Kevin Kossowan puts it, hunting for food is all “about quality”: “I was looking for really good, quality product and I thought I should go down the road of killing the animal I was eating and thought there was some value in that” (quoted in Lau 2008). What counts as “quality product” for hipster hunters, though, is drawn neither from state-sanctioned hunting discourses (which downplay or denigrate the role of food in hunting) nor from Aboriginal hunting discourses (which conceive of hunted food—when the hunting is properly conducted—as “real” food given by animals to deserving hunters who live well upon the land). Rather, hipsters draw notions of “quality” from a different discursive field altogether—that of “alternative” food networks, where quality products are foods explicitly linked to a place of origin and embedded within a local territory or are connected with “environmental, social, and distributional processes” that embody a shift away from industrialized and standardized food production (Ilbery et al. 2005, 120; see also Ilbery and Kneafsey 1998; Murdoch, Marsden, and Banks 2000). According to this logic, global-industrial foods are placeless, artificial, and risky, whereas nonindustrial, locally embedded foods—here, hunted foods—are inherently “good” or “better.” Within hipster hunting advocacy, wild meat is thus considered high-quality food more for its association with non-industrial processes than with local places: wild meat is “raised” naturally, selected for harvest sustainably, killed ethically, and cooked using highly refined, hands-on food craft.

Hipster hunters set wild meat apart from industrially processed meat in no uncertain terms. Hunted meat is “organic” food from “a natural source” (Remington 2008) and is “filled with vitamins, antioxidants and omega-3 fat” (Schatzker 2010), as opposed to “flabby,” “grey,” “toxic” feedlot beef (Kesia Nagata, quoted in Shore 2013) that is “smothered with antibiotics and injected with growth hormones” (Schatzker 2010). Wild animals are “good” to eat because they spend their lives “in meadows and forests nibbling tender shoots and leaves” close to “Mother Nature,” while “factory-raised” animals are imprisoned and shot full of chemicals (Schatzker 2010). Interestingly, this view is reminiscent of Aboriginal peoples’ praise for traditional foods as more “real” and nutritious than store-bought foods, yet it is not predicated upon the nuanced world view espoused by Aboriginal

peoples, in whose terms “real” food means food accepted and honoured as a gift from an animal, in recognition of the hunter’s moral and intellectual development while living on the land. If anything, this emphasis on food quality is a new spin on a distinctly preservationist world view, wherein wild foods are valued for their intrinsic purity, a function of their time spent beyond the influence of industrial society.

According to Matt Cartmill (1993), the link between “ecological consciousness” (232) and hunting is relatively new—unheard of until the second half of the twentieth century. The discourse of food quality underwriting hipster hunting is characterized by just such a link. These food hunters position wild game as superior because of its connection to “sustainable” harvesting techniques (Shore 2013), that is, to environmentally attuned methods for selecting animals for harvest that “ensure the land . . . is in good shape for successive generations” (“Hunting Your Own Dinner” 2012). Hunting means being “involved in the eco system on a very different level” (Lily Raff McCaulou, quoted in “Hunting Your Own Dinner” 2012), developing an “intimate knowledge of the terrain, the movements of animals . . . their feeding habits” (Schatzker 2013) and an ability to assess which animals can be safely shot. Again, this logic is evocative of Aboriginal peoples’ insistence that traditional hunting involves knowing how to harvest animals so that more (or as many) animals offer themselves in future. However, rather than being predicated on the same traditional knowledge or cosmologies as Aboriginal hunting, hipster hunting is tinged with a conservationist view: that wildlife populations need careful, paternalistic, and scientific “management” so that surplus animals will be available for “cropping” in future.<sup>11</sup> Assessments about which animals can be safely shot are left to state officials, who decree which animals are legal to hunt in a given season. This conservationist tinge comes to the fore, in particular, when hipsters rationalize hunting as a way not just to procure “quality” food but to target “surplus” populations and keep wildlife numbers in check. “Goose and duck populations are at an all-time high,” writes blogger Melanie Epp (2010b), “so if you’re worried about their numbers, you shouldn’t be. They are, in fact, considered vermin in some places. . . . Ducks Unlimited supports these hunts because they help control numbers, educate people about conservationism, and promote a healthy respect for wildlife.” This way of thinking about and doing hunting is perhaps best characterized as the hybrid offspring of food quality and conservation



discourses: hunting born of the simultaneous beliefs that wildlife populations need humans to “manage” them and that careful “management” ensures the “production” of wild animals by ecologically sound food processes, making wild meat a “quality” product.

Interestingly, such references to conservationism in hipster hunting are also accompanied by references to colonial discourses of class superiority—albeit reframed (as above) in terms of food quality. Hipsters claim to be “ethical” hunters who provision only ethically harvested wild meat: they take personal responsibility for how “animals are treated” (Shore 2013), ensure that animals don’t “suffer” (Epp 2010b), and kill animals quickly with a “well-aimed shot to the chest” (Schatzker 2010) to avoid the cruelty experienced by animals in factory farming (Epp 2010a). In so doing, they constitute wild game as a “quality” product because it is produced in ways that avoid the horrors of industrial agriculture. All of the “ethical” steps they list, though—such as pursuing animals fairly and ensuring a quick clean kill—reference colonial ideals of (aristocratic) sport hunting—long ago imported from Europe, transformed by North American attitudes (see Warren 1997), and enshrined in North American wildlife law. Insofar as it echoes elements of the sportsman’s code (fair chase, a clean kill), hipster hunting is a kind of sportsmanlike hunting—but for food, not for sport. In this sense, hipster hunting is the hybrid offspring of twenty-first-century notions of postindustrial food quality and colonial, aristocratic ideals of genteel sport hunting.

This intersection of discourses, though, gives the hipster hunter some ground from which to recast utilitarian meat hunting as civilized and noble rather than as the vile activity of a “plebeian ‘pot hunter’” (Cartmill 1993, 232). By (re)casting game meat as “quality food” and hipster hunting as sportsmanlike, hipsters help reorient the discursive field somewhat, so that meat hunting can be valued as a kind of right living through food rather than condemned as inferior and ignoble. This reorientation of the discursive field is reinforced through references to a new paragon of low-class hunting: “hillbillies who kill” (Epp 2010a) and “gun-toting rednecks” (Hayley 2008)—those who hunt for the thrill of the kill—mark the line between upstanding food hunters and “knuckle-dragging” degenerates (Remington 2008).

Advocates for hipster hunting also distinguish it as a source of “quality” food by describing the artisanal techniques used to prepare wild game for

the table. Here, the food focus of hipster hunting comes to the fore. Bloggers drop names of chefs like Hank Shaw (Kossowan 2012, 2013), Anthony Bourdain, and Gordon Ramsey (Kossowan 2007a), while detailing indulgent seven-course wild game dinners featuring dishes like “sautéed calf moose loin in cambozola cream sauce” (Kossowan 2007b). Hipster hunters ramble dreamily about venison rack “Frenched” and prepared with an “herb crust” (Schatzker 2010). They boast of their preference for prime cuts—not burger—(Kossowan 2009), walk readers through the delicate process of making bacon-wrapped wild goose hors d’oeuvres (Epp 2010c), and celebrate recipes found in old Italian cookbooks for sautéed venison with porcini mushrooms tossed “over fresh papardelle” (Schatzker 2010). Cooking for the lower classes this is not! Rather, hipster hunters associate hunting with haute cuisine and artisanal food craft, with food snobs (Kossowan 2006) who take pride in their distinguished palates and knife skills. In ways reminiscent of the Slow Food movement, hipster hunters profess and enact social distinction through food (Schneider 2008, 394–95), invoking quasi-European food aesthetics to mark wild game cuisine as “quality” food and translating ideals of genteel hunting behaviour from the field to the kitchen (Gaytan 2004).

#### HIPSTER HUNTERS: ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK

Perhaps the most obvious conclusion that can be drawn from this foray into hunting is that wild food provisioning is clearly valued well beyond Canada’s northern, rural communities. Scholarship tenaciously focuses on wild food provisioning as occurring at the cultural and geographic edges of the country, yet people from elsewhere are clearly engaging in wild food provisioning, too. Research into food hunting and wild food provisioning needs to broaden its scope to encompass food provisioning in a variety of communities and regions, including those that are neither northern nor rural. In addition, researchers need to pay closer attention to wild food provisioning in its wider cultural context. This need is confirmed by Levkoe et al. (2012, 20), whose report on the Canadian “food movement” fails to anticipate that wild foods or food hunting might be among the “issue-areas” in which alternative food networks are involved. While the report’s survey respondents corrected this oversight, by specifically mentioning “traditional/wild food and indigenous rights” and “hunting/game meat” under the “Additional Work” option, the oversight points to

a blind spot in Canadian research—an unwillingness to see hunting as a genuine food issue or as relevant to the Canadian food movement.

Hipster hunting, in particular, represents a new way of conceiving and conducting food hunting in Canada that warrants close attention. It draws heavily on a twenty-first-century (postindustrial) discourse of food quality to extol hunting as an ideal way to provision natural, sustainable, ethical, artisanal food. Its food- and quality-focused approach makes it appear closely linked to other “alternative” forms of provisioning—perhaps even the next logical step in the local, organic, or Slow Food movements (Brummett 2010). However, its invocation of food quality as a way to rationalize and promote food hunting is by no means a fresh start or a new direction in Canadian hunting. Rather, the discourse of hipster hunting mobilizes notions of food quality that are entangled with those discourses that already dominate the domain of hunting in Canada: preservationism, conservationism, and colonialism. At the same time, it reveals little concern for or even awareness of Aboriginal discourses of hunting (tradition, rights)—those discourses struggling to reframe food hunting in Canada. In this sense, hipster hunting is perhaps best understood as a food- and quality-focused (re)incarnation of the conservationist-preservationist-colonial discursive matrix that has dominated hunting in Canada for generations. As Kevin Kossowan (2011) explains, as a food-focused hunter, he is “working within the confines of our [society’s] norm . . . trying to broaden that norm in a healthy way”; however, in many respects he is unable to break from it.

This is not to suggest that hipster hunting is a dead end or a lamentable failure. Its allure among young people is strong enough that it may well reinvigorate hunting in Canada. It shows considerable promise, in particular, in its efforts to get Canadians to rethink old hunting stereotypes—especially those of the thrill-seeking sport hunter versus the rule-bending subsistence hunter. Rather than simply deny or object to these stereotypes, hipster hunting reworks them, marrying notions of sportsmanlike hunting behaviour with notions of quality food and distinguished taste. The result is a new figure on the hunting landscape: a genteel sportsmanlike hunter in search of food, rather than a challenge or trophy.

However, this reworking of stereotypes also brings with it some risks, which, to date, remain unexamined within hipster hunter circles. Perhaps most worrying is the refusal (thus far) among hunting advocates to tackle

the issue of class discrimination in hunting. The new figure of the ethical hipster hunter is, in fact, *built* on class discrimination. Hipsters emerge as “good” hunters only by co-opting some of the noble features of genteel hunters—by demonstrating their elite (artisanal) food tastes and food-crafting skills and by distinguishing themselves from gun-toting, knuckle-dragging “hillbillies” and “rednecks” whose vaguely unwashed and unruly behaviour relegate them to the bottom of the social (and quasi-evolutionary) ladder, that is, to the very spot that utilitarian meat hunters once occupied. In effect, ethical hipster hunters redeem themselves by climbing up the ladder and forcing others to occupy the rungs beneath them. The class hierarchy remains, but hipsters manage to scabble up a few rungs.

The claim of hipsters to be “good” hunters reflects a broader phenomenon grounded in the assertion of ethical superiority, one that allows some to proclaim their views to be the “right” way while demeaning or excluding those unable or unwilling to conform to this new standard. DuPuis and Goodman (2005) call this phenomenon a “politics of conversion,” wherein a minority (often elite) group decides that they have found the morally correct way to live—emphasizing its “ideal utopian ‘romantic’” qualities—and then attempts to “convert everyone to adopt their utopian ideal” (361). Such an approach is often the result of a lack of reflexivity: it betrays an unwillingness both to recognize the weaknesses and unintended consequences of one’s own approach and to see or hear other groups. In other words, it refuses to “treat ongoing conflicts and differences between various groups not as polarizing divisions but as grounds for respectful—even productive—disagreement” (361). Rather than fall into an endless politics of conversion, I would prefer to see hunters—including its food-focused boosters—move toward a more open, reflexive politics of respect. In the past, hunting discourses have mobilized patterns of discrimination and enshrined those patterns in policy, to devastating effect for those discriminated against. Rather than repeat history, in only slightly different terms, food researchers, writers, and practitioners would be better off learning from the past and endeavouring to weed out forms of discursive discrimination before they make their way into emergent food and wildlife policy—and into people’s lives.

## NOTES

- 1 Regulations governing the sale of wild foods in Canada vary depending on the region and the species. In most provinces, wild game meat cannot legally be bought, sold, traded, or otherwise distributed in exchange for remuneration—which, among other things, prohibits its sale in restaurants and grocery stores. For an example, see Manitoba’s Wildlife Act, 1987 (C.C.S.M. c. W130), sec. 30. In the territories, however, as well as in some provinces, wild game meat can be sold provided one has the proper licence, and, more generally, hunting regulations must acknowledge the existence of large Aboriginal settlement areas established through land claims. See, for example, Yukon’s Wildlife Act, 2002 (R.S.Y. 2002, c. 229), secs. 102(1) and 202(1). Foraging for wild plants and mushrooms in Canada is governed by different regulations entirely, outlined and enforced by various provincial, territorial, and federal ministries. For instance, in Alberta’s provincial parks, “Picking wild fruits and mushrooms *may be permitted if you have verbal approval from the district conservation officer,*” while in British Columbia mushroom picking, whether for personal or commercial use, is freely permitted on all provincial forest lands. See “Regulations,” Alberta Environment and Parks, AlbertaParks.ca, 2015, <http://www.albertaparks.ca/albertaparksca/visit-our-parks/regulations.aspx#Plants>; and “Harvesting Edible Wild Mushrooms in BC,” Ministry of Forests and Range, Forest Practices Branch, Publications Repository, n.d., <https://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hfp/publications/00028/harvest.htm>.
- 2 The phrase “hidden harvest” echoes the title of Scoones, Melnyk, and Pretty (1992).
- 3 Ken Albala, however, is by no means against contemporary foraging for wild foods. See, for instance, his blog entry “Urban Forage,” 1 October 2013, on *Ken Albala’s Food Rant* (<http://kenalbala.blogspot.ca/2013/10/urban-forage.html>).
- 4 “National Harvest Survey,” *Environment Canada*, 2012, <https://www.ec.gc.ca/reom-mbs/default.asp?lang=En&n=CFB6F561-1>.
- 5 For wild fowl, see “General Harvest Data,” *Environment and Climate Change Canada*, 2012, <http://www.ec.gc.ca/reom-mbs/enp-nhs/index.cfm?do=a&lang=e>; the breakdown is 825,210 ducks, 839,214 geese, and 53,601 other (“non-waterfowl”). For Alberta, see “Hunter Harvest,” Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, *MyWildAlberta.com*, <http://mywildalberta.com/Hunting/HuntersHarvest.aspx>. On deer harvests, see also Ontario, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, “Estimated Resident White-tailed Deer Hunting Activity and Harvest by

Wildlife Management Unit (2008–2013),” 2014, <http://www.ontario.ca/document/resident-white-tailed-deer-hunting-activity>.

- 6 Hiroaki Kawamura (2004) argues that hunting research relies too heavily on divisions between sport and food (or subsistence) hunting. However, Canadian history reveals that this dichotomy has shaped how food hunting is currently conceived and conducted, making the dichotomy worthy, in this case, of attention.
- 7 Siegrid Deutschlander and Leslie Miller (2003) refer to this kind of romanticization of Aboriginal peoples—as “noble savages” embodying the simple and archaic ways of life of a premodern tribal society—in the domain of cultural tourism as informed by primitivist discourse. In the context of wildlife and wildland policy, however, such romanticization is better understood as informed by a preservationist discourse.
- 8 North American and European notions of “sport” hunting are indeed different: European hunting traditions are better thought of as translated within North American hunting cultures than as merely transported here and imposed upon North American hunting (see, for example, Warren 1997). For further discussion of the racial and class divisions between sportsmen and “pantry” hunters in the United States, see Dizard (1994) and Warren (1997).
- 9 According to the logic of Indigenous rights discourses, special privileges secured for Aboriginal peoples cannot and should not be extended to other Canadians. Such distinctions—between those with special status and rights, and those without—have caused grief in the past, and likely probably will continue to do so. For instance, in the early twentieth century, the Department of Indian Affairs fought to grant treaty Indians special access to hunting within Wood Buffalo National Park. These same privileges, however, were not extended to “hunters and trappers of other ethnicities” (Sandlos 2007, 48), and “non-Native and Métis hunters” were removed from the park (49), causing them and their families great hardship.
- 10 For one example, see “Country Foods Program,” *Nisichawayasihk Trust Office*, 2015, <http://trustoffice.ca/country-foods-program.aspx>.
- 11 When surplus wildlife is harvested prior to commoditization, the process is called “cropping” (Sandlos 2007, 91), a term that, like “harvesting,” draws attention to often overlooked parallels between modern scientific wildlife management and agricultural food production.

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## **Lies, Damned Lies, and Locavorism**

### **Bringing Some Truth in Advertising to the Canadian Local Food Debate**

*Pierre Desrochers*

An ever-growing number of food writers and activists claim that our modern-day genetically modified “corn-utopia” is soaking up a rapidly vanishing petroleum pool while delivering junk food, rural poverty, and mutation-inducing pollution. Freeing ourselves from the monopolistic grip of agribusiness interests, their mantra goes, requires nothing less than a drastic carbon-fuel detoxification diet and a wholesale rethinking of the way everything is done from “plough to plate.” At the top of their list of recommendations is the (worldwide) revival of regional food economies, or “locavorism,” that is, the movement to increase local food production at the expense of long-distance trade. While some acknowledge that this prescription will be costly—a Swedish activist group even proudly calls itself *Dyrare Mat Nu!* (More Expensive Food, Now!)—they promise, in return, greater food quality, safety, and security, healthier bodies and natural environments, and improved community spirit and individual well-being.

As articulated most prominently by journalism professor and food writer Michael Pollan, the case against export-oriented monocultures rests primarily on the contention that they are “not simply the product of the free market” but rather “of a specific set of government policies that sponsored a shift from solar (and human) energy on the farm to fossil-fuel energy” (2008, 65). This argument, however, is problematic on several

counts. For instance, even a cursory look at American agricultural history reveals that some significant monocultures (indigo, tobacco, and cotton, for example) long preceded the advent of carbon fuels. (Needless to say, some export-oriented monocultures, such as olive, cereal, and wine production, were already well established during Mediterranean antiquity.) Another problem for Pollan's thesis is that, in the United States, the agricultural landscape was already dominated by "agricultural belts"—regions that specialized in the production of specific commodities—in the age of (unsubsidized) coal (Finch and Baker 1917). Finally, export-oriented monocultures are also dominant in countries that provide very little support of any kind to their agricultural sector, such as New Zealand.

The goal of this chapter is to challenge the locavore's rhetoric and to reiterate the importance of several factors that have long been understood to drive the ever more globalized nature of our food supply chain, namely, advantageous geographies, economies of scale, and advances in transportation and food preservation. The first section summarizes the rhetoric of Canada's most prominent advocates of a return to regional food production, while the rest of the chapter illustrates how the road to social, economic, environmental, food-security, and nutrition-safety hell is paved with allegedly fresher and more desirable local meals.

#### SOLE FOOD AND CANADIAN LOCAVORISM

Over a century ago, the French entomologist Jean-Henri Fabre deplored that history "celebrates the battlefields whereon we meet our death, [but] it scorns to speak of the ploughed fields whereby we thrive; it knows the names of the kings' bastards, [but] it cannot tell us the origin of wheat" (Fabre [1889] 2002, 334). In a complete turn of the intellectual tables, today a good many of humanities professors and graduate students in wealthy countries are concerned with little else. Unfortunately, this SOLE (sustainable, organic, local, and ethical) scholarship and its attending smorgasbord of television reports, magazine cover stories, popular books, and shock documentaries draw heavily upon older muckraking, populist, protectionist, romantic, and "vitalist" traditions.<sup>1</sup> The result is a one-sided narrative in which the abundant, affordable, and safe food produced through advanced means and distributed over long distances is quickly drowned in a sea of complaints (see, for example, Pollan 2006, Walsh 2009).

