Report of the
Citizen Hearings on Food

Prince Edward Island
2004

Script

(Note: Please contact Anne Bishop regarding access to the video presentation)

Organized by the Latin America Mission Program and the Cooper Institute
Funded by the George Metcalf Foundation
Commissioners: Anne Bishop, Joe Byrne and Ann Wheatley
Report delivered as the Daniel O'Hanley Memorial Lecture,
November 14, 2004, by Anne Bishop
Video by Rosemary MacAdam

Background

In 1976, the Berger Inquiry into the proposed Mackenzie Valley gas pipeline developed a new model for government commissions. Justice Thomas Berger arranged for community organizers to do the groundwork for months in advance. They encouraged people and recorded oral history, translated from the Dene language and brought forward the voices of those who would not have assumed their knowledge was important to the Commission. The inquiry was able to tap into centuries of traditional knowledge of the region and in the end, the pipeline was not built.

Meanwhile, activists across Canada had taken note, and the people's commission, or citizen's commission, was born. These are inquiries organized by ordinary people to gather our own knowledge, organize it and give it back. The purpose is to gain an overview and evaluate our strategies for change. The follow-up action comes from the communities that are involved.

The first citizen's commission was the People's Commission on Unemployment in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1977-78. Their report was called *Now That We've Burned our Boats*. The most ambitious was the People's Food Commission, 1978-80. It was national in scope, organized and supported by more than 300 organizations and involving over 5000 volunteers. Its purpose was to examine the Canadian food system. The report was called *The Land of Milk and Money*. The Prince Edward Island hearings for the People's Food Commission were organized by the National Farmer's Union and the Latin American Mission Program. I was here as a commissioner in the spring of 1979.

The report of the People's Food Commission went back to the non-government organizations and regional networks that organized the hearings, inspiring confidence, communication and ideas for action. Many of those networks are still active, including here on PEI, where the people involved became the Cooper Institute. This past spring the Latin American Mission Program and the Cooper Institute decided to organize a new set of citizen's hearings to look at what has happened to the PEI food system in the last 25 years since the Peoples' Food Commission. I was delighted when they invited me back again to serve as a commissioner. They also invited two PEI commissioners, Joe Byrne and Ann Wheatley.

The hearings were held three weeks ago, in O'Leary, North Milton and Poole's Corner. We heard from people involved in the production of food, both farmers and fishers. We heard about the challenges consumers face in obtaining healthy food, and the struggle faced by low-income families trying to access even the minimum nutrition they need. We received submissions on the environment, plant-breeders rights and seed patenting, land use, water quality and genetically modified organisms. We were given poetry and original songs; we participated in singing and reflected on our connection with the land, and we were treated to a delicious organic suppers.

Rosemary MacAdam, who is my niece, came as a volunteer to work with me on this report. She took one of the original songs, written and performed by Tony Reddin at the

North Milton hearing, and made a collage of images. I hope it will give you a sense of what the hearings were like.

Multi-media Collage: "If you want to grow good corn."

This report will be divided up into sections:

First I will summarize what we heard about the issues faced by six key sectors: farmers, organic farmers, inshore core fishers, shell fishers, Aboriginal communities involved in the fishery and low-income consumers.

Second, I have organized the content of the hearings under nine themes: making ends meet, vertical integration and corporate control, exporting and importing food, ownership of life-forms, genetically modified organisms, beneath the surface, health, the environment and our spiritual connection with the land.

Speakers at the hearings put a range of change strategies before us, from simple, common-sense solutions to specific problems, to deep transformation of the whole food system. The fourth section is about strategy. It will include some messages for the Provincial government and the Federal government, but the heart of this process is citizens' action. I have organized the hearing participants' ideas for action into political tactics, economic tactics, alternatives for low-income consumers, ideological tactics and alternative research.

And then, some closing messages.

Key Sector Summaries

Before I start talking about key sectors, I want to make a disclaimer. There are complicated technical issues involved in every one of these sectors, and I can't hope to understand them after a few hours of hearings, even with the amazing job our speakers did of explaining. In any event, it is not my mandate to comment on every specific concern, but rather to pull together what we heard and make it into a larger overview.