Canadian food activists and writers are every bit as vocal about these alleged shortcomings. For instance, Sandy Houston, the president of the Ontario-based Metcalf Foundation, remarks that food, “a fundamental human concern and central to the health of our communities, economy, environment, and bodies,” is now produced in a “complex, rigid, and opaque” system (Houston 2010, 4). Because of this “outdated system designed for export markets,” farmers struggle financially, agricultural land is “fast disappearing,” food bank use is on the rise, and overall health is in decline owing to a “lack of access to nutritional food” (Metcalf Foundation 2010). Policy writers at Food Secure Canada further contend that our current food system has delivered food insecurity for “close to two and a half million Canadians” and obesity for a quarter of the overall population, while driving farmers and fishers out of business and pushing our “natural environment . . . to the limit.” The way forward, they write, includes making sure that “food is eaten as close as possible to where it is produced” by supporting domestic and regional purchasing policies for institutions and large food retailers, local farmers markets, and community supported agriculture (Food Secure Canada 2011, 2).

The *Grow TO* urban agriculture action plan of the Toronto Food Policy Council shares a similar diagnosis and prescriptions. Increasing local food production, its authors claim, “creates business opportunities, enhances economic development, generates income,” and develops a wide range of job-related skills. It also “builds community, encourages life-long learning, reduces social isolation,” and “uses under-utilized land and rooftops” while connecting us “to the food we eat and to the broad food system,” providing “physical activity for all ages,” improving “health and nutrition,” and enhancing “urban food security.” The local environment is said to benefit in several ways: increased and more diversified urban green spaces, more ecologically sound stormwater management, greater local biodiversity, and reduced air pollution (Toronto Food Policy Council 2011, 9–10). In her bestseller *Locavore*, journalist Sarah Elton describes the path to a greener food system as lined with farmers’ markets, urban farmers, and community-supported agriculture programs, while another Canadian journalist, Thomas Pawlick, states that expecting international corporate agribusiness to “be ‘reformed’ or pressured into becoming a reliable, responsible source of healthy food and a protector of the environment” is akin to expecting foxes to be trained as “guardians for the world’s chicken coops” (Elton 2010;

Pawlick 2006, 203). The only way to defeat corporate power, he argues, is to go around it by thinking locally and fighting locally.

The benefits of locavorism put forward by these and other local food activists can be summarized as follows:

- *Social*: Farmers' markets can help mend the local community ties that have been torn by the globalized food supply chain and big box retailing by promoting camaraderie, informal conversation, and good will.
- *Economic*: Local food purchases improve the economic circumstances of mostly small-scale farmers who otherwise struggle in the face of international competition. Money spent locally stays in the community rather than ending up in the distant headquarters of monopolistic large retail chains, shipping companies, and mega corporate farms. More local jobs are created as a result.
- *Environmental*: Because locally produced food items travel shorter distances, they generate fewer greenhouse gas emissions than food shipped from distant places. In addition, local food production systems that serve a broad array of needs are more diverse than large, export-oriented monocultures. Promoting local food production is also an indirect way to fight urban sprawl and to promote better environmental stewardship.
- *Security*: Local producers are more dependable in times of political crisis and economic collapse. By contrast, international food markets cater only to the highest bidders and have no interest in the fate of marginal populations. Diversified local agriculture is also less likely than monocultures to succumb to pests and diseases.
- *Taste and Health*: Because locally grown food is fresher and picked in a more ripened state, it is tastier and more nutritious than items that have travelled long distances. Food contamination is also more likely in central processing facilities where vast quantities of food from diverse geographical origins come together and are exposed to undesirable elements. By contrast, the small scale of local food production ensures that problems remain localized and are easily traced.

Despite the popularity of locavorism, controversy still surrounds the geographical scale it refers to. Few people would advocate returning to the days of subsistence farming, but what is "local"—the approximately 50-kilometre



radius within which urban denizens historically got most of their perishable agricultural commodities before the advent of the railroad and the steamship (Rodrigue, Comtois, and Slack 2009, 42)? Or the now iconic “100 miles” (161 kilometres) for consumers in our car-dominated era? Or, as the provisional definition of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency would have it, “food produced in the province or territory in which it is sold” or “food sold across provincial borders within 50 km of the originating province or territory” (but evidently excluding adjacent American states)?<sup>2</sup> Or even the whole of Canada, as suggested by supermarket chain Loblaw’s “Grown Close to Home” campaign (Flavelle 2009)?

Adding to the confusion of what constitutes “local” food are a few other thorny issues. What about food that was actually grown near its final point of purchase but was then transported significant distances to be processed and inspected in a large plant before being shipped back to a retailer near its production site? Shouldn’t we also care about the distant geographical origins of seeds, embryos, fertilizers, and pesticides, or about the electricity, gasoline, diesel, packaging materials, computers, and software used by local producers?

From an economic perspective, some local foods make perfect sense because they provide the best ratio of quality to price available at certain times of the year (think of Prince Edward Island potatoes or British Columbia salmon consumed locally). And, in isolated rural areas where land is cheap, game animals abundant, and economic opportunities limited, it often makes perfect sense to spend significant chunks of one’s time growing a large vegetable garden, keeping a few animals, and hunting, fishing, and harvesting wild food. In other cases, such as hobby gardening, economic criteria are essentially irrelevant.

Uncompetitive local food promoted solely for its geographical origins is another matter entirely. As I will argue below, the policy recommendations put forward by local food activists can only deliver a world in which poverty, environmental damage, food insecurity, and diseases are much more prevalent than is presently the case—in other words, the true world of yesterday as opposed to the romanticized view of the past so common among locavores. In the remainder of this chapter, I examine each of the inaccurate or baseless myths propagated by activists, beginning with the notion that increased direct interactions between consumers and producers can only be beneficial.

## MYTH #1: LOCAVORISM NURTURES SOCIAL CAPITAL

From the beginning of markets and civilization, intermediaries have been engaged in the assembling, grading, packaging, processing, storing, transporting, financing, distributing, and advertising of food and other goods. For perhaps just as long, these people have been described as superfluous by social critics who, as the French economist Frédéric Bastiat observed over a century and a half ago, “would willingly eliminate the capitalist, the banker, the speculator, the entrepreneur, the businessman, and the merchant, accusing them of interposing themselves between producer and consumer in order to fleece them both, without giving them anything of value” (Bastiat [1850] 2007, 19). Locavores are but the latest activists to indict food wholesalers and retailers under charges of social parasitism and to promote various schemes to bypass them. Like their predecessors, however, they fail to grasp their valuable contributions.

In order to better understand the role and persistence of food intermediaries, one must first keep in mind the heterogeneity of agricultural productions. For instance, not all apples—even if grown on the same tree—are identical. Depending on their characteristics, they are graded as Canada Extra Fancy, Canada Fancy, Canada Commercial, Canada Hailed, Canada Commercial Cookers, Canada No. 1 Peelers, and Canada No. 2 Peelers.<sup>3</sup> This system ensures that specific apples are put to the best use they warrant, from direct sales to consumers for the highest grades to making juice, pie and pastry fillings, jelly and other products for the others. Grades and standards help ensure that producers of quality output obtain maximum value in different markets, that buyers do not have to inspect every shipment, that handling and transportation can be done more efficiently, and that waste is minimized.

The development of modern brands further saved consumers the trouble of establishing the trustworthiness of multiple small-scale producers, which was once a significant issue. Unbeknownst to present-day activists, a number of their nineteenth-century predecessors were forever denouncing the shady dealings of *local* businesspeople, whom they accused of adulterating food in various ways, such as adding water to milk, wine, and beer; roasted chicory roots, peas, and beans to coffee; or horsemeat to beef (Wilson 2008). Trust issues in farmers’ markets now mostly manifest themselves in the form of resellers peddling nonlocal products under false

local pretenses (Etter 2010), a problem made worse by the fact that small operators have much less at stake than large companies, whose deep pockets unavoidably attract the attention of trial lawyers.

The shortcomings of locavorism are most obvious in community-supported agriculture (CSA) schemes where farmers prepare a selection of pre-paid seasonal items. Regular deliveries (typically once a week) take place either at participants' doors or at locations where farmers can meet a larger number of consumers. Alternatively, consumers might be required to show up at the farm and perhaps even do volunteer work there. The truly defining feature of CSA, however, is that participants "share the risk" with the farmer they support, meaning that the weekly pickups may be larger than expected when things are good but smaller when they aren't.

Unfortunately, a typical complaint from a former CSA participant is that "inconvenient drop-off locations or contracts . . . require more time or money than you can afford" while the "sudden onslaught of produce" might require the acquisition of significant cooking skills and equipment, along with a serious time commitment for food preparation. When the latter is not possible, much produce ends up on the composting pile. Production problems on the farm, be they related to weather, pests, or equipment, also mandate "budget busting" trips to the local grocery store (Ghezzi 2009). One disgruntled former CSA adherent found out that "many times 'shared risk' meant receiving produce with major insect damage," while on other occasions "the produce was beautiful, but I expected that there would have been more." Inflexible delivery schedules and quantities delivered also turned out to be problematic when scheduling conflicts occurred or when children were suddenly gone for a few days. The result was either significant waste or additional supermarket trips. As she pointed out, and as is now readily acknowledged, "wasted produce is the most common reason for people not to continue with a CSA program."<sup>4</sup>

Such problems are a useful reminder that intermediaries in the food sector create value by delivering greater convenience and minimizing waste. True, initiatives that help consumers to meet food producers might create new genuine friendships, but spending more time and money to acquire food less efficiently means fewer opportunities to nurture social capital in other ways, from charitable giving to volunteering opportunities. Overall, CSA and other attempts to bypass intermediaries might actually decrease social capital in a local community.

Celebrity food writer Michael Pollan has suggested that channelling “even a small portion of institutional food purchasing” within a hundred miles would “revive local agriculture,” “create more jobs on farms,” and promote “rural redevelopment” (quoted in Moyers 2008). Increased local spending by hospitals, military bases, and other government agencies and bureaucracies, he argues, would not only “vastly expand regional agriculture,” but it would also “improve the diet of the millions of people these institutions feed” (Pollan 2008, 70).

The basic problem with Pollan’s proposal is that it skips over the fact that no one would buy more distant food if it did not provide a better quality-to-price ratio over local options. This point was made rather forcefully, if somewhat unintentionally, in Alisa Smith and James Bernard MacKinnon’s iconic hundred-mile experiment in some of Canada’s most productive agricultural and coastal areas. For example, locally produced honey cost about \$11 a kilogram instead of \$2.59 a kilogram for sugar. Furthermore, acquiring and preparing food for both immediate and later consumption turned out to be comparable to holding a part-time job, thus providing a useful reminder that the one thing money cannot buy is more time (see Smith and McKinnon 2005, 2007). Needless to say, these costs would have been much higher if other residents of the British Columbia lower mainland had similarly turned their back on the globalized food chain and been much less productive as a result.

Because he ultimately cannot deny the higher price tag of his prescription, Pollan has long requested that “food-stamp debit cards should double in value whenever swiped at a farmers’ markets” (2008, 70). Like many other local food activists, however, he is quick to denounce the unfair playing field on which small producers ply their trade and the “unconscionably expensive” price of cheap food because of subsidies paid to large agricultural farms, the general disregard for the well-being of agricultural workers and the environment allegedly displayed by agribusiness, and what he claims is the poor quality of the food delivered to consumers. Yet Pollan and other locavores appear oblivious to the geographical disadvantages of certain locations—from poorer, rockier, or less levelled soils to an unsuitable climate for certain crops (too cold or too hot, too humid or too dry)—and to the fact that smaller markets do not warrant major investments in

the development of more productive plant and animal varieties or in larger and more cost-effective production and processing facilities.

Another consideration often lost on local food activists is that, regardless of the location or time period, economic growth has never occurred without the development of cities. There are several reasons for this. Among others, the geographical agglomeration of diverse economic activities makes possible the profitable operation of a transportation hub through which firms can better serve a broad range of activities (both in local and more distant markets). Being located next door to suppliers, customers, and creative people in general facilitates the diffusion and development of a broader range of skills and the launching of new innovative businesses. Urban labour markets are also much larger and diversified than those of rural areas and smaller towns, thus making it considerably easier for entrepreneurs and managers to find the specialized or temporary workers they need and for individuals to invest in the acquisition of ever more refined skills. In the words of economist Edward Glaeser, there is “a near-perfect correlation between urbanization and prosperity across nations” (Glaeser 2011, 7). The key point for locavorism, however, is that urbanization has long been impossible without substantial food imports from distant locations. As some of Plato’s characters in his *Republic* observed nearly two and a half millennia ago, to find a city “where nothing need be imported” was already then “impossible” (Plato [c. 360 BCE] 2008, Book II). In short, economic development is impossible without urbanization, and urbanization has long been impossible without long-distance trade in food and other items. A world that would abide by the locavore’s creed would unavoidably use scarce resources less productively and deliver lower standards of living, as has always been the case in all predominantly rural societies.

### MYTH #3: LOCAVORISM HEALS THE EARTH

In a 2008 *National Geographic* article, journalist Michael Mann discusses how unsound soil-management policies in communist China led to the creation of terrace agriculture in unsuitable conditions, along with the cutting down of trees and the planting of grain on steep slopes. The result, not surprisingly, was increased soil erosion and depletion. Daring to challenge official wisdom, some villagers replanted the steepest and most erosion-prone third

of their land with grass and trees, covered another third of the land with harvestable orchards, and focused their cropping efforts on the remaining lower flat plots that had been enriched by the soil washed down from the hillsides. By concentrating their limited supplies of fertilizer on the best land, Mann tells his readers, the dissident villagers were able to increase yields to such an extent that they more than made up for the land sacrificed, in the end delivering both increased output and reduced environmental impact (Mann 2008).

The outcome described by Mann is a microcosm of the long-standing economic and environmental benefits of high-yield agriculture and long-distance trade. As the Marxist theorist Karl Kautsky observed over a century ago, “As long as any rural economy is self-sufficient it has to produce everything which it needs, irrespective of whether the soil is suitable or not. Grain has to be cultivated on infertile, stony and steeply sloping ground as well as on rich soils” (Kautsky [1899] 1988, 254). In time, however, increased commodity production and overseas trade removed the need “to carry on producing grain on unsuitable soils, and where circumstances were favorable it was taken off the land and replaced by other types of agricultural production” such as orchards, beef cattle, and dairy cows (254). Exporting food items from production locations where water is abundant to consumers living in regions where it isn’t similarly removes the need to drain surface waters and aquifers in the latter regions. International trade creates more affordable food, in greater quantities, with reduced environmental impact.

Unfortunately, locavores not only exhibit geographical short-sightedness, but they have also embraced the notion of “food miles” as a proxy for greenhouse gas emissions. Yet this otherwise handy equation is generally not supported by life cycle assessment (LCA) studies, which examine the environmental impacts associated with all the stages of a product’s life cycle, from raw material extraction to disposal of the finished product. As has been repeatedly and rigorously documented in numerous LCA studies, and others, the distance that food items travel from farms to consumers is meaningless in terms of the overall environmental impact of agricultural production, for several reasons (Cuéllar and Webber 2010; Desrochers and Shimizu 2008; Edward-Jones 2010; Saunders, Barber, and Taylor 2006). Among other problems, producing food typically requires (much) more energy than moving it around, especially when significant

amounts of heating and/or cold-protection technologies, irrigation water, fertilizers and pesticides, and other inputs are required to grow things in one region but not in another. Reducing food miles typically implies a greater environmental footprint through the use of additional resources of additional inputs in a less desirable location. While imperfect because of subsidies and barriers to trade, market prices factor in most of the relevant environmental trade-offs because of the additional costs incurred through the use of additional inputs. Another problem well documented in LCA studies is that the distance travelled matters less than the mode of transportation. Shipping things halfway around the earth on a container ship often has a smaller footprint per item carried than a short-distance trip by car to a grocery store to buy a small quantity of these items.

As these studies further indicate, advances in transportation and conservation technologies have historically increased the importation of perishable food items produced at different latitudes and decreased local food production and storage, in the process delivering greater freshness, lower costs, and reduced energy consumption. For instance, importing New Zealand apples in the northern hemisphere in April, rather than preserving local apples picked in September in cold storage for several months, delivers fresher items while reducing both storage costs (attributable to factors such as the need to maintain higher than normal CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations and to control temperatures to inhibit spoilage or prevent freezing) and losses to spoilage.

Reducing production and postharvest losses as well as consumers' food waste should be given a higher priority than food miles, for reduction in wastage means either reduced production or less hunger (Marsh and Bugusu 2007). By virtually any metric, residents of high-density urban areas drive, pollute, consume, and throw away much less than people living in greener surroundings (Owen 2009, 7; see also Glaeser 2011). Concentrating human population in urban centres and feeding them from the world's best agricultural locations is a more sensible way to lighten humanity's load on the planet than reducing food miles.

To the extent that it takes place in a competitive setting, modern agriculture is about getting more from less. That local food activists genuinely believe that doing the opposite is more sustainable is one of the greatest puzzles of the modern environmentalist movement.

#### MYTH #4: LOCAL FOOD INCREASES FOOD SECURITY

At the 1996 World Food Summit, “food security” was defined as existing “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life.”<sup>5</sup> While perennial worries like food shortages and famines are now confined to the least developed and more conflict-prone parts of our planet, food activists periodically blame “neoliberal globalization” for persistent problems such as malnutrition in less advanced economies and recent international food price spikes. Their preferred solutions typically revolve around managed trade, the reaffirmation of national sovereignty, and increased local food production (see Mousseau 2010). Taking their cue from environmentalist icons such as Rachel Carson, who argued that under “primitive agricultural conditions the farmer had few insect problems” and that those arose with the “devotion of immense acreage to a single crop” ([1962] 2002, 10), some activists also believe that because local food systems must, by their very nature, be more diversified, they are inherently more resilient to pests and diseases than export-oriented monocultures. In times of rapidly rising commodity prices, political turmoil, all-out war, or sudden decline in the demand for a particular crop, they add, vulnerable communities will be better served by nearby producers. Defenders of agribusiness and trade liberalization observe, to the contrary, that there is currently (and can only ever be) enough food to go around *because* of modern food production technologies and long-distance trade. Furthermore, the vast majority of today’s malnourished people are African and South Asian subsistence farmers and rural landless labourers who cannot readily access international food markets and are therefore unaffected by international price spikes (see, for discussion, FAO 2010; Paarlberg 2002).

Locavores also misunderstand the greater resiliency of a globalized food system over polycultures. Simply put, agricultural producers have always had to strike a balance between the greater resiliency, but lower productivity, of growing different types of food simultaneously and the greater productivity, but increased vulnerability, of focusing all of one’s energy on a single lucrative commodity. Subsistence farmers understandably elect to follow the former method, but, in practice, this amounts to putting all of a community’s agricultural eggs into *one geographical basket*. As the historical record convincingly demonstrates, this is always and



everywhere a recipe for disaster when societies are confronted by natural events (from droughts and floods to tornadoes and tsunamis) that destroy much in their path, highly contagious diseases that affect a broad range of animals, and generalist insect pests (see Ó Gráda 2009).

Among other problematic facts for their case, locavores forget that dominant high-yielding and disease- and stress-resistant varieties were bred from multiple and geographically distant cultivars; that, because of their lower productivity, polycultures can never create enough wealth to support the human brains and capital required to create better varieties and improve crop and animal protection (Kirchmann and Bergström 2008); and that, whether because of biological or economic problems, countless producers have historically switched from one type of monoculture to another.

In the end, the claim that monocultures are a serious threat to food security can only be sustained in the absence of broader economic development (which provides other income opportunities if local agricultural productions become problematic), long-distance trade (including the movement of agricultural commodities when there is a local food shortage), and labour mobility (which makes emigration a realistic possibility when other options fail). As the Scottish historian William Wilson Hunter observed in his nineteenth-century classic *Annals of Rural Bengal*, the best way to prevent famines is to promote “every measure that helps towards the extension of commerce and the growth of capital, every measure that increases the facilities of transport and distribution,” and “whatever tends to develop the natural resources of a country” so as “to render each part less dependent on itself” (1871, 55).

The truly food-insecure people today practice (mostly) self-reliant polycultures in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. When stricken by famine, their best hope of survival is that food produced in distant monocultures will eventually reach them. Subsistence farmers are not food insecure because of the globalized food supply chain, but rather because they are not part of it.

#### MYTH #5: LOCAVORISM IS TASTIER, MORE NUTRITIOUS, AND SAFER

The widespread claims that locavorism delivers tastier, more nutritious, and safer food than does agribusiness typically boils down to the fact that,

according to Michael Pollan, “food eaten closer to where it is grown will be fresher and require less processing, making it more nutritious” (2008, 68). In other words, food sold at farmers’ markets will have been picked in a more ripened state than items shipped over long distances, ensuring superior taste and nutritional value. Another alleged advantage of local food systems is that they can tap into older “heirloom” varieties developed for taste rather than for resistance to transportation and storage. Pollan further believes that a single factory “grinding 20 million hamburger patties in a week or washing 25 million servings of salad” is more susceptible to accidental contamination and that, obviously, “the bigger and more global the trade in food, the more vulnerable the system is to catastrophe” (68). While he acknowledges that small producers will always experience food safety problems, Pollan states that they will be “less catastrophic and easier to manage because local food is inherently more traceable and accountable” (68). His solution to these various perceived problems and shortcomings is decentralization, a strategy now hampered by “a tangle of regulations” that mandate “a huge investment in federally approved facilities” for such innocuous things as farmers smoking a ham and selling it to their neighbours (70).

As we will soon see, Pollan’s perspective is not backed up by either logic or the available evidence on food taste, nutrition, and safety. Crucially, too, it skips over the inadequate nutrition provided by all traditional local food systems, a topic that needs further elaboration before I address his other claims.

It is generally admitted that the diet of medieval Western European peasants was not only low in calories and proteins but also often lacking in lipids, calcium, and vitamins A, C, and D (Gies and Gies 2010, 96–98). Until the mid-1800s, most Europeans remained “in a chronic state of undernourishment,” while only elites could expect a daily intake of white bread and meat (Murton 2000, 1412). As late as 1940, vitamin deficiency diseases such as anemia, beriberi, and pellagra remained common in the United States (DeGregori 2002, 93). Indeed, as a result of nutritional inequalities, members from the richer groups in Western Europe and the United States were historically “taller and heavier than those from poorer backgrounds,” suffered less from chronic and debilitating diseases, lived longer, and were capable of harder and more sustained work (Floud et al. 2011, 1).

Gaps of this kind have now largely been closed in advanced economies: for instance, British aristocrats are now only two inches taller than average.

As the Marxist historian Jeffrey M. Pilcher observes of Britain, while there is much debate as to the actual timing, there is no controversy over the fact that “when nutrition did improve for common people, it came at the price of a growing distance between producer and consumer” (Pilcher 2006, 55). Dissecting the available data, the Nobel laureate economist Robert Fogel and his collaborators further found that “in most if not quite all parts of the world, the size, shape and longevity of the human body have changed more substantially, and much more rapidly, during the past three centuries than over many previous millennia,” a time period that coincides with the development of the globalized food supply chain (Floud et al. 2011, 5).

With these facts established, let us now get back to the locavores’ taste, nutrition, and safety rhetoric. The first problem for Pollan and other locavores is that their claim that freshness is key to superior taste is self-defeating. After all, barring massive investments in energy-guzzling greenhouses, fresh food is only available for short periods of time each year in temperate climates, whereas our globalized food supply chain delivers “permanent summertime” in the produce sections of supermarkets.

Second, the alleged nutritional benefits of freshly picked local produce depends more on its freshness than its geographical origins. For instance, a local item picked four days before it is sold at a nearby farmers’ market cannot be inherently superior to an identical item picked further away, but closer to the selling date, and preserved and transported in state-of-the-art conditions. Produce destined for freezing and canning is also typically picked in its best state, something to keep in mind because “depending on the commodity, freezing and canning processes may preserve nutrient value” better than refrigeration (Rickman, Barrett, and Bruhn 2007, 930). Interestingly, while some canned products (such as peaches) might be just as nutritious as fresh items, others (such as canned tomatoes) are actually more nutritious because the cooking process makes them more easily digestible (Durst and Weaver 2013). This being said, modern packaging and refrigeration technologies have also come a long way in terms of preserving nutritional values over time (Barrett and Lloyd 2012). In the end, there is no simple correlation between freshness and nutritional value.

Other practical considerations that undermine the alleged nutritional benefits of locavorism include the fact that the fortification of food items ranging from milk and butter to salt, flour, and pasta can be accomplished much more effectively and cheaply (especially if vitamins and minerals are

produced in large volumes) through large-scale facilities that serve a geographically significant customer base. Food imports can also be crucial for people who suffer from food allergies ranging from celiac disease to lactose intolerance, if adequate substitutes are not available locally. In the end, though, the real problem of the locavore's stance on nutrition is that while human consciousness might care about the geographical origins of food items, human bodies don't. From a physiological perspective, what matters about food is that it provides sufficient energy and nutrients. Because locavorism can only deliver a more expensive and monotonous diet, it cannot provide superior overall nutrition than the globalized food supply chain.

Finally, the locavores' main food safety claims also rest on a romantic view of the past and a tendency to disregard the available evidence. Arguing that a food system devised around a limited number of large-scale operations is more likely to diffuse pathogens than highly decentralized regional ones ignores the importance and risks associated with the completely natural pathogens that surround us. Far from being healthier, our remote (and highly decentralized) hunter-gatherer and farming ancestors constantly displayed symptoms like nausea, fever, vomiting, abdominal cramps, and diarrhea—or even died—after consuming prey or domestic animals, produce, and water that had been contaminated by one or several types of viruses, bacteria, parasites, toxins, metals, and prions (DeGregori 2002). Still today, virtually all food-borne diseases are not attributable to synthetic pesticides but to completely natural pathogens such as *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, *E. coli* O157, or norovirus. Fortunately, advances such as proper canning, pasteurization, refrigeration, water chlorination, and sanitary packaging, along with greater scientific understanding of problematic agents and vectors and the development of ever more efficient countermeasures, have helped address these problems and made our modern food system the safest in human history.<sup>6</sup> Apparently unbeknownst to locavores, economies of scale are significant in food safety and are better thought of as fortifications against roaming marauders than as hubs facilitating their movement. Humanity's food supply was never inherently "pure, natural, and safe"; it has only recently been corrupted by man-made chemicals and careless industrial practices, but it has always been afflicted by a large number of pathogens that have been significantly brought under control through the development of industrial-scale food safety technologies and procedures.

Large supermarkets are also inherently safer than temporary farmers' markets, which are typically poorly equipped outdoor structures whose traders have only received elementary food hygiene training. The warning of some health experts—that "given the restricted facilities at farmers' markets and the early phase of implementation of hygiene management systems by market traders, it may be precautionary to restrict the sale of farm products at farmers markets to those that are regarded as low-risk"—should be given more consideration than it usually is (Worsfold, Worsfold, and Griffith 2004, 109).

Perhaps in the end, the most compelling argument on behalf of modern advances is the fact that, as the food policy analyst Robert Paarlberg observes, approximately 700,000 people die every year from food- and water-borne diseases in Africa, where "many foods are still purchased in open-air markets (often uninspected, unpackaged, unlabeled, unrefrigerated, unpasteurized, and unwashed)," compared to only a few thousand in the agribusiness-dominated United States (Paarlberg 2010, 84).<sup>7</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Freedom to trade and technological advances in the production, processing, preservation, and transportation of food have long eroded the local foundations of humanity's food supply. Despite the benefits inherent in an increasingly globalized supply chain, the sense of lost community and increased political vulnerability that have unavoidably accompanied them have long triggered nostalgic and protectionist reactions.<sup>8</sup> Although now often couched in environmental terms, twenty-first-century local food rhetoric undoubtedly taps, to a large extent, into these more primal emotions.

Of course, most past governmental interventions in agricultural markets (from production subsidies and trade barriers to ethanol mandates and country of origin labelling) have traditionally appealed to the same. Far from promoting a radical departure from past practices, locavorism is, in the end, just a new spin on an old agricultural protectionist rhetorical package. As such, it can only deliver the trying times that our ancestors left behind and that today's subsistence farmers would escape if given opportunities to trade.

What enthusiastic locavores ultimately fail to understand is that their "innovative" ideas are up against regional advantages for certain types of

food production; economies of scale in food production, processing, transport, and safety; and the absolute necessity of large urban agglomerations reliant on long-distance trade for economic development. These unavoidable realities defeated very sophisticated local food production systems in the past. The sooner locavores redirect their efforts toward real agricultural problems—from costly production subsidies to international trade barriers—the better humanity and the planet will be. A necessary first step toward the creation of a better world is to stop communicating erroneous information and suggesting impractical and environmentally harmful solutions.

#### NOTES

- 1 The main thrust of “vitalism” is that living organisms fundamentally differ from nonliving entities because they contain some nonphysical element or are governed by different principles than inanimate things.
- 2 Canada, “Local Food Claims Interim Policy,” *Canadian Food Inspection Agency*, 2014, <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/food/labelling/food-labelling-for-industry/origin/local-food-claims/eng/1368135927256/1368136146333>.
- 3 Canada, “Apples,” *Canadian Food Inspection Agency*, 2011, <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/food/fresh-fruits-and-vegetables/quality-inspection/fruit-inspection-manuals/apples/eng/1303668473869/1303672406197>.
- 4 Lynda Altman, “Pros and Cons of Community Supported Agriculture: CSAs Are Not for Everyone,” 2011, Associated Content from Yahoo.com, formerly available at [http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/7734092/pros\\_and\\_cons\\_of\\_consumer\\_supported.html?cat=6](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/7734092/pros_and_cons_of_consumer_supported.html?cat=6).
- 5 Quoted in “Trade, Foreign Policy, Diplomacy, and Health: Food Security,” *World Health Organization*, 2015, <http://www.who.int/trade/glossary/story028/en/>.
- 6 For a more elaborate introduction to food-related illnesses, see Health Canada, “Food and Nutrition: Food-Related Illnesses,” 2013, <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/securit/ill-intox/index-eng.php>; and Public Health Agency of Canada, “Food Safety,” 2015, <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/fs-sa/index-eng.php>.
- 7 For the most recent food illness statistics, see Public Health Agency of Canada, “Estimates of Food-Borne Illness in Canada,” 2014, <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/efwd-emoaha/efbi-emoa-eng.php>; see also Thomas et al. (2013). While no mortality estimate is provided, it is reasonable to assume that it is proportionally similar to that of the United States.
- 8 Some of this history is covered in Desrochers and Shimizu (2012).

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# **Communication, Crisis, and Contaminated Meat**

## **A Tale of Two Food Scares**

*Charlene Elliott and Josh Greenberg*

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, approximately four million Canadians get sick from food-borne disease every year (Thomas et al. 2013). Although food poisoning can, in rare instances, lead to serious illness and death, most cases last only a short time and cause minor but uncomfortable symptoms. While many such bouts are sporadic in nature, some occur as part of outbreaks.

Along with disease epidemics, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and a host of everyday health risks, the risks and dangers associated with food have become a source of growing public attention and worry. This anxiety about food is partly due to greater media coverage of disease outbreaks related to contaminated food in recent years. News stories about food scares relating to *E. coli*, *Listeria*, or *Salmonella* poisonings in the consumer food chain are reported on an almost daily basis. In many cases, food scares emerge suddenly, commanding intense but short-term attention, and disappear from the public spotlight just as quickly. Yet the recurring nature of these risks and the expanding terrain of food-related activism have established food safety—and, especially, food danger—as an almost ordinary part of public discourse and everyday life.

When food becomes a vector for disease, it affords more than just grist for the media mill; outbreaks of food-borne illness also present political

and economic problems for the corporations, regulatory agencies, and governments that occupy different positions within the food industry. A recent report prepared for the Conference Board of Canada indicates that high profile outbreaks (and even fears of outbreaks) can significantly affect food sales, prompt high recall costs, and undermine public trust in the food system (Munro, Le Vallée, and Stuckey 2012). Outbreaks can also have broader political and economic consequences. Britain's BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) crisis in 1996 triggered a 40 percent fall in the consumption of beef in the United Kingdom and the complete loss of export markets worth an estimated US\$1.7 billion (Lloyd et al. 2006). A false botulism scare in August 2013 at the New Zealand company Fonterra, the world's largest dairy exporter and a major contributor to that country's economy, also precipitated the closure of export markets and an immediate drop in the value of the national dollar (Kitano and Chua 2013). By May 2013, the economic losses relating to the H7N9 bird flu outbreak in China that had begun only a few months earlier had already exceeded more than US\$6.5 billion ("H7N9" 2013).

While scholars may lament the "current fearmongering about food" (Levenstein 2012, viii), the problems associated with outbreaks of food-borne disease are very real. Not only do they threaten economic security; they also undermine relations of trust among food companies, governments, regulators, and the populations they serve. Increased incidents of food disease outbreaks illustrate the "well distributed awareness of risk" that typifies modern society (Giddens 1990, 125) and the ways in which the politics of the risk society are mediated in and through communication. This chapter examines two high-profile, recent Canadian food scares: the 2008 listeriosis outbreak originating at a Maple Leaf Foods plant in Ontario, which contributed to the deaths of twenty-three people and sickened many others, and the presence in 2012 of *E. coli* in meat products from the XL Foods processing facility in Alberta, which led to very few cases of human infection yet precipitated the largest meat recall in Canadian history. We explore how key actors in the food industry communicated during these outbreaks and how the different strategies for handling each contaminated meat crisis led to very different outcomes. Particular attention is given to the corporations that found themselves at the centre of these outbreaks. Briefly put, while the response of XL Foods worked to undermine consumer confidence, that of Maple Leaf Foods functioned to restore

it. Both food scares inform an understanding of what we call “conspicuous apologetics” in corporate crisis response and underscore the importance of communication in the handling—or mishandling—of risk.

#### RISK AND THE AGE OF ANXIETY

Risks seem to reside wherever we turn, from the food and water we consume to the air we breathe and the technologies we use in our daily lives. For many observers, the line between relatively minor health scares and warnings of catastrophic events is blurring. Add to this the constant flow of fear-inducing public health advice (don’t smoke, avoid salt, get a flu shot, etc.), and one begins to appreciate why some analysts have raised concerns about “risk fatigue” (see Eckersley 2001, for example).

However we define risky events—as significant or trivial, probable or remote, voluntary or imposed—they become meaningful to us primarily through communication: the words, symbols, images, and stories used to convey their significance. These stories are either amplified or attenuated by media coverage, making the mass media a central driver in the social construction of risk (Pidgeon, Kasperson, and Slovic 2003). Many food safety experts, policy makers, and even veteran health reporters lament the alarmist ways in which the mainstream mass media cover disease outbreaks and other public health risks. As Harvey Levenstein argues (chapter 18, this volume), our mainstream media has been central in promoting—and sometimes creating—food fears for well over a century. And although some risks may be more “real” than others, their scientific measurement is only part of the picture. Social perceptions of risk, and the responses of decision makers to these perceptions, are often as significant as the risks themselves.

Social theorists suggest that the anxiety we feel about risk is shaped principally by a global news media that continually reminds us that our world is dominated by crises and/or hazards (Giddens 1990; Beck 1992; Wilkinson 2001). This “age of anxiety” creates a dilemma for governments, corporations, and other institutional bodies that may need to communicate timely, valuable, and scientifically accurate information to Canadians about the safety risks associated with the food they eat. Risk *prevalence* and risk *perception* have thus emerged as major concerns for governments, prompting the development of an array of strategies to help bring these risks under control.

Effective communication is central to managing perceptions of and exposure to risk. In its ideal form, risk communication is an open and interactive process involving the exchange of information and opinions among governments, regulators, corporations, interest groups, different types of “experts,” and the public about the existence, nature, form, severity, and degree of acceptability of risks (United States, Department of Health and Human Services 2002). Early and complete disclosure is considered the most ethical course of action, because it recognizes the capacity of citizens to exercise reason and it promotes trust and cooperation between authorities and the publics they serve. Trust, it has been argued, makes it easier to live with risk (Hunt 2003, 169).

In practice, though, risk communication has not always followed the principles of openness, transparency, and interactivity. Originally conceived, risk communication was defined as the “unilateral sending of a message to the public about a particular risk. The message emanated in scientific and government circles and was designed to persuade” individuals to accept it as accurate and to act on expert recommendations (Valenti and Wilkins 1995). As a technique of public administration, risk communication arose during the 1970s in the context of efforts by the nuclear and chemical industries in the United States to counteract widespread concern about public safety and to shape favourable attitudes toward nuclear energy as a suitable alternative to hydrocarbons. The belief was that if people only had access to accurate, scientific information from trusted sources, they would act according to the advice of those in charge. At the same time, certain politicians and experts believe that if provided with information about risks to their health, people will panic, prompting officials to hide or refuse to disclose known risks. Both scenarios illustrate that risk communication often entails a decidedly technocratic approach in which knowledge about risk arises not through dialogue between authorities and the public but directly from the assessments of experts: epidemiologists, engineers, chemists, biostatisticians, and others (Greenberg 2012, 56–57). In the technocratic approach to risk communication, scientific methods trump public perceptions and experiences, as experts are called upon to make recommendations based on their knowledge of the subject and situation. Although this perspective is now unpopular among scholars for the paternalism often

embedded in expert-driven decision making, many stakeholders in fields like nuclear technology, biotechnology, and even public health still view risk communication as simply a matter of making technical information more easily understandable. The problem is thus not one of epistemology but of transmission and translation.

#### COMMUNICATION, RISK, AND TRUST

Regardless of whether we focus on risk as a matter of mobilizing knowledge claims or translating danger, the tensions between expert and lay understandings of risk have intensified over time. Most Western nations have seen a steady erosion in public trust toward government, industry, and regulatory bodies. Data reported in the 2012 Edelman Trust Barometer illustrate the fragility and decline of public trust in government officials, regulatory agencies and industry. Most Canadians (75%) agree with the statement that it's important for government to listen to citizen needs and feedback when making decisions, yet only 16 percent claim to believe that their governments actually listen to them. Similarly, 74 percent of those polled affirmed that it's important for government to communicate frequently and honestly, yet only 16 percent believe that government routinely does so. Almost half (46%) of respondents reported that they do not trust government at all to tell the truth about anything.<sup>1</sup>

Canadians lack trust in government and industry for various reasons. As noted, our modern mediascape has amplified our perceptions of risk by producing a steady supply of stories about health scares, scandals, and regulatory mismanagement. There also remain ongoing cases of public health risk in which officials violate norms of ethical risk communication—that is, they choose to not disclose, out of worry about “public panic” (see, for example, Muise 2013). Simultaneously, the increase in news reporting about risk (not to mention the rise of social media and internet use) has expanded public access to multiple viewpoints that challenge the perspectives of authorities, leading to a pluralization of opinion and competing claims of expertise. Given the number and size of public health scares and risk communication failures reported—including the “mad cow” crisis in Europe, Britain, and Canada; the Walkerton, Ontario, *E. coli* disaster; the *Listeria* linked to Maple Leaf Foods; and the *E. coli* contaminated beef from

XL Foods—it is understandable why our impersonal trust in expert systems may stand on rocky ground (Luhmann 1988).