Farmers

During the hearings, we had presentations from seven people who till the land. All face a struggle to survive. Several of our speakers described the impact of changes made to Canada's agricultural policies in 1969. That's when food ceased to be officially defined as a basic necessity for human life and became a commodity. Here are Steven MacKinnon and Kevin Arsenault:

(MacKinnon) "This was when the idea of bigger is better came into being and the need to get rid of half of the family farms over the next 30 years. Guess what? It was very, very successful. Food is seen by big business and government in terms of profit only. So, it's not surprising to see the effects of these policies since 1969. Some of them are: environmental problems, poorer food quality, factory farms, fewer family farms, weaker

communities with very little structure, a disconnection of the general population from the land and how food is grown, very little profit for small family farms, large margins for big business and a smaller tax base to pay for education, health care, roads, etc."

(Arsenault) "Because there is no longer a law of supply and demand at play within the food sector of the economy; so it is both naïve and foolish to think that by shifting from one commodity to another, or by making minor changes and further efficiencies, farmers will be able to get fair prices. The age old survival tactic which farmers have relied on to motivate themselves to stay in the game of farming, namely to hope against hope that next year will be the boon year that will pay all the bills and make everything right again, will no longer work. The facts of corporate control have become so obvious, that we'd have to be completely blind not to see that the farming game is fixed. Like a one-armed bandit at a gambling casino, or racino, agriculture is rigged to guarantee that the players—farmers—supply all the worry and work, all the investment, take all the risk, and, in the end, walk away with nothing, or perhaps just enough to gamble again next year."

Steven MacKinnon told us the story of how he almost lost the family farm when he took over at the age of nineteen. He saved it by returning to an older style of mixed farming and working more in tune with nature. Others have taken this path even further and become certified organic farmers.

Organic farmers

Farmers turn to organic production for a variety of reasons. John Hardy noticed what was happening to his soil:

(Hardy) "We were what you call conventional farmers for quite a few years. We had a dairy operation and mixed farming, and we were finding out a lot of our crops, especially corn, that our soil was ending up in a non-producing state."

James Rodd spoke of his father's feeling for and knowledge of the land:

(Rodd) "My father was a man with a great love for the land, the crops and the livestock, especially horses. Like his father before him, he understood the nature of farming, the cycles of the seasons and the organic processes that were needed to ensure a good crop was harvested. They were used to running their hands through the soil, feeling its structure and smelling its sweetness. I believe, or I hope at least, that I am as caring and nurturing to the land as was my father."

The transition from conventional to organic farming is not easy:

(Hardy) "So we decided we'd try-- this is before we were certified organic—we thought we'd try doing it without chemicals and, let me tell you, it's quite a thing to try to farm without chemicals after doing it for quite a few years. It's just like an addict going off of drugs—and we looked like that by the time the year was out."

Then there are challenges in maintaining certified organic status. All of the organic farmers who spoke at the hearings mentioned the threat of contamination by pesticides or genetically modified organisms. For Daphne Davey it became more than a threat:

(Davey) "Did you know that the Three-Year Crop Rotation Act allows a farmer to grow potatoes in three years of a six-year cycle? Thanks to this exemption—one of two built into the act—the act is effectually hamstrung. I live right next to land where this exemption has been used. As a result, I have now lost my 14-year certified organic status. In potato years I cannot grow tall plants which will show their heads above the three-foot board fence surrounding my organic vegetable and medicinal herb garden and I cannot bring my livestock into the barn on spray days because I am not notified when spraying will occur. In short, my ability is being impaired to maintain the healthy lifestyle which I have worked very hard over a number of years to develop."

John Hardy pointed out that the government's safety nets for farmers don't work very well for organic producers:

(Hardy) "If you fit into a certain category you're all right. You trigger a certain amount of money to cover what kind of losses you incur, but the way they have it set up, most of the allowable expenses are chemicals, and we don't fit into that group, and so, immediately, we don't trigger the money."