Outbreaks of food-borne disease often create the space for raising broader concerns about business practices or policy. As we will discuss, such questions and concerns relate to the complex notion of “ownership” that pertains both to the chain of causality that culminates in harmful events and in the distribution of responsibility for them (Knight and Roper 2011). At what point in the food chain did the problem arise? Who is to blame for the problem, and who is responsible for ensuring that it does not reoccur? Most significantly, how does the handling of the crisis—in terms of taking ownership and framing accountability—work to mitigate public concern? In addressing these questions, we see that crises and risks are about more than just the presence of circumstances indicating that something may be wrong. Fundamentally, they are about the social relations of definition (Beck 1992) through which meanings of outbreaks arise.

#### CANADA’S LARGEST FOOD RECALL: *E. COLI* AND THE XL FOODS PLANT

On Monday, 4 September 2012, routine testing by the USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service found *E. coli* in meat produced at the XL Foods Plant in Brooks, Alberta. As is required in cases such as this, American authorities destroyed the product in the United States and alerted Canadian officials to the results. Coincidentally, on the same day, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) detected *E. coli* in a separate XL Foods product and initiated an investigation. CFIA determined that a recall was unnecessary, however, because none of the tested meat ever made it to market and public health was thus not technically ‘at risk.’

The next day, the Lees family in Edmonton hosted a barbecue, grilling steaks purchased from their local Costco store. Within hours, several diners experienced serious gastrointestinal pain that would later be diagnosed as food poisoning. Meanwhile, as the CFIA investigation continued, a “corrective action request” was issued to XL Foods. The company took four days to respond, all the while continuing to process and package meat for market. On 12 September, the CFIA found more *E. coli* and quietly honoured the US request to close the border to American shipments from XL Foods (Wingrove 2012a).



After nearly two weeks of investigation, CFIA finally went public on 16 September, reporting that deficient test sampling and data analysis, and poor safety controls were responsible for the *E. coli* contamination. CFIA issued a public alert, warning consumers, distributors, and food service establishments to avoid eating, selling, or serving ground beef products from the XL Foods plant. Several more warnings were issued to the company between 16 and 25 September, and CFIA posted numerous food safety alerts on its website.<sup>2</sup>

On 26 September, food safety and public health authorities in Canada and the United States began discussions on what they were now officially labelling an outbreak. Canadians were advised to take their meat back to the grocery store and to ask whether it had been included in the recall. Risk messaging also stressed the importance of cooking beef to a temperature greater than 71°C to kill the bacterium. As details of the context behind the outbreak emerged, news reports revealed that in the months leading up to the *E. coli* outbreak, XL Foods had been issued six separate corrective action requests for failing to sanitize cutting tools and workspaces, improper labelling, mixing edible and inedible parts of carcasses, and failing to maintain the building to prevent condensation from pipes repeatedly dripping onto carcasses on the cutting room floor. On 27 September, XL Foods had its licence officially revoked for failing to implement proper food safety controls (CBC News 2013a).

As the recall numbers continued to grow, the news narrative shifted from emphasizing the cause of the outbreak to focusing on its effects. On 28 September, CBC's flagship television news program, *The National*, carried the story of five-year-old Elijah Lees, whose mother detailed her anguish in finding her son crying in pain in the middle of the night, lying in a pool of his own bloody diarrhea. Shortly thereafter, the Lees family and their guests mounted a class action lawsuit against XL Foods. Eventually, the suit would include seventy-five claimants from across Canada seeking damages of \$17 million. The day the lawsuit was reported, Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz attended a luncheon in his Saskatchewan riding hosted by the North Battleford Rotary Club, where he downplayed the risk of *E. coli*, reassured those in attendance that the food system was safe, and expressed his "absolute confidence" in Canadian beef. Ritz remarked, "We had some great Canadian beef for lunch. I don't know where it came from; I don't care. I know it's good, I know it's safe. You just have to handle it

and cook it properly” (quoted in Cairns 2012). The following day, Ritz and CFIA president George Da Pont held a joint news conference at XL Foods, where they continued to offer reassurances before being whisked away by a government communications staffer when the questions became increasingly pointed (Payton 2012).<sup>3</sup>

As recall notices expanded, reporters, political opponents, and pundits increasingly expressed their bewilderment at the casual response of different levels of government—and particularly of the corporation at the heart of the crisis. Concerned about public confidence in the safety of Alberta beef, then premier Alison Redford went on television to encourage Albertans to continue supporting its beef industry, lauding its quality and safety record. Responding to a reporter, she said, “I am a mother, and I have a daughter, and I will tell you that from the start of this, my daughter has eaten beef every day” (quoted in “Hamburger” 2012). By this time, over 1,100 beef products had been recalled from fifty Canadian retailers (Wingrove 2012b)—a large portion of the 1,800 products that would ultimately be removed from the Canadian and American marketplace (Lewis, Corriveau, and Osborne 2013). While Premier Redford acknowledged the existence of “one particular processor that’s having some regulatory challenges at the moment,” her core message was that Alberta beef is “a fantastic product.” She affirmed: “We have to make sure that Albertans and Canadians understand that this is a product they can have confidence in” (quoted in Wingrove 2012b). Redford’s message was about ensuring Canadian “understanding” about Alberta’s quality beef and not about the four thousand tonnes of beef and beef products that were ultimately recalled from Canada and abroad (Lewis, Corriveau, and Osborne 2013). Her comments came mere weeks before Canadians were awash with television and media images of over five hundred tonnes of frozen beef being dumped into a landfill in Brooks, Alberta (CBC News 2012).

Memos obtained by CTV News through access to information requests during the height of the crisis revealed that beef inspectors at XL had been ordered to turn a blind eye to fecal and intestinal contamination on animal carcasses being processed for sale to Canadians. Meat being shipped to Japan, however, was given closer scrutiny, a revelation that caused an uproar in the House of Commons and across the media (CTV News 2012).

XL Foods was notably absent as a key source of public information during the most intense periods of the meat scare. It failed to issue even a single public statement about the mounting recall notices, the illnesses associated with its product, or the concern about the safety of the food produced in its processing plant. Finally, after a full month of silence, XL Foods joined the conversation—loosely put—by releasing a written statement and a pre-recorded phone message by an unidentified female. The 4 October 2012 communication affirmed, in part: “We believed XL Foods was a leader in the beef processing industry, with our food safety protocols, but we have now learned that it is not enough. We take full responsibility for our plant operations, and the food it produces, which is consumed by Canadians from coast to coast” (“Read” 2012). While the statement also made claims to implement new quality-control measures, it was a case of too-little-too-late in terms of damage control. Not a single XL Foods executive would appear publicly until 11 October 2012, when co-CEO Brian Nilsson finally issued an apology in an exclusive interview with Postmedia reporter Sarah Schmidt (2012).

By the end of the XL Foods recall, meat contaminated with *E. coli* had made eighteen people ill. Roughly four thousand tonnes of beef and beef products were destroyed—a minimum of twelve thousand head of cattle—and numerous people, most of them migrant workers at the processing plant, had been laid off (Lewis, Corriveau, and Usborne 2013). An Ipsos study reported heightened worry among Canadians about food safety: 80 percent of those surveyed expressed their concern about the safety of the food they eat, with Albertans reporting the highest levels of concern. Ipsos also found that trust in meat products, in particular, was plummeting: 24 percent of respondents indicated that they “do not trust” the safety of meat products sold in Canada at all, an increase of 9 percent over 2010 (Ipsos 2012). This shaken trust stemmed, in part, from the multiple public relations gaffes that occurred at various points along the entire food system. As a later, independent review of the XL beef recall observed, the crisis was characterized by “communication gaps” and mishandlings at points along the entire food system chain, leading to a “confused and worried” public. This independent review also specifically criticized the communication strategy that XL Foods chose. Among other things, the company’s failure

to “present a spokesperson reflected poorly on its corporate responsibility” (Lewis, Corriveau, and Osborne 2013). Failing to reach out to consumers with an identifiable spokesperson, in fact, had even further repercussions, as we shall discuss shortly.

Part of the reason XL Foods’ approach in its communication was so surprising is that it didn’t have to be this way. It might even be considered a textbook case of what *not* to do—even though the company’s response joins a long list of organizations that have faced crisis situations by keeping silent and maintaining a position of minimal public visibility (Greenberg and Elliott 2009; Knight and Greenberg 2002). Rather than putting up a wall of silence and failing to communicate with Canadians, XL Foods might have followed the path of absolute accountability exhibited by Maple Leaf Foods just a few years earlier. We briefly review the handling of the Maple Leaf Foods crisis, then illustrate how the radically different approaches taken by these companies (during these respective outbreaks) speak to three core issues: how communication can work to shift the balance of perception between risk and harm, how speakers—and silences—work to reorient the focus of blame, and how the responses of Maple Leaf Foods and XL Foods can be understood to demonstrate “guilt” versus “shame,” respectively. We suggest that the guilt-informed response worked to re-establish trust in the company (and prompt forgiveness), while the shame-based response functioned in the exact opposite fashion.

#### A COLD-CUT CRISIS: *LISTERIA* AND MAPLE LEAF FOODS

Like XL Foods, Maple Leaf Foods was also at the heart of one of the worst cases of food contamination in Canadian history. It started on 17 August 2008, when CFIA and Maple Leaf Foods issued a “health hazard alert” warning the public not to consume Sure Slice brand roast beef and corned beef due to the risk of *Listeria* contamination. Over two hundred Maple Leaf products from its Toronto meat-processing facility were recalled, but not in time to prevent twenty-three deaths, serious illness in fifty-seven people, and a class-action lawsuit with more than five thousand complainants. Economic costs incurred by the company exceeded \$50 million (Greenberg and Elliott 2009, 190).

This case is significant for various reasons, not least of which is how Maple Leaf Foods communicated in its response. Rather than denying

responsibility or shifting blame, the company adopted a strategy of high visibility. Almost immediately following news of the first death, president and CEO Michael H. McCain brought a camera crew to his office, where he recorded a statement that would later air on all major broadcast media and gain wide circulation on YouTube. In this statement, McCain confirmed that *Listeria* had been found in some of the company's products, explained what *Listeria* was, expressed deep concern for what had happened, and apologized unreservedly to those whose lives had been affected. Importantly, he affirmed that Maple Leaf would assume full responsibility for the situation and rejected accusations that it had happened because of failed government regulation. McCain's apology was heralded in the mainstream media as a "bold, breathtaking communications play" (quoted in Greenberg and Elliott 2009, 190).<sup>4</sup> So effective was the company's response to this crisis that the Canadian Press (2009) named McCain the top business newsmaker of 2008.

#### CRISIS AND CONSPICUOUS APOLOGETICS

McCain's apology worked precisely because there appeared to be no "communications play" in motion—just sympathy, regret, and the promise to do better. As a concerned McCain explained in his initial TV spot:

When *Listeria* was discovered in the product, we launched immediate recalls to get it off the shelf. Then we shut the plant down. Tragically, our products have been linked to illnesses and loss of life. To Canadians who are ill and to the families who have lost loved ones, I offer my deepest sympathies. Words cannot begin to express our sadness for your pain. . . .

But this week, our best efforts failed and we are deeply sorry. This is the toughest situation we have faced in a hundred years as a company. We know this has shaken your confidence in us; I commit to you that our actions are guided by putting your interests first.<sup>5</sup>

McCain's conspicuous apology was not the company's only gesture of remorse and expression of its commitment to doing better. Maple Leaf Foods invited a news camera crew in to tour the facilities so that Canadians could see the inner workings and conditions of the plant. As the crisis unfolded, McCain apologized in press conferences, in newspaper and television advertisements, and on the corporate website. Even when media coverage revealed that total direct costs of the product recall would reach \$30 million

and that class-action lawsuits were being mounted against the company, McCain firmly announced, “Knowing there’s a desire to assign blame, I want to reiterate that the buck stops right here” (quoted in Shaw 2008, 5).

Maple Leaf Foods handling of the crisis is remarkable because it embodies what we call a “conspicuous apologetics,” which is characterized by speed (that is, an immediate response), accountability without equivocation, transparency, and a bareheaded bow by the person at the top (Greenberg and Elliott 2009, 198).<sup>6</sup> Key to conspicuous apologetics is its conspicuousness. Not of the “blink and you missed it” variety, a conspicuous apologetics requires visibility across various platforms and also extends across time, with frequent, regular updates—precisely what transpired in the *Listeria* outbreak. As a result of this approach, the company was viewed as trustworthy. Reporters lauded McCain’s “candour” and brave choice not to scurry “behind spin doctors and legal eagles,” many online reader postings (related to coverage of the crisis) expressed empathy and support for the company, and the hotline that Maple Leaf’s Consumer Affairs department set up to address customer concerns and queries received many calls of support. Indeed, three separate national surveys (conducted between August 2008 and January 2009) revealed that Canadians who had viewed McCain’s “apologies” had a significantly higher “good opinion ranking” (74%) of the company than those who had not (63%) (Flynn 2009). Although Maple Leaf stock took a hit in the six months following the outbreak, by October 2009 its value had rebounded (Owram 2009). Perhaps even more telling is that a major public opinion study in 2010 conducted by Decima for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency showed that public trust and confidence in the food system had not been significantly affected by the listeriosis outbreak (Decima Research 2010). Although Canadians recognized the food safety system was still vulnerable to failure, they expressed a “significant level of confidence” that it works very well most of the time (ibid, 4).

#### KEY ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS IN XL FOODS AND MAPLE LEAF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

What can we take from these two significant incidents of food-borne disease outbreak? Both had major social, economic, and regulatory impacts. The listeriosis case “shook the nation and prompted the federal government

to commission an independent investigative review of Canada's food safety system." Yet, only four years later, Canadians "found themselves asking how this could have happened once again" (Lewis, Corriveau, and Osborne 2013). In both instances, media coverage began quietly but picked up with intensity. Maple Leaf Food Foods' case dominated headlines and was the lead story in televised news broadcasts for nearly two weeks. The outbreak was equivalent to a "signal crime" that opened a window into media investigations into Canada's food industry—from substandard safety regulations, to the dangers of eating mass-produced foods, to the question of whether food produced by big conglomerates was of better or lesser quality than that produced by small family farms.<sup>7</sup> All of these narratives would be replayed in the XL Foods case—with microscope images of bacteria splashed across the front of at least one national newspaper and broadcasts featuring unsettling images of hazmat-suited disease detectives searching for traces of contamination. Media coverage, in both cases, was overwhelming enough to have produced significant food-related anxiety, political conflict, and changes in consumption practices across the country. Yet when it comes to the corporate communication around each crisis, the similarities stop short.

### *Shifting the Balance of Perception Between Risk and Harm*

Risk communication experts often observe that the risks that upset people and the risks that harm them are different and that perceived risks are often more powerful than "real" ones (Sandman, n.d.). In both of the food cases examined here, risks were present, but the objective risk from the Maple Leaf Foods outbreak was greater: twenty-three people died, fifty-seven became seriously ill. In the XL Foods case, eighteen people became sick and nobody died. With XL Foods, over four thousand tonnes of beef and beef products were destroyed, with *untainted* product—what the independent review described as "thousands of pounds of wasted beef"—also being sent to landfill owing to public concern (Lewis, Corriveau and Osborne 2013). That these companies had very different public profiles is also significant: whereas Maple Leaf Foods was a very well-known consumer brand, few people had ever heard of XL Foods before the outbreak (given that it is a meat-packing facility with no retail presence in Canada). Nevertheless, at the time of the outbreak, XL was the second-largest beef processor in Canada: when the Brooks, Alberta, facility was sold to the

Nilsson brothers by Tyson Foods in 2009, it was reportedly generating US\$1.3 billion in annual sales (McClure 2012).

With the Maple Leaf Foods outbreak, the listeriosis was in the actual product, and the contaminated products could not be made safe. Yet the *E. coli* in the XL Foods product could be killed if cooked to proper internal temperatures. This does not, in any way, dismiss or minimize the problems with XL's meat processing and practices. The point, however, speaks to Sandman's notion that *the risks that upset people and the risks that harm them are different*. The actual risk from listeriosis was greater, yet Maple Leaf Foods effectively managed public upset by putting its CEO front and centre, by acknowledging public concern, and by taking responsibility. With XL Foods, the risk was much lower (nobody died, and meat cooked to the proper internal temperature would be safe) yet the company made no apparent effort to manage public worry or outrage at all. Despite the greater risk of "harm" in the Maple Leaf Foods case, McCain's straightforward apology and acceptance of responsibility restored consumer confidence and helped the company to rebound. The risk of "harm" in the XL Foods incident was lower, but the company's prolonged silence, followed by a prerecorded statement (which could be considered dismissive), only served to amplify consumers' outrage and fears about food safety. The different communication practices prompted a significant difference in public response and confidence in the system, illustrating how the balance of perception between risk and harm can be shifted.

### *Speakers—and Silences—Work to Reorient the Focus of Blame*

A second take-away point in this tale of two food scares pertains to silences and the failures of communication. One important communication lesson is that *if you don't seize control of the message, someone else will*. In the Maple Leaf Foods case, CEO Michael McCain took firm hold and ownership of the message, affirming that—regardless of any critiques of the regulatory system and the broader political environment—"the buck stops here." The message was one of responsibility, remorse, and commitment to Canadians. And, as earlier discussed with regard to the communication of risk, early disclosure promotes trust. McCain's conspicuous apologetics communicated that he was present, concerned, and listening. The media spotlight focused on the crisis, yet the fact that the Canadian Press recognized McCain as the top "business newsmaker" of 2008 speaks to



his visibility during this time (Canadian Press 2009). XL Foods protracted silence, in contrast, meant that reporters had to find other communication angles, including seeking out victims and disgruntled factory workers. Equally memorable were the televised images of journalists standing outside the chained gates of the XL Foods plant seeking information on the crisis, with upper management refusing to come out. Lack of visibility does not absolve one of accountability. (Indeed, in the public perception, it may even solidify blame.)

Both sides mobilized the image of individual suffering, yet with the listeriosis scare, the undeniable distress of McCain as CEO joined with that of others who had been harmed. We suggest that this made his commitment to ensure food safety and to “make things right” more trustworthy—and more worthy of forgiveness. In contrast, much media coverage of the XL Foods case showed the victimized (including innocent children, in five-year-old Elijah Lees) on their own, without any trace (or face) of the company. *Speakers, and silences, thus work to reorient the focus of blame.* It should be added that an interesting effect of McCain’s conspicuous apologetics was to generate sympathy for the CEO and company. Because no time or energy was required to make Maple Leaf Foods accept responsibility and because the apology was purportedly about principles and people (not profit), the company’s treatment of the tragedy was seemingly beyond reproach. Sympathy directed toward the company, interestingly, meant there was a parallel string of accusations of who *else* was to blame. Unions representing meat inspectors and other critics linked the outbreak to government cutbacks to meat-inspection services, politicians from opposition parties blamed the government for its policy of industry deregulation, and industry analysts queried whether food processing was becoming less safe (Schmidt 2008, for example). Most certainly, the profusion of blame was heightened because the listeriosis outbreak occurred during the 2008 federal election campaign. Opposition parties used the crisis to point to failures in political leadership and the government’s apparent agenda to transfer oversight of meat inspection from the state to industry (Greenberg and Elliott 2009, 199).

### *Guilt Versus Shame: Communication and the Re-establishment of Trust*

Conceptually, the two approaches could be understood to demonstrate the ways in which “guilt” and “shame” play out in corporate responses to

crisis and risk. Recent theoretical understandings of guilt and shame suggest that each emotion can “arise in response to a broad range of failures” and that both are “as likely to occur in public contexts” (Tangney 2000, 40). Yet guilt has been understood as a more internally oriented response (the perpetrator feels bad about his or her specific behaviour) and shame as more externally oriented (the perpetrator is concerned about how others will perceive him or her because of that behaviour). Guilt and shame, as separate affective experiences, have distinct implications for our relationships with others. It has been suggested that guilt “typically motivates reparative behavior: confessing, apologizing, or somehow undoing the harm that was done” and that it reflects the ability to empathize with others (40). It is viewed as a prosocial stance. Shame, in contrast, “typically leads to attempts to deny, hide, or escape” (41). Admittedly, this framework is highly simplistic, and debates in the fields of psychology, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology have raised questions about the definitions, criteria, and affective states of guilt and shame (see Elison 2005; Oppenheim 2008; Teroni and Brunn 2011; Teroni and Deonna 2008). Yet, for our purposes, this contrast between guilt and shame is heuristically useful because it underscores the different corporate communication responses of Maple Leaf Foods and XL Foods to their respective food safety failures. Maple Leaf Foods, represented by McCain, embodied the internally oriented response of guilt to its failure, with apologies, empathy, and the attempt to redress. XL Foods embodied the externally oriented response of shame to its food safety failure, with its silence indicating a type of “hiding.” XL Foods prerecorded message with no identifiable public face represented a denial of personal responsibility. Maple Leaf’s guilt-informed response worked to re-establish public trust in the company and to prompt forgiveness, while XL Foods shame-based response had the opposite effect. Perhaps we are more willing to absolve someone of guilt than of shame. But it is also interesting to raise another point of consideration in these two meat scares. If the risk of harm is higher for a particular behaviour (as it was with Maple Leaf Foods), do we do more to lessen the risk of public upset (by employing the guilt-informed communication response)? Conversely, if the risk of harm is lower (as it was with XL Foods), do we expend less effort to lessen the risk of upset (and use instead the shame-informed communication response)?

## CONCLUSION

Communicating risk is a delicate business, particularly when it extends to the foods we put in our bodies. This tale of two food scares illustrates the central role of communication in the narratives of contaminated-meat crises. These two significant events jarred Canadians' confidence in the food system. The events also illustrated how different approaches for handling crisis can lead to different outcomes. Whereas XL Foods was invisible and unaccountable, Maple Leaf Foods was transparent and contrite. Maple Leaf Foods fixed the problems, compensated its victims, and understood that managing risk *and* outrage are critically important. As a result, the company emerged with its image and brand relatively intact—and also worked to restore consumer confidence. As the XL Foods case unfolded four years later, it was constantly subjected to comparisons with Maple Leaf Foods but displayed no similarities in terms of its communication strategies. As the independent review of the XL Foods beef recall affirmed, “the rolling recalls, numerous public health hazard alerts, and extensive media coverage all created alarm and confusion among consumers as a whole” (Lewis, Corriveau, and Osborne 2013). Public confidence in both the beef industry and Canada's food safety system as a whole was eroded not just because *E. coli* was detected in meat products but because of the complete failure of key players in the food industry to properly acknowledge the dynamics of the communicative environment in which health risks play out.

## NOTES

- 1 2012 *Edelman Trust Barometer: Canada and Global Results*, <http://www.slideshare.net/EdelmanTO/2012-edelman-trust-barometer-canada-and-global-results>, slides 16, 20.
- 2 For a descriptive timeline of the events, see “XL Foods Beef Recall Timeline,” *CTV News*, 2015, <http://www.ctvnews.ca/health/xlbeef>.
- 3 Note that the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), which is responsible for leading communications during national food-borne emergencies, was almost invisible during the entire XL Foods scare. Rather than the country's chief medical officer of health, it was the minister responsible for the food industry who took the lead in much public communication. While an independent report concluded that interagency

- communication between the CFIA, ministry of Health, and PHAC “was open and constructive” (Lewis, Corriveau, and Osborne 2013), government communication with the public was generally confusing and inconsistent.
- 4 This assessment appeared in “Touchdowns and Fumbles: The Canadian McCain,” *Veritas Communications*, 5 September 2008, formerly available at <http://www.touchdownsandfumbles.com>.
  - 5 *Maple Leaf Foods Apology*, YouTube video, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIsN5AkJ1AI>. Unless otherwise noted, the details of the communication handling of the Maple Leaf listeriosis case in this section are drawn from Greenberg and Elliott (2009).
  - 6 The “bareheaded bow” is what Karl Meyer classifies as the highest, and least common, act of contrition, in which the “lords of power bow their heads” in a gesture that is far removed from the typical rhetoric of “mistakes were made” or the search for scapegoats (2004, 110).
  - 7 Signal crimes are incidents of antisocial behaviour that act as a “signal” to a community that its members are at risk. Such incidents often lead to intensified forms of control. Key to the success of certain incidents signalling community risk is the role of mass media and the use of specific rhetorical techniques that articulate imminent threat or harm (see Innes 2004).

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## Canaries in the Supermarket

### Moral Panic, Food Marketing and Children's Eating

*Stephen Kline*

As many of this book's authors have noted, the emergence of "foodie" culture has received considerable attention in the media in recent years. Yet, along with the public attention to celebrity chefs and the virtues of "slow food" cooking, the first decade of the new millennium media also witnessed the onset of a major public debate about the risks of eating too much of the wrong foods. From organic farming and gluten free diets to GMO labelling and paleolithic grains, eating right has become integral to the ideals of healthy living (see, for example, Lien 2004; Pollan 2013).

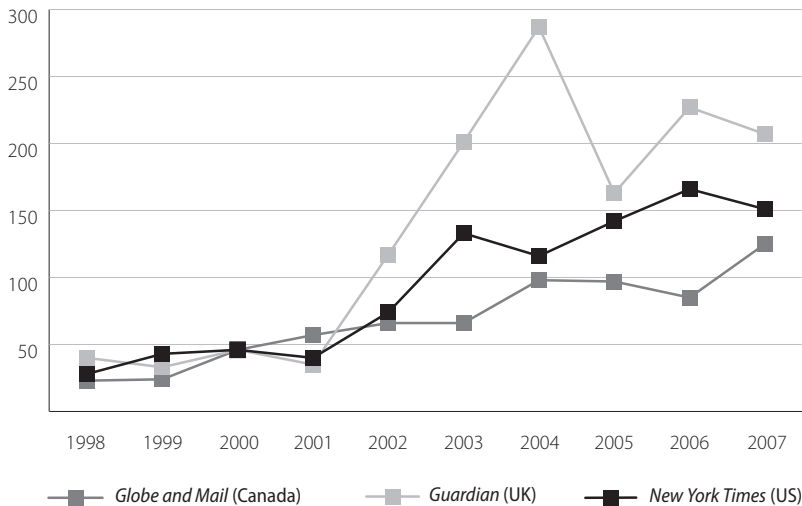
In 2000, the US National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) revealed a dramatic increase in the prevalence of obesity. That same year, the World Health Organization (WHO) proclaimed that excessive weight gain was associated with the rising burden of global illness (WHO 2000). With roughly 65 percent of the adult population in the United States now classified as overweight or obese (CDC 2003, 2) population weight gain augured broader social and political ills.<sup>1</sup> The overweight body—frequently depicted in news stories about obesity (Heuer, McClure, and Puhl 2011)—began to stand as the symbol of a looming crisis in health care. By 2004, newspapers in Canada, as in the United States and the United Kingdom, were focusing more on the risk factors associated with obesity

than on the risks of smoking, making fast food into the new tobacco and fat kids into the canaries in the millennial supermarkets.<sup>2</sup>

My intent in this chapter is to explore how the medicalization of the adipose child's body has helped to ignite public debates in Canada about what children eat and why they eat it. I begin with the moral panic about children's weight gain, by analyzing the dynamic that distorted communication of scientific evidence which in turn served to galvanize anxieties about children's vulnerable status as consumers in a market society. I go on to examine the questions surrounding Canadian food advertising targeted at children by pointing not only to the systematic nutritional bias of the "TV diet"—that is, the diet promoted through television—but also to the implicit embedding of unhealthy eating behaviours in the visualization of contemporary lifestyle practices. I then argue that this media-driven panic about "globesity" provides exemplary terrain on which to explore the impact of the competing discourses of health advocacy and the food industry on Canadian families' domestic dialogues regarding children's screen use, diet, and discretionary consumption. In the chapter, I hope to explain why familial discussions of healthy living have increasingly focused on what we feed our kids.

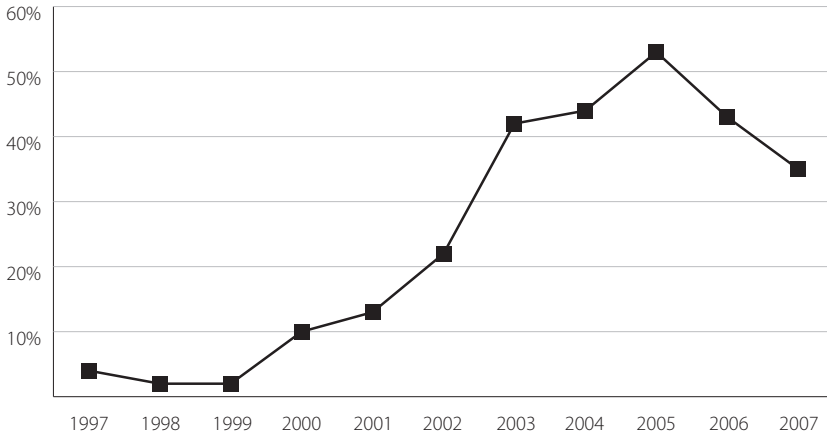
#### DISTORTED COMMUNICATION ABOUT LIFESTYLE RISKS

As figure 16.1 illustrates, starting around 2001, stories about the risks of obesity began to appear with increasing frequency in newspapers in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. In its 2000 report on obesity worldwide, the WHO pointed a finger at the food industry for its role in encouraging the consumption of foods high in sugar and fat, and it went on to emphasize the multiple perils of obesity in its 2002 report on world health, *Reducing Risks, Promoting Healthy Life* (WHO 2002). Journalists picked up on these concerns, fomenting anxiety by declaring that the problem of excess weight was rising fastest in pediatric populations, a trend observed first in the United Kingdom and then around the world. The moral panic about children's changing body morphology was also stimulated by growing evidence from the US medical community that heavy TV watching was a risk factor in the obesogenic family by exposing children to food marketing (Dietz 1991; Robinson 2000).

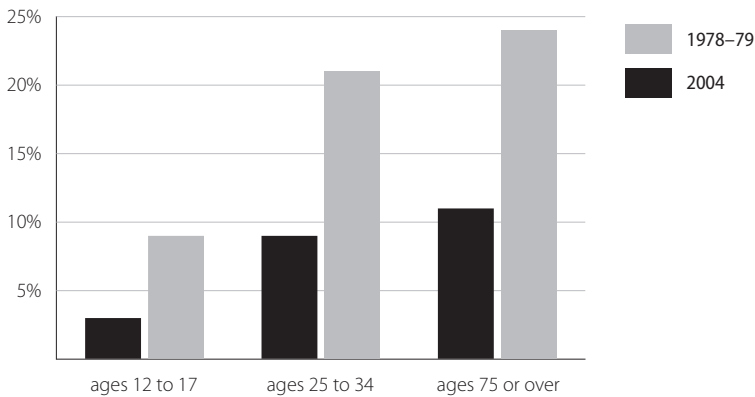


**Figure 16.1** Reporting of obesity in the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and the *Globe and Mail*, 1998–2007.

In the United States, ongoing monitoring of BMI (body mass index) showed that, between 1980 and 2000, the rates of obesity among children and adolescents had more than doubled, rising from 5.5 percent (1980) to 13.9 percent (2000), and then climbed even further, to a high of 17.1 percent in 2004 (Fryar, Carroll, and Odgen 2012, table 1). Children’s advocacy groups, such as the Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood, complained loudly that parents were simply unable to deal with the pressures of slick fast-food marketing campaigns (Linn 2004). In their public statements, health advocates highlighted this “at risk” and developmentally vulnerable group, attributing weight gain in childhood mostly to fast-food marketing. Their concerns were paralleled by a dramatic rise in the number of newspaper stories about childhood obesity. As a review of newspaper coverage of the obesity “epidemic” revealed, the proportion of stories that pertained specifically to childhood obesity skyrocketed from only 2 percent in 1999 to 10 percent in 2000 and then continued to grow rapidly, peaking in 2005 at 53 percent (see figure 16.2), with most of these stories linking weight gain to fast-food and soft drink consumption.



**Figure 16.2** Child obesity stories as a percentage of all obesity stories in the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and the *Globe and Mail*, collectively.



**Figure 16.3** Changes in the prevalence of obesity among adolescents, younger adults, and seniors. Source: Statistics Canada (2005).

Yet, at least in Canada, it was primarily among adult populations that the incidence of obesity had most clearly escalated over time. Although the 2004 Canadian Community Health Survey did find that the obesity rate among children overall (ages 2 to 17) had increased, from 3 percent in 1978-79 to 8 percent in 2004, the data showed that “among adults, the

growth in obesity was even more dramatic,” with the rate rising from 14 percent in 1978–79 to 23 percent in 2004 (Statistics Canada 2005). The most striking increases were seen among adolescents, younger adults, and the elderly (see figure 16.3). In contrast, “the proportion of children aged two to five who were either overweight or obese remained virtually unchanged from 1978 to 2004” (Statistics Canada 2005). In other words, among younger children, weight gain was less pronounced—and, while adolescents had been gaining weight, so, most definitely, had adults. As the report noted, overweight or obesity in adolescence often carries over into adulthood, which further suggests that, if there was cause for alarm, attention should focus more on the teenage population.

A discourse analysis of the Canadian news coverage from 1997 and 2007 indicated that three biases torqued the debates in the press about children’s weight gain, with clear implications for public health policy. The first consisted in the tendency among both journalists and health advocates to frame the phenomenon of long-term population weight gain as a health “epidemic” exemplified by childhood obesity, thereby unduly magnifying concerns about population weight gain in childhood. Despite repeated statements in the press that the prevalence of obesity was rising fastest in child populations, this conclusion was not consonant with the ongoing scientific studies, which indicated that growth in the obesity rate among children and adolescents had in fact levelled off. In Canada, the authors of a report based on the 2009–11 Canadian Health Measures Survey noted that, since 2004, “no significant differences were observed in the estimates of overweight and obesity among children and adolescents” (Roberts et al. 2012, 6; see table 16.1), and a similar pattern was visible in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Evidence thus existed to suggest that public anxieties about children’s changing weight status were disproportionate to the magnitude of the associated risks. Describing small, long-term incremental changes in body morphology as an “epidemic” might be good publicity, but it is bad health policy. Moreover, by conflating obesity in children with the long-term risk of overweight, the medical world stigmatized marginal weight gain in teen populations with significant consequences for their mental health (Kline 2015), while ignoring well-established obesogenic risk factors that clearly point to changing lifestyle practices in marginalized families rather than to a contagion caught from food marketers (CDC 2013).

**Table 16.1** Canadian children and adolescents (ages 6 to 17): Mean BMI and percentage distribution by BMI category

|               | 2004  | 2007-9 | 2009-11 |
|---------------|-------|--------|---------|
| Mean BMI      | 20.19 | 20.09  | 20.03   |
| BMI category  |       |        |         |
| Thinness      | 1.4%  | 1.6%   | 2.3%    |
| Normal weight | 63.8% | 66.4%  | 66.6%   |
| Overweight    | 21.4% | 17.7%  | 19.5%   |
| Obesity       | 13.3% | 14.3%  | 11.6%   |

Note: Figures represent a 95% confidence interval. Those for thinness should be used with caution.

Source: Adapted from Roberts et al. 2012, 5 (table 3). Estimates derive from the Canadian Community Health Survey (2004) and the Canadian Health Measures Survey (2007–9 and 2009–11)

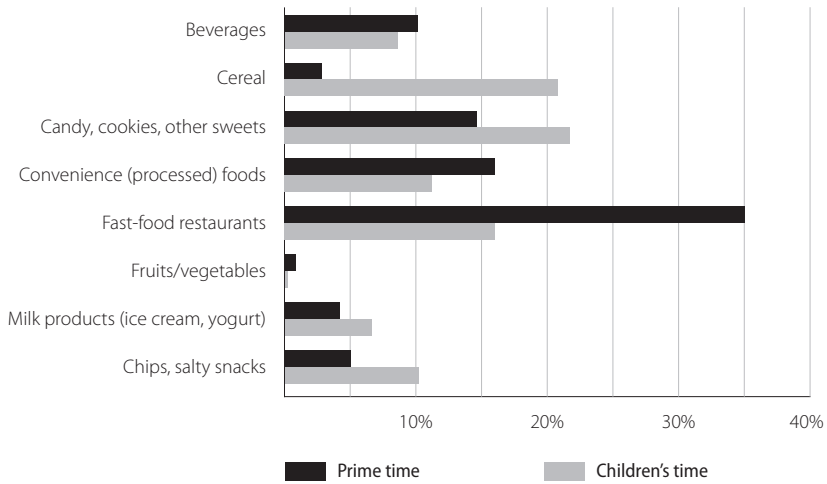
The second bias emerged in the tendency of health advocates to overstate the role of children’s dietary preferences in the etiology of population weight gain. In the process of panic amplification, journalistic reporting of the scientific evidence was overwhelmed by publicly expressed anxieties about children’s media use—in particular, their vulnerability in the face of television food advertising (see Linn 2004; Lewin, Lindstrom, and Nestle 2006). Public discussion of children’s obesity thus fuelled parental concerns about direct-to-child TV advertising of snack chips, cookies, chocolate bars, sugary cereals and drinks, and other junk food instead of the reduction in physical activity and eating while watching. But assertions of a powerful relationship between TV advertising and weight gain are not sustained by the empirical evidence. Although the TV diet, especially during children’s programs, is skewed toward unhealthy foods, health advocates overstate the impact of food marketing on the family diet (as David Buckingham [2009] demonstrates in a study of regulatory policy in the United Kingdom), as well as the potential of bans on child-targeted ads to stem the tide of lifestyle change. Media research has long suggested that advertising influences brand preferences (Young 2003), but not actual weight status, and that many other factors—parenting, school lunches, media literacy, sedentary lifestyles, and snacking behaviours—are implicated in the phenomenon of generational weight gain (Livingstone and Helsper 2004).

But the third and perhaps most problematic bias had to do with projections of the burden of illness, which effectively shifted the focus away from the *immediate* health risks experienced by youth. But the risk factors associated with childhood body morphology were conflated with the health outcomes resulting from lifelong obesity in adults.<sup>4</sup> For the most part, excess weight does not place children or adolescents in any immediate danger. In the United States, data for the period from 1999 to 2006 showed that heart disease accounted for only 3 percent of teen deaths (Miniño 2010, 2). Data from the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey confirm that in the United States, despite the attention focused on the problem of overweight and unhealthy eating, the most prevalent health risks experienced by youth are associated with other factors, such as driving under the influence or riding with drunk drivers, school violence, and depression (CDC 2014, 5–13). Among adolescents and youth (ages 10 to 24), 70 percent of all deaths result from motor vehicle crashes (23%), other unintentional injuries (18%), homicide (15%), and suicide (15%) (CDC 2014, 2).

#### MARKETS AS RISK COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS: THE SYSTEMIC BIAS OF THE TV DIET

Public concerns about food and health during the obesity pandemic helped to draw attention to the transformation in our food production and consumption practices—that is, to the industrialization of global food chains and the emergence of mass marketing dynamics that frame food choices within families. The diet promoted on commercial television and the effects of that promotion on children’s consumption was subjected to intense scrutiny in both the United States and the United Kingdom (see Hastings et al. 2003). My own studies of food advertising between 2003 and 2007—which compare advertising in the United States, Canada, and the UK—confirmed what had long been known. First, there is a lot of it: although food accounts for only about 9 percent of the average discretionary spending of the Canadian family, it consists of about 15 percent of the total TV advertising budget. Second, kids are targeted as food consumers. In the United States, the Federal Trade Commission estimates that about US\$3 billion per year is spent on marketing food to children on television and online (FTC 2012). The foods advertised during children’s-time television in all three of the above countries confirmed that the TV diet was a systemically distorted guide to

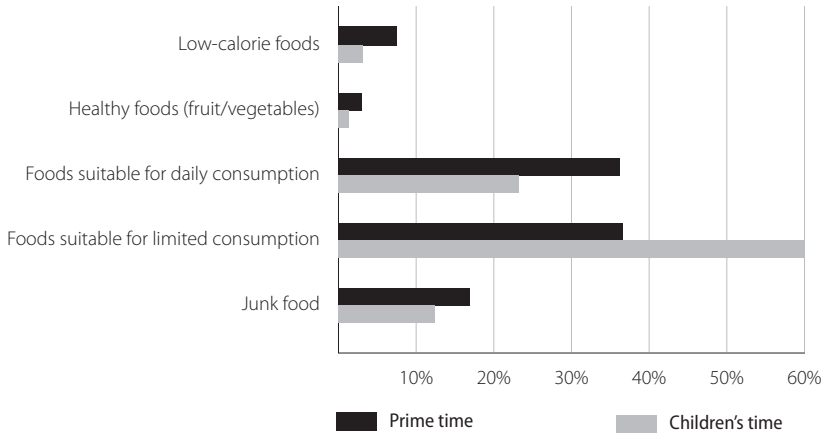
eating choices. In North America, ads for cereals, sweets, and salty snacks predominate during children’s programs, while ads for fast-food outlets and convenience foods are featured in prime time. Fruit and vegetables, however, are largely absent from both (see figure 16.4).



**Figure 16.4** The North American TV diet, showing ads for specific types of foods as a percentage of all food ads. Source: Adapted from Kline (2011).

From a nutritionist’s point of view, food is a good sold in the market that has nutritional and caloric properties necessary to sustain human life. Content analysis of TV food ads in the United States, Canada, and the UK confirms what has long been known about the nutritional limitations of the TV diet: while the nutritional biases of the advertised diet are in evidence during prime time, they are especially stark during children’s time (see figure 16.5). Not only were healthy foods (fruit and vegetables) absent in all TV advertising, but the bad five (sugared cereals, soft drinks, snack foods, fast foods, and sweets) were particularly abundant in advertisements shown during children’s programming (Hastings et al. 2003). My own research found only insignificant differences between Canadian and us food marketing to children but considerable differences, in terms of the types of food and the nutritional quality of foods, between child-targeted and adult-targeted food advertising.





**Figure 16.5** The nutritional character of foods advertised on North American television, showing specific categories as a percentage of total food ads.

In accordance with Beck’s (1992) notion of the “risk society,” we have become increasingly aware of the environmental and health risks associated with many goods legally sold in the market. Corporations are responsible for communicating certain known nutritional benefits and risks of their products in their packaging and advertising, as mandated by the Canadian Food and Drugs Act. Nutritional labelling and allergen warnings are required on the packages of most foods. Yet, when it comes to advertising, marketers’ attention to the health and environmental risks associated with their products is discretionary. Approximately 25 percent of all TV food ads make verbal health claims (“an excellent source of Vitamin B,” “part of a healthy chocolaty breakfast”), but far fewer allude to lifestyle risks associated with excessive consumption (“low in saturated fats,” “low in cholesterol”). However, mention of both nutritional information and health risks is far less prominent in child-targeted advertising. Furthermore, health claims that are made implicitly through images on packaging (fruit in cereal, cereal bowl in a wheat field) and the provision of risk information remain unregulated because they are hard to define in law and impossible to restrict in practice.

In the United Kingdom, proof of the systemic nutritional bias in foods marketed on children’s-time television was deemed sufficient reason to regulate food advertising (Buckingham 2009). After a four-year policy

battle, waged in the press, Ofcom (the independent regulator and competition authority for communications industries in the UK) banned advertising of high fat, salt, and sugar (HFSS) foods on children's-time television. In the United States, where guarantees for freedom of marketing speech are constitutionally sanctioned, the only policy initiatives for stopping the spread of obesity are self-regulation and efforts on the part of public figures such as Michelle Obama. In Canada, a less intense debate about fast-food culture precipitated revisions to guidelines for child-targeted food advertising that were intended to remediate the TV diet (Kline and Botterill 2011). But because food, even junk food, is not a toxin, the lifestyle risks associated with excessive eating of high-calorie foods and too little exercise remain the responsibility of the consumer. It is no small irony that, throughout the anglophone West, Coca-Cola and McDonald's have been able to reposition themselves as major advocates of children's well-being in part because of the legislative ambiguities surrounding the communication of lifestyle risks in media-driven markets (see Botterill and Kline 2007).

My own research on Canadian children confirms that the TV diet affects children's weight status through the formation of brand preferences with regard to broadly defined eating occasions (breakfast, TV snacks, eating out, after school treats). Children's brand knowledge is extensive. Regardless of their media use, for example, 95 percent of Canadian children could identify the McDonald's logo and connect it with the company's slogan simply because they live in a consumer culture in which popular brands are part of everyday experience and discourse. Children who are exposed to lots of advertising may thus form a preference for a particular brand of cereal or candy bar over other options, and since most advertised food brands are high in calories, there is a slight tendency for branded food preferences to be sweeter (Young 2003). At the same time, policy makers find it difficult to regulate the systemic biases of TV food promotion other than through bans and guidelines concerning potentially misleading advertising (Kline 2010).

The impact of preferences on weight status occurs, however, only when children are given the option to choose for themselves. Because parents are the purchasers of most of the food products consumed by the family (albeit sometimes under the influence of their children's expressed preferences), children's discretionary consumption might better indicate the consequences of branded advertising. When one examines the health ratings of foods and snacks bought with children's own money, the systemic

biases of food advertising are more clearly evident: junk foods constitute the majority of children's preferences for discretionary media snacks, and these choices are correlated with heavier TV viewing. In other words, ads may influence brand preferences, but the effect of branded advertising on children's diets depends on the degree to which parents are involved in the food purchase decisions of younger children. My surveys of families in British Columbia showed that because of the moral panic about children's weight gain, parents chose to limit access to discretionary snacks. Rates of obesity among BC children are also lower than the Canadian average.

The consensus among researchers is that advertising has an impact on no more than 5 percent of children's food consumption choices (Livingstone and Helsper 2004; Buijzen, Schuurman, and Bomhof 2008). If this estimate is accurate, bans on children's food advertising will not result in reduced obesity on their own. In the United Kingdom, the incidence of childhood obesity had not fallen five years after the ban was implemented in 2007. The most obvious explanation is that children who watch prime-time television or spend time online are still exposed to the promotional discourses of food advertising (see Boseley 2013). Additionally, any rise of obesity over the past two decades is confounded by children's increasingly sedentary lives. This is not hard to understand. There are three reasons why heavy media consumption has been linked to children's weight status: their exposure to the unhealthy TV diet, the displacement of active leisure by sedentary behaviour, and the ritualized snacking that happens while children are watching television (Buijzen, Bomhof, and Schuurman 2008).

With this in mind, rather than analyze the TV diet from the point of view of nutrition, I decided to examine the food consumption patterns—the practices of everyday eating—depicted in advertising. In analyzing the culture of eating implicit in these ads, I was surprised by the dearth of references to family mealtimes. Instead, I identified four prominent eating occasions repeatedly referenced in Canadian food advertising: eating out (usually at a fast-food restaurant), eating convenience foods, snacking (particularly while watching television), and eating on the run. Each of these patterns of eating is empirically associated with weight status in both adults and children (Taylor, Evers, and McKenna 2005). In my view, it is the combination of the TV diet's nutritional limits and its emphasis on unhealthy eating occasions that best characterizes the changes taking place in the obesogenic marketing discourse.

News coverage of obesity focused public attention on all children's weight gain, but the evidence gathered by medical research clearly shows that not all children are at equal risk in the obesogenic market. In addition to heavy TV watching, gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity are all identifiable risk factors associated with children's elevated weight status.<sup>5</sup> The problem with the medical approach to the mitigation of lifestyle risks is that while it highlights the systemic promotional bias of the TV diet, it fails to address the multiple intersecting lifestyle factors that underlie population weight gain among children. The analysis of TV eating as well as diet outlined above suggests that, in addition to the nutritional inadequacy of the TV diet, we should look at the eating routines of Canadian families if we want to understand children's and adults' weight gain. Indeed, the acts of TV snacking, eating out frequently, eating convenience foods, and eating on the go, as well as the decline of the family dinner have all be associated with weight status of Canadian children (Taylor, Evers, and McKenna 2005). The epidemiologist's concept of the "obesogenic environment" disguises the realities of the complex and intersecting socio-cultural risk factors associated with population weight gain in consumer culture.

From a socio-cultural point of view, the consumption of food is nested in contemporary lifestyle practices of household provisioning and the familial negotiations that organize the routines of daily life. I use the expression "lifestyle risk management" advisedly, to shift the focus from food as nutrition to the consumption of food as a cultural practice lodged within the daily routines, social relations, and norms governing consumer socialization more generally. Research on the obesogenic family has shown that the overriding lifestyle risk factor in child and youth obesity is screen time, rather than exposure to food advertising per se. Moreover, nutritional guidelines developed on the basis of medical research offer only limited ways of understanding the changing patterns of eating within media-saturated families, some of which (such as family meal time, no TV snacking, and eating a healthy breakfast) can counteract the promotional force of food marketing.

To study the link between children's media use and their eating behaviour, I and my co-researchers set up home monitoring systems so that every

time the television was switched on we would be able to see both the children and what they were watching. Watching the watchers, we found that children do pay attention to some of the food ads. They also get up during commercial breaks to get something from the fridge or to play a video game. But what our study revealed conclusively was that all of the children were eating while they were watching—nibbling on bread and butter, or eating dried cereal from a box, or being provided with a snack or a drink by their parents. What we witnessed in these households was that the routine practices such as snacking, TV dinners, and family meals—practices that explained why some children become overweight—were sanctioned, provisioned, and reinforced by parents. It appears, then, that the degree of discretionary consumption that children enjoy depends on lifestyle negotiations and strategies of consumer socialization within the family.

If the family is the primary socio-economic institution that organizes domestic food consumption, then any study of lifestyle risks must take into account the nonmarket values and ideals of the family. In the traditional household unit, eating was grounded in cooperative work, the sharing of food resources, co-ownership (inheritance), and interdependence rather than in the rational exchange of goods for money. Although some of these traditional social relations have been modified—allowances, bribes, and chores are now common practices in families—these nonutilitarian norms and gift relations remain central to the analysis of the social dynamics that underwrite household economies generally and food consumption in particular. Viewed from the point of view of eating practices, the TV diet is key to understanding the repatterning of familial consumption that has taken place over the past thirty years (see Hamrick et al. 2011).

#### BEYOND NUTRITION: UNDERSTANDING EATING IN THE MEDIA-SATURATED HOUSEHOLD

I am obviously not the first to argue that, in the market economy, the household, not the individual consumer, is the basic unit of demand. As Pierre Bourdieu (2005) points out, the origins of the word *economy* in the Greek term for household, *oikos*, reflects the fact that the major source of wealth within the extended family system in agrarian societies was food production, with the food largely intended for consumption by family members. Bourdieu's sociological theorizing of household economics reminds us

that in a wage economy, in which labour is exchanged for money that is then exchanged for goods, the household is no longer the dominant mode of production and distribution of foods—the food industry is. That said, we can still agree with Bourdieu that the household, as the organizing principle of domestic consumption, remains the primary social institution regulating the demand for food production and its distribution in markets. The individual consumer is the economist's assumption but is not a social fact: household spending is the engine of growth in the capitalist market society, accounting for about 70 percent of GDP.<sup>6</sup> This is why social policy over the past ten years has become increasingly rooted in an analysis of the discretionary spending of households and their accumulation of debt as socially organized economic practices. And families are spending less on food relative to their total income, not more (Statistics Canada 2009, 12).

Second, we must realize that the household is a site for the production of consumption. In fact, when one looks at the household, it is clear, as feminists have long reminded us, that considerable labour goes into modern lifestyles—including that associated with shopping, cooking, and washing up. As illustrated by Alan Warde (1999), food consumption practices provide a useful doorway into the study of factors underwriting the changing patterns of contemporary lifestyles. Warde uses the growing consumption of convenience foods in the 1990s to rethink the broader economic conditions influencing the food purchases of British families, arguing that the concept of convenience increasingly rests on a new way of conceptualizing time. In Warde's view, the shift to convenience is evidence of a profound temporal structuration of familial cultural practice (Warde 1999), one in which fixed mealtimes give way to a pattern of continuous consumption and activities once separated are collapsed. The higher cost of a prepackaged dinner for example, in comparison to the cost of preparing a meal from scratch, represents an implied savings in the labour of provisioning (that is, in time), which we identify with convenience. The flexible scheduling permitted by prepackaged single-portion 'readi-meals' is also interpreted as convenience, as is the multitasked efficiency of eating dinner while watching TV. Temporal reorganization of family life therefore speaks to a major shift in family eating practices.

In this light, Warde argues that many people feel constrained to eat what they call convenience foods as "a provisional response to intransigent problems of scheduling everyday life." This new pattern of consumption,

he argues, “speaks to the problem of living in a social world where people, in response to the feeling that they have insufficient time, set about trying to include more activities into the same amount of time by arranging or rearranging their sequence” (Warde 1999, 525). A look at the time budgets in families affords us a glimpse of the ways in which the compression of time plays out (Statistics Canada 2011). Canadians who spend less time cooking and eating together and more time multitasking experience a significant pressure on their childrearing time—especially as the children get older and are given more discretionary control over their activities, their foods, and their leisure. Building on Warde’s ideas, I would suggest that the emphasis in advertising on convenience food, eating on the go, fast-food restaurants, and snacking while doing something else all reflect the reordering of the time-space relations of everyday family life in market society. As Michael Pollan (2013) argues, this reorganization of family life not only diminishes the time allocated to cooking but also, and more fundamentally, undermines the practice of eating together. And it is these lifestyle changes that are most associated with the rising weight status of children (Taylor et al. 2005).

This analysis of the eating behaviours associated with weight gain therefore focuses our attention on the negotiations within the consuming household as it organizes family life. Anthropologists have long maintained that familial eating is central to the social relations and ideologies through which family life is constituted and performed. Family life is constituted around the table through commensality—through the intertwined acts of eating and communicating. Conversation is woven into the fabric of eating, as are ethnic traditions, manners, taste, self-restraint, and appreciation of life, all of which are mostly taught at the table. Eating together is also a lifestyle practice: it integrates children into the division of labour in the household, including expectations surrounding the activities of shopping for, preparing, and consuming food. Eating practices also reflect societal values pertaining to sharing, reciprocity, and interdependence within the household unit, values that assign to parents responsibility for the management of young people’s moral and physical well-being. In short, eating practices thread through the weave of family life. Perhaps this is why the family meal has such a mythic stature and why the reworking of family eating practices has had such profound consequences for children’s health within the family.

The socialization of the young as citizen-consumers is a major part of family life—and much of this socialization is again transacted around the

table. Bernard Roy and Judith Petitpas (2008) interviewed Canadian families about the family meal using the Foucauldian notion of a regime of eating to describe his finding that the ideal of family meals is intimately bound up with health (restrictions on eating) and domestic happiness (the protocols of commensuality).<sup>7</sup> But as kids grow-up more of their eating takes place in front of the screen and outside the home. Using surveys and in-home interviews with Canadian parents, my research team discovered that parents are managing their children's daily food consumption in the "fast-food era" in part by limiting children's exposure to commercial TV and encouraging them to engage in physical activity (e.g. treats after a football game). The discussions we had with diverse families revealed the complexity of their ways of managing children's socialization as consumers by granting them increasing control over their consumer behaviour and giving them scope to spend their allowances as they choose. One advantage of this ethnographic approach is that reveals the complexities of the everyday practices and social relations that circumscribe consumer "empowerment" in a risk society, one in which children must come to understand the relationships among lifestyle, environment, and health. Parents proved to have a critical awareness of the part played by media in their children's daily lives, and many expressed concerns about how best to regulate media use. They were also well aware of the role that advertising plays in their children's brand preferences. Many parents received requests from their children for unhealthy foods, but they resisted them in the interests of their children's health. Finally, parents talked about what was perhaps the most problematic issue, namely, how to manage children's consumer power within the family.

The discussions with parents about meal time and snacking provided a glimpse of the contradictory ideas underlying Canadian regimes of consumption—which, when analyzed through interviews with parents, reveal a series of trade-offs among health, self-restraint, taste, love, and pleasure. Food, it seems, is the supercharged commodity that brings the complex issues surrounding consumer socialization (including media use, active living, economics, and taste) into sharp focus.

Although the parents I interviewed approached family lifestyle management in many different ways, they all agreed that raising healthy children amid the tensions and complexities of modern capitalism is a challenge. In discussing how to ensure the psychological and physical



well-being of their children, parents frequently mentioned considerations of leisure time, food affordability, and peer influences. Notably, the management of diet and reduced media consumption were prominent concerns in middle-class families. The responses of these parents suggested that they felt trapped between the the advice of health advocates and the allure of the market. My general impression from these conversations was that, by and large, Canadian families are mindfully struggling to bring up healthy children but under conditions in which domestic negotiations are skewed by the cumulative persuasion of the TV diet. Teaching children to make thoughtful choices for themselves was described as a parent's most difficult job.

## CONCLUSION

In 2003, I set out to study the obesity epidemic in order to understand why epidemiology was failing to translate into effective policies for mitigating lifestyle risks associated with obesity in the consumer culture. As I noted at the outset of this chapter, the medicalization of the “adipose” child's body is closely linked to public discourses about what children eat in Canada. Although journalism has galvanized public discussion of changing Canadian diets, it has also narrowed the policy frameworks for mitigating the problem caused by current patterns of eating. Food politics has brought with it a heightened awareness of how risk is embedded and discussed in the marketplace, but moral panic has focused these concerns on the practices of marketing to children and, in the process, has torqued public understanding of lifestyle risks toward children's weight gain rather than the behaviour of adults. And herein lies the problem: as we gazed in the journalistic mirror of lifestyle risks, we saw our children growing fatter because of their vulnerability to advertising and their sedentary lifestyles, while we dismissed the idea that food marketing had any consequences for ourselves. Yet adult populations are three times as likely to be obese as those under twelve, and adults are far more sedentary than children. In short, we failed to realize that children are not the ones creating the looming burden of illness—adults are.

The first part of this chapter outlined the distortions of scientific evidence implicit in the intensified media coverage galvanized by moral panic about children's weight gain. In the news, “big food” was blamed for exploiting children's vulnerability as food consumers (Kim and Willis

2007). In turn, the linking of obesity to food marketing was crucial in the reframing of the public debate about healthy living: food was not just a composite of nutrients, minerals, vitamins, and energy but a potential toxin bought and sold in the market. The “fat kid” thus became the poster child for the looming burden of illness in the consumer society despite the evidence that the incidence of adult obesity is twice that of youth.<sup>8</sup> It seems that sensationalism triumphed over science in the medical framing of risk communication: slow marginal increases in children’s weight status over thirty years does not constitute an epidemic so much as it signals lifestyle change within our so called “obesogenic” cultural environment. In the process, changes in children’s body morphology were labelled as an illness and falsely understood to be the leading indication that fast-food consumption is a major cause of ill health.

In my analysis, three communication dynamics distorted the way that Canadians understood and talked about the lifestyle risks associated with provisioning their families with healthy food. First, the moral panic in the USA and UK especially, galvanized the discursive politics of food production and marketing to children. Second, the skewed promotional discourses of food marketing normalized unhealthy eating practices and attitudes, despite attempts to impose responsible advertising (such as the nutritional labelling and limitations on health claims mandated by the Food and Drugs Act). Third, TV watching time, so closely associated with weight gain, played an important role in reordering family routines and familial negotiation, not only by exposing families to unhealthy TV diets and displacing active leisure time but through undermining family meal-time and consolidating routines of unhealthy snacking while watching (Hamrick et al. 2011).

It is therefore hardly surprising that parents felt trapped between the competing discourses of public health advocacy and marketing. So how well are Canadian parents doing in buffering children from the onslaught of food marketing? If we focus on the health advocates’ concerns about the doubling of youth obesity rates from 5 percent in the 1970s to 9 percent at the new millennium, we may be alarmed by the constant reporting of child and youth obesity statistics. But if only 9 percent of Canadian youth are considered obese, then the vast majority of parents seem to be doing reasonably well in balancing their children’s lifestyles. In Canada at least, the evidence suggests that child obesity peaked in 2005 and has actually

declined since then. Indeed, CanSim data reveals a rise from 71.2 percent to 75.1 percent in normal weight adolescents between 2005 and 2008 — evidence of an “epidemic of normality” among Canadian youth that may have resulted from the moral panic about child obesity.

I do not mean to suggest that obesity is not a serious indicator of changing family lifestyles. While very young children (under six years) are the least at risk, (because they are more active and parents are supervising their eating closely) as they enter their teen years, Canadian youth become more empowered consumers. As they acquire more discretionary power and influence over their own dietary preferences and practices, their lifestyles and body morphologies become more like ours—and the incidence of obesity rises. It is time to focus attention on the real threat, namely, the increasingly sedentary lifestyle of Canadian adolescents.

#### NOTES

- 1 Overweight and obesity are most commonly defined in terms of body mass index (BMI), with “overweight” referring to people with a BMI in the range of 25.0 to 29.9 and “obese” to persons with a BMI of 30.0 or more. (The “healthy” range is 18.5 to 24.9.)
- 2 Here and elsewhere in this chapter, I draw on earlier research, in which I monitored the incidence of “risk stories,” chiefly those concerning obesity, in the *Globe and Mail*, the *New York Times*, and the *Guardian* over a period of a decade (1998 to 2007). For a detailed analysis of this research, see *Globesity, Food Marketing, and Family Lifestyles* (Kline 2011).
- 3 In the United States, the overall obesity rate among children and adolescents had stabilized at about 17%, decreasing slightly from its high of 17.1% in 2004 to 16.9% in 2010 (Fryar, Carroll, and Ogden 2012, table 1; see also Ogden and Carroll 2010). Moreover, among preschool children (ages 2 to 5), the prevalence of obesity had significantly declined, from 13.9% in 2004 to only 8.4% in 2012. “Childhood Obesity Facts: Prevalence of Childhood Obesity in the United States, 2011–2012,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2015, <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/childhood.html>. See also Ogden et al. 2014.
- 4 For an example of such projection, see “Statistics,” *Childhood Obesity Foundation*, 2015, <http://childhoodobesityfoundation.ca/what-is-childhood-obesity/statistics/>. In fact, as a major review and meta-analysis of existing literature revealed, that overweight and even relatively mild

- obesity (BMI 30 to <35) does not appear to increase risk of mortality in adults. See Flegal et al. (2013).
- 5 For a discussion of the factors influencing rates of obesity, see the “Determinants” section in “Obesity in Canada,” *Public Health Agency of Canada*, 2011, <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/oic-oac/sum-som-eng.php>.
  - 6 For these and estimates worldwide, see “Household Final Consumption Expenditure, etc. (% of GDP,” *World Bank*, 2016, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.CON.PETC.ZS>. In the definition of the World Bank, “Household final consumption expenditure (formerly private consumption) is the market value of all goods and services, including durable products (such as cars, washing machines, and home computers), purchased by households.”
  - 7 Roy and Petitpas argue that the pleasure of commensality has been displaced by the current preoccupation with nutrition: eating a healthy diet becomes associated with self-discipline, and pleasure thus inheres in breaking the rules. In the eyes of the women whom Roy interviewed, healthy eating was perceived as labour: it “requires sticking to the CFG [Canada Food Guide] and ‘making an effort.’ There is generally little pleasure involved and it can unfortunately interfere with family bonding and happiness. A ‘healthy regimen’ can also come up against the primary mission of the meal—that of ‘being a family,’ creating a place of togetherness, peace, and enjoyment.”
  - 8 In 2014, 54.0% percent of Canadian adults were overweight or obese, as compared to 23.1% of youth. See Statistics Canada, “Body Mass Index, Overweight or Obese, Self-reported, Adult, by Age Group and Sex (Percent),” 2015, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/health81b-eng.htm>; and “Body Mass Index, Overweight or Obese, Self-reported, Youth, by Sex,” 2015, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/health83b-eng.htm>.

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## **“Death on a Plate”**

### Communicating Food Fears in Modern North America

*Harvey Levenstein*

To be fearful of food is part of the human condition, one result of what has been called the “omnivore’s dilemma.” This means that unlike, say, koala bears, who depend solely on eucalyptus leaves for their diet and cannot wander far away from where eucalyptus trees grow, our ability to eat a wide variety of foods has enabled us to roam the earth and survive almost anywhere on the planet. However, many potential foods can sicken or kill us, and the need to figure out which foods are dangerous and how to avoid them has resulted in a natural anxiety about food.<sup>1</sup>

For most of human history, people passed on the knowledge of what to eat and what to avoid within the small group of hunter-gatherers in which they lived. However, the rise of the kind of agriculture that produced surpluses that could be stored over long periods of time led to the growth of towns and cities. This meant a constant widening of the gap between those who produced the food and those who consumed it. Transportation improvements steadily increased the number of people who handled and altered the foods—intermediaries who were, often quite rightly, regarded with suspicion. However, until the mid-nineteenth century, most people in North America were farmers or lived in small communities and either produced much of what they ate or had enough personal contact with those who produced it to assure themselves of its safety. Although food scares

were by no means unknown, they were mainly communicated through rumour, which kept them relatively restricted in scope.

In the United States and Canada, this situation changed dramatically in the late nineteenth century, when these countries were transformed by a wave of industrialization and urbanization. New railways spanned the continent, opening new areas in the West to large-scale grain production and ranching. In the East, the railways stretched their fingers inland, encouraging the growth of commercial farming to provide fruits, vegetables, meat, and dairy products to the booming cities. Large steamships crowded the ports, unloading exotic foreign foods, such as bananas, for shipment by rail across the continent. Now, not only were many of the foods that were consumed by the people in the towns and cities not grown by neighbours: many of them were not even grown in neighbouring countries. Even more disturbing was the fact that most of the refining, milling, canning, salting, baking, and other ways of preserving food that had previously been done at home or by neighbours was now being done by large impersonal companies in facilities far from home. All along the way to the dinner table, these foods passed through the hands of any number of people who could profit by altering them, potentially to the detriment of their healthfulness and safety.

These technology-based fears were magnified by revolutions in two other fields: science and communications. In the late nineteenth century, scientists discovered that food consisted of proteins, carbohydrates, and fats, each of which played a crucial role in preserving health. Then, in the early twentieth century, vitamins were discovered. The use of “vita” in their name (rather than alternatives such as “accessory food substance”) associated them with life and vitality in the public mind, indicating that they were critical to survival. These crucial new food components all shared one feature: they were undetectable by laypeople—that is, they could not be seen, smelled, felt, or tasted. Only scientists, working with complex equipment and techniques in their laboratories, could detect how much of them foods contained and calculate how much had to be consumed to avoid disease, debility, and death. This meant that taste, the traditional warning sign of what was not fit to eat, was now the least reliable guide to safe eating (Levenstein [1988] 2003, 44–59).

A second barrel of the scientific blast was fired in the later nineteenth century by Louis Pasteur, the French scientist who discovered bacteria and

pioneered the “germ theory” of disease. His discovery that one species of these invisible killers infested milk, causing typhoid and other dreaded diseases, cast a pall over fresh milk. In the early 1900s, North American cities were swept by the realization that bacteria in their milk supplies were a prime cause of the attacks of diarrhea that killed many thousands of infants and children each year. Germs in other foods were then accused of causing a host of other deadly diseases—tuberculosis, diphtheria, smallpox, and so on—and frantic efforts were undertaken to get rid of them. Flies were now accused of being mobile germ carriers—“germs with wings.” In the United States, governments mounted “Swat the Fly” campaigns, which, among other things, rewarded schoolchildren with movie tickets for bringing buckets of dead flies to school (Levenstein 2012, 6–12).

Large-circulation women’s magazines, such as the venerable *Ladies’ Home Journal* and the upstart *Good Housekeeping*, warned Canadian and American housewives of the dangers posed by the germs lodged in the nooks and crannies of old-fashioned wooden kitchen tables and counters. Domestic science teachers in schools on both sides of the border scared children about the dire consequences of eating food prepared in kitchens that were not spotlessly clean. As a result, middle-class parents began furiously renovating hitherto neglected kitchen spaces, lining their floors with linoleum and installing enamel sinks, metal countertops, and spanking new white-painted cupboards (Gdula 2008, 11–15).

Meanwhile, late-nineteenth-century advances in chemistry produced new chemicals for preserving and altering food. Some of these were used as additives in the processes (such as canning) that spurred the industrialization of the food supply, and fears now arose that these chemicals were dangerous and possibly deadly. In the United States, the chemist Harvey W. Wiley, chief of the US government’s Bureau of Chemistry, led a campaign that culminated in the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, which put his office in charge of preventing industry from using dangerous additives in processing foods. Fears that the new industrialized assembly line (or rather, disassembly line) method for slaughtering cattle was endangering the safety of the meat supply led to the simultaneous passage of the US federal Meat Inspection Act (Levenstein 2012, 43–78; Barkan 1985). The Canadian government then responded to Canadian concerns with an act providing for government supervision of meat inspection and canned foods (Derbyshire 2006, 542–43).

How were these new food fears communicated? Why did they have such a rapid and enormous impact? Much of the answer lies in the rise of an educated middle class in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the development of new media devoted to influencing them. In the United States and English-speaking Canada, the rise of free public school education after the 1830s had made basic literacy the norm. The expansion of free secondary education in the 1880s and 1890s then helped create a critical mass of middle-class men and women capable of reading and comprehending written material at a quite sophisticated level. At the same time, advances in printing technology allowed the creation of mass-circulation newspapers and—crucial to the spread of food fears—a number of glossy, illustrated, large-circulation magazines, such as *McClure's*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Saturday Evening Post*, all competing for readership among this very literate middle class. In the early 1900s, these periodicals began vying for readers by having what we would call investigative journalists expose the untoward political, social, and environmental consequences that the surge in industrialization and urbanization was bringing to their middle-class readers' lives. In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt famously stuck the derisive label "muckrakers" on these reporters, yet that same year, he responded quickly when one of the most prominent of them, Upton Sinclair, came out with a series of magazine articles and a book, *The Jungle*, that chronicled the horrendous conditions in the Chicago stockyards where much of the nation's meat was processed. The consequent uproar led Roosevelt to do a quick reversal and come out in support of the federal government meat inspection bill that the meat packers' representatives had been successfully blocking in Congress (Kolko 1963, 101–6; Levenstein [1988] 2003, 38–39; Horowitz 2005, 27–33).

Although Sinclair, a socialist, claimed to have been primarily interested in the plight of the stockyard workers, his stories of what went on in the slaughterhouses were truly stomach churning—including dead rats and rat poison being ground into sausages. These stories spread like wildfire, not just across the nation but also internationally. His book, said the *Toronto Globe* in 1906, had "set the whole English-speaking world agog," including, obviously, Canada ("Man of the Day," *Globe* [Toronto], 10 November 1906). It would probably have been more accurate to suggest that it was articles about his book, in magazines and in newspapers like the *Globe*, that had set the world agog. As occurred in 1962, with the publication of

another book, by Rachel Carson (discussed below), many more people are likely to be influenced by reports of a sensational book's findings than by the book itself.

One of the most interesting aspects of the brouhaha over Sinclair's revelations was the way the meat-packers in the firing line handled the crisis, which contrasts quite sharply with the description that Charlene Elliott and Josh Greenberg (chapter 16, this volume) provide of how the packer XL Foods responded to a similar crisis in its Alberta slaughterhouse over one hundred years later. The Chicago packers quickly realized that the government could be their saviour rather than their adversary, and they threw their support behind the bill calling for regulation of the slaughterhouses. This ensured its passage, and henceforth, the entire progress of the animals through the killing and packing process was overseen by inspectors, paid by the government, who allowed government stamps guaranteeing their safety to be displayed prominently on all the products emerging from the plants. For the packers, it was hard to imagine a better way of assuaging public fears. They could now advertise, as Armour and Company did, that "the *U.S. Inspection* stamp, on every pound and every package of Armour goods, guarantees purity, wholesomeness, and honest labelling of *all* Armour food products." As if this were not enough, to further reassure the public, the company threw open (carefully selected) parts of its facilities to the public (Levenstein [1988] 2003, 40–41). Other packers followed, and the slaughterhouses soon became one of the most popular tourist sites in Chicago; (Horowitz 2005, 59–60; see also *Harper's Magazine Advertiser*, December 1909, 64).

A similar situation, minus the tourism, arose in Canada, where, in April 1907, Parliament passed the Meat and Canned Goods Act. As with the American system, government inspectors were posted in the slaughterhouses, and, once again, the packers supported the measure, seeing it as necessary not only to reassure the Canadian public but also to head off the British and European demands to ban imports of all North American meat—which stemmed from Sinclair's exposé of the Chicago stockyards (Derbyshire 2006, 523–24).

Worries over the beef supply had actually burst on the scene some years earlier as a result of charges that newly created chemicals had been used to preserve the beef shipped to the American soldiers who invaded Cuba during the Spanish-American War in 1898. Newspapers and magazines

were full of stories saying that the “embalmed beef” had killed more American soldiers than had the Spanish (“Who Is the Criminal?” cover illustration, *Harper’s Weekly*, 13 August 1898; Keuchel 1972, 251). This became part of a larger concern that food processors of all kinds were using dangerous new chemical additives to extend the shelf life of their foods. It was in response to this that Harvey Wiley demonstrated his great skill at grabbing headlines by gathering together a group of young government clerks in Washington and having them test the safety of these additives by having them dine each day on food laced with them. After an enterprising reporter labelled this experimental group the “Poison Squad,” the story was picked up by newspapers and magazines across the country. They even became the subject of vaudeville songs and skits. Ditties about them circulated far and wide. (One was recited in the recent TV series *Boardwalk Empire* [2010].) As it turned out, after four years, none of the squad’s rotating members experienced any untoward health effects, but no matter: the experiment gave governmental blessing to the idea that the new chemical additives could be dangerous (Levenstein 2012, 64–65).

The media hype about the “Poison Squad” and the “muckraking” magazine pieces warning of dangerous food additives played major roles in rallying support for the passage of the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act. However, like that year’s meat inspection law, its passage also benefited from the support of the large processors it was supposed to regulate. In this case, H. J. Heinz, the largest processor of them all, managed to persuade a number of other giant processors that not only would government supervision of additives reassure the public that it was safe to eat their products; it would also rid the industry of the many small-scale producers who often used questionable additives to undercut large producers’ prices (Barkan 1985, 20–21). The addition of “Canned Foods” to the Canadian meat inspection act—resulting in the Meat and Canned Foods Act, passed in 1907—was intended to convey similar assurances, and the Canadian government agency tasked with inspecting canned goods adopted the standards used by the U.S. Bureau of Chemistry. As in the United States, the large canners were fully supportive of the new regulations (Ostry 2006, 16–17).

Government regulation of slaughterhouses and canned foods in Canada and the United States played major roles in reassuring the public about the food supply. Yet they also had a paradoxical effect, for their very existence raised public consciousness of the potential for danger inherent in the new

methods for processing foods. This awareness was often heightened by public officials seeking to demonstrate the importance of their roles as protectors of consumers' health. For example, in the years following the 1906 passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act in the United States, Harvey Wiley used his Bureau of Chemistry role in overseeing food additives to put himself constantly in the news, raising alarms about the potential dangers of any number of popular products, the most famous of which was Coca-Cola. He tried to force the company to state on the product's labels that Coca-Cola was an addictive concoction because it contained cocaine (a not-yet-banned substance that it had not contained for many years) and, when that failed, because it contained caffeine, which he called more addictive than opium and cannabis (*Washington Post*, 17 December 1909; Coppin and High 1999, 144–45). Although he was unsuccessful on both counts, the ideas that cocaine is part of Coke's secret formula and that Coke is addictive have persisted to the present day.

The food producers themselves—again, paradoxically—helped raise consciousness of the dangers of germs in food by promoting their brand names as guaranteeing the purity of their products. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Heinz built an international empire for its “57 Varieties” of processed food with advertisements showing them being processed by white-uniformed young women in immaculate facilities. Other companies exploited early-twentieth-century germophobia by trumpeting how their processing techniques protected their foods from dirty, germ-carrying hands. Gold Medal Flour declared, “The hands of the miller have not come into contact with the food at any stage of production.” Nabisco advertised that its biscuits were “touched only once by human hands—when the pretty girls pack them” (Tomes 1998, 169; Levenstein 2012, 12–19).

Another way of communicating that products were sanitary was through packaging, which, consumers were told, prevented germs from infesting their contents. Cardboard boxes were called “sanitary boxes”; Kellogg's claimed in 1914 that its “Waxtite” packaging was endorsed by “48 state and municipal health authorities” (Levenstein 2012, 12–21). The implication in all of these campaigns was that their smaller competitors, who could not afford these measures, were selling impure, possibly dangerous foods. So successful were the large processors in associating their brand names with sanitation and purity that in the 1920s, when food processors

began the process of corporate takeovers and aggrandizement that continues to the present day, the most valuable objects of the takeovers were usually not the production facilities but the well-established brand names.

During the 1920s, another kind of food fear came to the fore: vitaminism, or fear that a dearth of vitamins was ruining one's health. After the first vitamins were discovered in the 1910s, each new discovery led to increasingly inflated claims for their importance in protecting against everything from the common cold and blindness to anxiety and depression. Food producers—such as citrus growers, milk producers, and flour millers—mounted expensive campaigns warning of the dire consequences that would result from not consuming enough of their products. Food processors mounted equally potent campaigns to reassure the public that not only did their processing techniques not deprive their foods of their vitamins, but they somehow enhanced their nutritional value. Again, the net result was to help raise—or rather, inflate—consumer fears about not getting enough vitamins. They succeeded in having my generation of young Canadians being forced to down large portions of acrid, supposedly strength-producing, canned spinach and also laid the basis for the huge surge in the consumption of vitamin pills that followed their introduction in the early 1940s (Levenstein, 2012, 79–94).

As was the case with the fears of germs and additives, vitamaniacs brought in heavy scientific artillery to support their claims (Apple 1996, 1–53). In the 1920s, America's most famous vitamin researcher, Elmer McCollum, a professor at Johns Hopkins University who claimed to be the actual discoverer of vitamins, supplemented his academic salary by working for flour millers seeking to convince Americans that (contrary to what he had said earlier) white flour was nutritionally equal to whole wheat flour. Perhaps his most effective effort in this regard came when he appeared on nationwide radio broadcasts with a bevy of Hollywood stars who supplemented his nutritional message with testimonials to white bread's efficacy in weight-loss diets. He then moved on to helping canners argue that canning had no effect on the vitamin content of food—statements that were duly reported in the daily press (Levenstein 2012, 96–106).

Reassurances of this kind played well in the print media during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, something that was probably not unconnected to the fact that advertising from food processors was now an important source of their income. The contrast with the heyday of the "muckrakers,"



when magazines carried few advertisements from food producers and relied mainly on circulation for profits, was marked. During the earlier period, as we have seen, press exposés of chicanery in the food industries played major roles in spurring the passage of meat inspection and pure food laws in the United States and Canada. In the 1930s, they played the opposite role. In 1933, after a couple of best-selling books and some articles in small progressive magazines exposed similar dangers in the meat- and food-processing industries, the US government proposed a new food and drug law to stiffen consumer protection. Many American magazines and newspapers responded to the pressure of corporate food advertisers, who were now very important to their bottom lines, by condemning the industry's critics as communists and helping their allies in Congress to effectively gut the new act. Among the processors' leading defenders were the *Ladies Home Journal*, which had been an important participant in the earlier crusade, and *Good Housekeeping* (Levenstein 2003, 17–18).

The 1940s and 1950s saw an explosion in the use of food additives. This was spurred on, first by defence needs and shortages during World War II and then by the postwar boom in family formation, suburbanization, and the consequent rise of once-a-week shopping, all of which created a huge market for “convenience” foods with longer shelf lives. Thanks to the toothless US legislation, food additives were subject to almost no government scrutiny, which was also the case in Canada, where the federal government still relied heavily on the United States for judgments about the safety of food additives. The result was what I have called “the golden age of food processing”: a time in which the media celebrated, rather than questioned, the dramatic changes that processors were effecting on the food supply (Levenstein 2003, 101).

During the 1960s, however, complacency about the heights to which the United States had risen was shattered by the rise of protest movements that began questioning its record on race relations, foreign policy, and economic equality. Big business became a favourite villain, and critics soon trained their guns on the giant food processors, whose new chemical preservatives and processing methods were now subjected to intense scrutiny. The result was a resurgence of fears of the chemicals and additives that they were using (Levenstein, 2003, 160–94).

In 1961, worries about the effects of pesticides on foods were spurred in the old-fashioned way, through a series of muckraking-style magazine

articles in the *New Yorker* in 1962 by Rachel Carson, subsequently published as the groundbreaking book *Silent Spring*. Pesticidal poisoning, she said, had gone beyond “the dreams of the Borgias.” She warned that “for the first time in history, every human being is subjected to contact with dangerous chemicals from the moment of conception until death” (Carson 1962, 13). Carson’s main target was DDT, a poison that had hitherto been hailed as a boon to mankind. Echoing President Theodore Roosevelt’s reaction to Upton Sinclair’s revelations about meat, President John F. Kennedy declared that he had been shocked by the *New Yorker* articles. Unlike Roosevelt, though, he was able to do little about it. Farmers and food producers managed to head off a ban for the next ten years (Levenstein 2003, 160–61).

One reason for their success was that most of the print media were still beholden to the food processors’ advertising. Carson’s methods, evidence, expertise, and conclusions were condemned by the likes of *Time*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Readers Digest*. “Our food scientists agree,” said a 1965 article in *McCall’s* magazine, “that without chemical additives . . . we would literally know famine” (Connif 1965, 83). However, network television news, newly expanded from fifteen-minute headline-reading to a more in-depth half-hour format, was hungry for sensational stories and not so dependent on food processors’ advertising. This probably explains why they picked up the cudgels with a series of reports recounting the dangers of pesticide residues on cranberries, apples, and other crops. In 1969, NBC-TV News caused a huge uproar by broadcasting an interview with a whistle-blowing Food and Drug Administration scientist, who described the horrifying malformations seen in chicks born of eggs injected with cyclamates, a widely used artificial sweetener. Dr. Arthur Schramm, head of the National Academy of Science’s Industry Liaison Committee, criticized the “economic terrorism” of the media, “particularly TV,” for publicizing studies of cyclamates and the flavour-enhancer MSG that disposed “a large majority of the lay public to draw dire conclusions.”<sup>2</sup> Although the reports did indeed have dire effects on food producers, who were forced to abandon cyclamates and reduce the use of MSG, they were a boon to TV ratings, spurring the networks into digging up revelations about mercury in fish, botulism in pizza, pesticides in turkeys, arsenic in chickens, antibiotics in cheese, hormones in meat, salmonella in soup, and DDT in practically everything (Levenstein 2003, 172–73).

Exposés such as these helped lend credence to the wave of critical information about the food industries emerging from the “underground” or “alternative” news sources that began springing up in cities across Canada and the United States in the late 1960s. They cultivated the belief that it was the close connections between government, large corporations, and the mainstream media that had led to the Vietnam War, racism, pollution, and other outrages, including the degradation of the American diet. They were abetted by those involved in the so-called counterculture, who apotheosized the “natural,” denounced “plastic” white bread, and regarded practically any foods that were not brown as damaging to the health. Ultimately, it seemed, the only way to avoid big business’s depredations on the food supply was a do-it-yourself one, such as growing and eating organic foods. Consequently, the circulation of *Organic Gardening and Farming*, originally confined to a few thousand true believers, reached 650,000 in 1970 (Belasco 1989, 48–58; Levenstein 2003, 163).

Despite the TV networks’ earlier role in promoting scares about pesticides and chemical additives, they, along with the print media, were still accused of hiding information about the dangers of chemical additives at the behest of their corporate sponsors. The government, hitherto thought of as on the front lines in guarding the health of consumers, was now perceived by many to have joined the enemy ranks. In 1970, one of the research groups sponsored by the peripatetic critic Ralph Nader published *The Chemical Feast*, a sensational book condemning the US Food and Drug Administration for allowing the food supply to be laced with dangerous chemical additives (Turner 1970). Similar claims soon had a significant part of the population suspecting all mainstream advice—governmental and commercial—on the safety of additives and processing.

Processors deftly handled the resulting surge in demand for “natural” foods by relabelling and sometimes reconstituting their foods. There being no restrictions regarding the use of the term *natural*, almost any food and any ingredient could be labelled as such. By the mid-1970s, the shelves of supermarket aisles were full of foods such as “100% natural” cereals, potato chips, and even dog foods with “natural beef flavor” (Levenstein 2003, 198–200). As with the sanitary craze in the early years of the century, packaging was a major tool in communicating the message. In 1977, market researchers concluded that “natural” was the most convincing sales claim that could be put

on a food package. Among other favourites were “organic,” “no chemicals,” “pure,” “real,” and “no preservatives” (*New York Times*, 8 August 1977).

Meanwhile, the mainstream media were helping to promote lipophobia—fear of dietary fat—a new kind of food fear that, perhaps coincidentally, proved profitable to a number of their major advertisers. A powerful coalition of scientists, food processors, and charitable organizations coalesced to warn the public that eating foods containing saturated fats would elevate the amount of fat in their bloodstream and cause them to die prematurely of heart attacks. This idea originated in a flimsy scientific study that compared heart attack rates among some poor men in Naples, Italy, and some well-off businessmen in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and that linked the supposed “epidemic” of heart attacks among the Americans to an excess of saturated fats in their diets. The American Heart Association (AHA) seized on this “diet-heart theory” as a vehicle for redirecting its efforts from raising money for research—a long-term effort that was producing few noteworthy results—to telling people how to eat and urging them to make what we now call “lifestyle changes” (Levenstein 2012, 124–38).

Thanks, in part, to some advantageous political connections, the AHA and the scientists promoting the “diet-heart theory” soon gained enthusiastic support from the traditional media. The owners of *Time* magazine and the *New York Times* became actively engaged in raising funds to combat heart disease. They helped persuade Congress to funnel millions of dollars into the National Institutes of Health, a US government agency that quickly became the main source of funding for research into heart disease—money that, for the most part, went to scientists sympathetic to this theory. Meanwhile, the AHA used its campaign against saturated fats to create a “virtuous circle” in which its high-profile activities to inform the public on how to combat the “epidemic” raised money for more informational activities (as well as the hefty salaries of the professional fundraisers running the organization) that helped it promote itself even further as the leader of an assault on what it called “the nation’s number-one killer” (Levenstein 2012, 126–39).

On one level, the AHA communicated its message through activities organized by local chapters of the organization that were headed by professionals and staffed by volunteers, including highly successful efforts to encourage people whose loved ones had died of heart disease to have donations to the organization made in their memory. These were supplemented

by advertising campaigns to inform people of the dangers of saturated fats that helped the AHA to raise funds by giving the impression that the organization was in the forefront of bringing the “epidemic” to heel. Later, in the 1990s, the professionals came up with the idea of allowing companies to use—for a fee—an AHA (or in the case of Canada, Heart and Stroke Foundation) symbol in their advertising and packaging of foods that the organization certified as safe to eat (Levenstein 2012, 125–59).

Earlier, a number of food processors had begun playing a different, even more effective role in spreading lipophobia. They used the “diet-heart” theorists’ condemnations of saturated fats to promote their products as healthy alternatives to lard, butter, eggs, steak, and the other foods that were now labelled as deadly. Producers of polyunsaturated vegetable oils seized on some diet-heart science to promote these products as positively promoting healthier hearts, even convincing prominent nutritional scientists to recommend that they be drunk straight from the glass as “medication.” Nabisco claimed that eating a bowl of Shredded Wheat each morning would cut cholesterol levels and thereby prevent heart attacks and strokes (Levenstein 2012, 142–44). Most of these campaigns relied heavily on the print media, with ads in general interest and women’s magazines playing a prominent role. These would catch the attention of the main target audience: middle-class, middle-aged women worried about their husbands succumbing to the heart attack “epidemic.”

In scientific circles, the reign of the diet-heart theory and the fear of saturated fats that it promoted was crumbling rapidly by the early 2000s. The theory was undermined by discoveries that there were different kinds of saturated fat (some of which were said to be beneficial for the heart), challenges to the idea that more saturated fats in the diet increased the risk of heart disease, and the theory that the root cause of the illness was not fat but inflammation (Ridker et al. 2008). However, it still held sway in popular consciousness. That people who ate such things as Big Macs, fries, and shakes still said they were purchasing one-way tickets to the cardiac ward was testament to the power of the traditional media that had promoted this theory. However, at the same time, a host of other food fears swept the middle classes that seemed to have less to do with these media. The origins of the fears of the many people who are now convinced that they are allergic to, or at least “intolerant” of, gluten, lactose, nuts, and a host of other things are much more difficult to pin down. While an aversion to

saturated fats had the benediction of Time magazine, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, and often one's doctor, fear of gluten seems to have originated, in large part, in that amorphous thing called the "Web," where, to many people, almost every source looks authoritative, especially if it is saying something you'd like to hear.

Where this will lead is anyone's guess—hopefully not to the situation depicted in the recent *New Yorker* cartoon in which people sit around an empty Thanksgiving Dinner table, with each of them saying something like "I'm vegan," "I'm lactose intolerant," "I'm allergic to gluten," and so on (*New Yorker*, 30 August 2012). It does make one long for the days when the mainstream media reported on Pasteur's germ theory of disease and one could just go out and swat some flies.

#### NOTES

- 1 Michael Pollan popularized the term "the omnivore's dilemma" in his book of that name, crediting the psychologist Paul Rozin for the phrase. It did appear first in Rozin's work, and the concept's many implications were explored in the work of the French social scientist Claude Fischler, who called it "the omnivore's paradox" (Pollan 2006, 3; Rozin 1976, 21–25; Fischler 1990, 61).
- 2 Schramm's comments appear in "Diet and Coronary Heart Disease," *Nutrition Reviews* 30 (10) (October 1972): 223.

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## Contributors

**Ken Albala** is professor of history and director of Food Studies at the University of the Pacific and the author of a wide array of books on food, including *Eating Right in the Renaissance*; *Food in Early Modern Europe*; *Cooking in Europe, 1250–1650*; and *The Banquet: Dining in the Great Courts of Late Renaissance Europe*. He has also edited numerous publications, among them the three-volume *SAGE Encyclopedia of Food Issues*, the *Routledge International Handbook of Food Studies*, and the four-volume *Food Cultures of the World Encyclopedia*. He is currently the series editor of *AltaMira Studies in Food and Gastronomy*; his textbook *Three World Cuisines: Italian, Chinese, Mexican*, which appeared in the series, won the Gourmand World Cookbook Award for best foreign cuisine book published in the United States. A firm believer in teaching history through original documents, he is the editor of *The Food History Reader: Primary Sources* and of *The Most Excellent Book of Cookery*, a translation with Timothy Tomasik of the sixteenth-century cookbook *Livre fort excellent de cuysine*.

**Elizabeth Baird** is a food writer, editor, and cookbook author. *Classic Canadian Cooking* was her first cookbook, published in 1974, and her latest is *Canada's Favourite Recipes*, published in 2012. In the interval, she worked for twenty years as food editor of *Canadian Living* magazine, has appeared on numerous television shows, notably *Canadian Living Cooks* on Food Network, and published more cookbooks with the Canadian Living Test Kitchen. In addition, she has written a weekly food column since 1981, first in the *Toronto Star* and, for the past twenty-five years, in the *Toronto Sun* and SunMedia papers. She was named a Member of the Order of Canada on 1 July 2013.

**Jacqueline Botterill** is associate professor in the Department of Communication, Popular Culture, and Film, at Brock University, where she teaches and conducts research in the areas of advertising and consumer culture. Her current interest in contemporary eating practices includes the study of dinner parties and of eating away from the table—in cars, at one's desk, and on the street.

**Rebecca Carruthers Den Hoed** is a PhD candidate at the University of Calgary and teaches in the Department of Communication and Culture. Her background lies in rhetoric and discourse studies, a theoretical orientation that informs her critical analysis of food movements and claims to “right living” through food. Her dissertation examines the multiple, interwoven, and often competing models of food citizenship mobilized by discourses of subsistence, sport, and hipster hunting in Canada, with a focus on the province of Alberta.

**Catherine Carstairs** is associate professor of history at the University of Guelph. She is the author of *Jailed for Possession: Illegal Drug Use, Regulation and Power in Canada, 1920–61*, and the coeditor, with Nancy Janovicek, of *Feminist History in Canada: New Essays on Women, Gender, Work, and Nation*. Among her current projects are two books, one a history of the Health League of Canada and the other a history of dentistry and dental health.

**Nathalie Cooke's** publications explore the shaping of taste in Canadian literature and foodways. She is professor of English at McGill, founding editor of *CuiZine: The Journal of Canadian Food Cultures*, and editor of *What's to Eat? Entrées into Canadian Food History*.

**Pierre Desrochers** is associate professor of geography at the University of Toronto. His main research interests are economic development, technical innovation, the interface between business and the environment, and energy policy and food policy. He is a co-author, with Hiroko Shimizu, of *The Locavore's Dilemma: In Praise of the 10,000-Mile Diet*.

**Charlene Elliott** is professor of communication at the University of Calgary and Canada Research Chair in Food Marketing, Policy, and Children's Health. She is jointly appointed with the Faculty of Kinesiology. Her areas

of research include food promotion and policy, communication and health, children's food marketing, regulation and obesity, taste and taste cultures, and sensorial communication and its governance. Currently, she is writing on the complex nature of children's food marketing, exploring what it means—in terms of dietary habits and health—to promote food using particular types of marketing appeals. Elliott has provided input and recommendations on federal and international initiatives pertaining to food, labelling, and policy.

**John Gilchrist** has reviewed restaurants for CBC Radio in Calgary since 1980 and is the author of ten national bestsellers on dining in southern Alberta. He has also released three restaurant apps, including *Eat Canada*, a nation-wide restaurant guide for the business traveller. His weekly "Off the Menu" column appears in the *Calgary Herald*, and he is a contributing editor for *Avenue* and *Where Calgary* magazines, as well as writing regularly for *Swerve* and *Harry*. He is a member of one of the selection panels for *Restaurant* magazine's list of the "World's 50 Best Restaurants" and the Calgary judge for the Canadian Culinary Championships. Gilchrist teaches courses on food culture for the University of Calgary and leads travel programs to culinary destinations such as Santa Fe, New York, Rome, and Paris.

**Josh Greenberg** is associate professor and director of the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University, as well as the lead investigator of the Communication, Risk, and Public Health Research Group. His areas of research interest and activity include crisis and emergency-risk communication, media coverage of health scares, the impact of digital media on emergency management, risk communication for vulnerable populations, and community consultation in relation to harm reduction and other controversial public health initiatives. He has worked closely with public health agencies and organizations at the national, regional, and municipal levels on developing public health campaigns and effective community-engagement strategies.

**Shannon King** is currently a student in the Bachelors of Applied Science program at the University of Guelph, with a major in applied human nutrition, and holds a scholarship from the Loran Scholars Foundation. During the summer of 2013, she interned with Edible Canada in Vancouver, where

she was immersed in the inner workings of all the areas of the organization's business—culinary tourism ventures, a speciality local foods retail store, and a bistro that showcases Canadian cuisine.

**Stephen Kline** is a professor in the School of Communication and the director of the Media Analysis Laboratory at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver. His research interests include the study of domestic consumption, advertising, and consumerism, debates surrounding video game policy, community media education, the marketing of food and toys to children, and the dynamics of family consumption. He is the author of five books, including *Globesity*, *Food Marketing*, and *Family Lifestyle*, which offers a critical analysis of the public debates concerning the role of the media in the rise of child obesity in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. Kline's current research into media-saturated family life in Canada explores the relationships among children's sedentary lifestyles, their patterns of food consumption, and their socialization as consumers.

**Jordan LeBel** is associate professor of marketing and director of the Luc Beaugard Centre of Excellence in Communications Research in the John Molson School of Business at Concordia University in Montréal, as well as a member of the university's Centre for Sensory Studies. He conducts research on hedonic and aesthetic consumption and its relationship to definitions of pleasure and is particularly interested in the emotional and biological determinants of food choices and the role of hedonic consumption both in obesity and in healthy eating and lifestyles. His work on comfort food and his expertise on chocolate have received extensive press coverage. LeBel is a member of Concordia University's Food Culture Research Group and a 3M National Teaching Fellow.

**Harvey Levenstein** is a social historian specializing in the history of American food and the author of two wide-ranging surveys of the topic: *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet* and *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Food in Modern America*. In his most recent book, *Fear of Food: A History of Why We Worry About What We Eat*, he analyzes the forces that have helped make middle-class Americans anxious about food. Levenstein did his undergraduate work at the University of Toronto and graduate work at the University of Wisconsin. He has taught at Brooklyn

College of the City University of New York, Columbia University, and McMaster University, where he is now professor emeritus of history. He has also been a visiting professor and invited researcher at the Centre for the Study of Social History at the University of Warwick, the Maison des sciences de l'homme in Paris, and the Research Centre for the History of Food and Drink at Adelaide University. His books and articles have won a number of awards, including a *New York Times* "Notable Book of the Year."

**Wayne McCreedy** is a professor emeritus in the Department of Classics and Religious Studies at the University of Calgary and recently completed his second five-year term as director of the university's Calgary Institute for the Humanities. His research at the institute focused on the role of the humanities for meaning making in light of "place" studies, as well as on authority and civil society. His primary area of research is group identity and self-definition during Second Temple Judaism (ca. 200 BCE to 200 CE).

**Irina D. Mihalache** is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Information at the University of Toronto, where she conducts research into the intersections between food cultures and museums and is currently co-editing a book on the subject. More specifically, she looks at museum restaurants and their menus as spaces of informal learning and multi-sensorial interpretation. Her research interests also include curatorial practice in food museums, historic foodways programs at heritage sites, and museum communication. In addition to food in museums, Mihalache writes about the representations of celebrity chefs in the kitchen and performances of masculinity on food television. She received her PhD in communication studies from the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University and her MA in French studies from New York University.

**Eric Pateman** has grown his company from a tiny one-man culinary concierge service into one of the leading ambassadors of Canadian cuisine and a storyteller for hundreds of small companies across the country. Beginning simply as Edible Vancouver in the spring of 2006, the business widened its scope beyond the city limits to become Edible British Columbia and then, in 2010, Edible Canada, recently ranked as one of Canada's fastest growing companies by *Profit* magazine. A co-author of the *British Columbia Seasonal Cookbook*, Eric is regularly sought as an expert on Canadian food and wine

for research projects, cooking demonstrations, and speaking engagements. Business in Vancouver named him one of their “Forty Under 40” in 2007, and, in 2008, he appeared on *Western Living* magazine’s list of “Top 40 Foodies Under 40.”

**Sheilagh Quaile** has a BA in History from the University of Guelph, where she conducted research on the history of milk pasteurization in Canada. She is currently completing a Master’s Degree in Art History at Queen’s University.

**Melanie Rock** is an associate professor in the Department of Community Health Sciences in the Cumming School of Medicine, at the University of Calgary. Also at the University of Calgary, she holds appointments in the Department of Ecosystem and Public Health, in the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, as well as in the Faculty of Social Work and in the Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Arts. Her research focuses on the societal and cultural dimensions of health, with an emphasis on the importance of animals for human well-being in everyday life.

**Paige Schell** is a recent graduate of the Master of Public Health program at the University of Guelph, where she also completed her undergraduate work with a focus in food science and history. Currently, she works as a public health planner at Region of Waterloo Public Health.

**Valerie Tarasuk** is a professor in the Department of Nutritional Sciences and the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto. Much of her research focuses on problems of household food insecurity in Canada, especially their origins and nutrition implications, as well as on policy and program responses to these concerns. Paralleling this focus is an ongoing interest in Canadian food policy and population-level dietary assessment. Her recent work in this area includes a series of studies (led by doctoral candidate Jocelyn Sacco) that investigate the population health implications of discretionary food fortification, a broad-based study of nutrition-related food marketing in Canadian supermarkets, and an examination of nutrition inequities in Canada.

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