Another problem is the industrialized food production mindset of agricultural policy makers. Reg Phelan told us:

(Phelan) "It was even hard then. The agri schools and departments were really pushing the whole concept of monoculture and industrial farming and the works on it, and it was pretty hard to talk to them about organics or alternative ways, or how things had happened in the past, and they used to more or less a lot of times belittle the traditional farmers and small farmers who had been doing it for years.

Really it was an uphill battle in terms of approaching them on this, and it still is today, because a lot of them have grown up in that mindset in terms of doing that, and they look upon it now, particularly because the consumers' pressures for more organic produce and less chemicals and better treatment of the environment, there is some pressure for them to become somewhat involved, but even when they do become involved in that, they think it's just another little niche in the industrial system rather than a different approach to farming."

The biggest challenge, according to the organic farmers who spoke with us, is marketing:

(Clausheide)"I don't think most people are aware how most organic farmers are just barely scraping by, and it's not the production. It's a whole lot easier to grow it than it is to sell it. You've got to be able to sell it in enough quantity to make a living at it. I know maybe one organic farmer in the whole Maritimes that's making a comfortable living at it."

Working with the big supermarket chains is tricky, with all the risk on the farmer's side:

(Rodd) "A corn farmer, sweet corn farmer, in the valley was told to produce eight acres of sweet corn for Superstore, and when it came on stream the first of August, he was waiting for the order, and he called Superstore—"What's going on?" "Oh, sorry, we're getting it in from Quebec." What does that individual organic corn producer do with sweet corn that was destined—you know, you can't stop the growth."

Some certified organic producers sell through farmers markets or directly from their farms, but very little PEI organic produce is consumed on the Island. James Rodd made a guess that 50 acres of certified organic potatoes would satisfy the local demand and Margie Loo told us that only 10% of the organic food consumed on the Island is grown here. So, like conventional farmers, organic producers have to sell elsewhere. One group does this through their own marketing cooperative, Seaspray Atlantic.

(Phelan) "And we consider it the best approach, if we want to really get people involved in it, or really change the PEI economy from the conventional type of farming to organic, is there has to be some example set in terms of this product can be grown here, which takes a lot of experimenting and time on our parts in terms of doing it, but also that we can market it and make a living at it. I think if we can show that, I think you'll see a faster transition from conventional agriculture to organic."

Inshore core fishers

Farmers work with many government regulations, but when it comes to the fishery, the regulations are so extensive and complicated that we spent part of our time at the hearings just figuring out the language. Inshore core fishers, it was explained to us, are owner-operators of 30 to 45 foot boats, fishing in inshore waters. At the best of times this is a challenge. Doug Fraser told the O'Leary hearing:

(Fraser)"Core fishers continue to explore different options always mindful of mother nature's changes, migratory patterns and the many different factors which change with every tide. With four tides within a twenty-four hour period, these changes tend to help with hair loss by fishers."

Like farmers, inshore fishers face industrialization. Gerard Steele told us:

(Steele) "The hook and line fishery gave way to a mobile fleet of trawlers towing large heavy nets over vast areas. In a few short years the great northern cod stocks have been devastated along with many other species. There are some estimates that an area one-third the size of Canada is being drug over each year on our continental shelves. Seiners also became a significant factor in the fishery. These ships using very large nets with very small mesh, are capable of pursuing fish populations all over their migration routes."

Like industrial farming, industrial fishing is pushing past the limits of nature. As our hearings took place the focus of attention on fish stocks was nearby, on the wharf at Souris. At both the O'Leary and Poole's Corner hearing we heard the background: the large New Brunswick-based herring seiners used to take all of their quota from the Bay of Chaleur. The inshore fishers there protested until the seiners were restricted to taking only half of their quota there. Because of reduced stocks, they now take only 17% of their quota in the Bay of Chaleur and must find all the rest elsewhere. As a result, inshore fishers in Nova Scotia and PEI are able to catch only 60-70% of their quota. PEI, in particular, has not adequately protected its inshore waters. Steele explained to us what is at stake:

(Steele) " The scientists know now that the herring is like a salmon. It homes to a certain area and spawns at the same time throughout its life cycle and its decendants come back to the same areas. So if you let these boats go right into these areas where these fish accumulate to reproduce, they can encircle the whole school. Not a single fish can escape. Every age-class of fish, probably down to one year or even less, they catch with these nets, and the nets, you couldn't put your finger through the mesh. In the late 70s, they fished right in Colville Bay, right off the Souris wharf, within a mile of the wharf. There hasn't been a spawning stock in Souris since. That's not that long ago. A lot of us here were in high school. It's just plain wrong."

He also described the tactics that the police are using to keep the inshore fishers from interfering with the seiners landing their catch:

(Steele)"We've been negotiating for four years. We all know what happened last year, with people arrested and thrown in jail, two of them roughed up. This summer and fall they've been going around visiting homes, and they can deny it if they want. They knew some of the leaders. They're going to their homes—'If you cross the line, we're taking you to court. You're going to be charged and the seiners have the right to sue you for the loss of their catches.' They estimate last year from the blockades they lost three quarters of a million pounds and, if they could make a charge stick or not, you still have to defend yourself, and the lawyers wouldn't be long gobbling up your assets. So that's why you're not seeing a whole lot of activity on the wharf today.

Well, they had M16s there last year, and attack dogs. It really says something when you have to take a riot squad around to conduct your fishery."

The inshore fishers are not asking for a lot here:

(Steele) "But we're not destroying stocks. We just want these guys pushed out far enough so they don't destroy these homing stocks."

This is a current, visible struggle over environmental and community survival.

Aboriginal communities involved in the fishery

Chris Milley made a presentation to the O'Leary hearing on the Aboriginal fishery. Mi'kmaq culture has preserved strong values of community and the sacred wholeness of nature, along with the place of humans and the meaning of food within that circle. As with all populations, Chris informed us, thousands of years of evolution have made the Mi'kmaq people dependent on their traditional diet, with the majority of the protein coming from the sea--fish and marine mammals.

(Milley) "When you start to look at the dependence on traditional diet and health, there's a direct relationship. When you look at the places that have the most contact with non-Aboriginal society, you have the poorest health conditions."

As Chris explained to the hearing, the early European settlers recognized the Aboriginal right to hunt and fish for food and ceremonial purposes, a right confirmed by the Supreme Court in the Sparrow decision in 1990. Also since the 18th century, specific treaties recognized the right of the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet and Passamaquoddy to make a living from natural resources. This right was confirmed by the Supreme Court in the Marshall Decision in 1999. The Mi'kmaq people see the Marshall decision as an opportunity to deal with present problems in the community, particularly the 60-80% unemployment rate.

(Milley) "You have communities that are relatively small. They are in places that don't have a lot of access to economic resources. You have a lot of unemployment. Aboriginal unemployment in First Nations ranges from 60 to 80 %. The European perspective, or post-European perspective, can be—my father is a Newfoundlander, went into the clergy, the United Church, and moved to Ontario. My cousins, my brother-in-laws, when they were looking for work when they graduated from university, went out to Alberta. That's the normal mode of operation in my society. I don't have to leave my culture to more across Canada. But a Mi'kmaq person leaves the Mi'kmaq community, they're actually leaving their culture. It's a cultural shift to work in Moncton. Somebody moves from Lennox Island and goes to Charlottetown, they've actually emigrated from their culture. We don't see that. It's even more pronounced in communities like Eskasoni and Big Cove where the language is still spoken as the first language. So that's something to bear in mind. So people look at it and say, 'Oh yeah, go get a job.' But you're saying 'Leave the country.' When Trudeau was running back in the 70s, he said, 'If you don't like it move south of the border,' and people thought 'how terrible of him to say that,' but we say that to First Nations all the time."

The challenge facing the Mi'kmaq First Nations of PEI, then, is to maintain and manage their fishery, with objectives that contradict those of the industrial fishery. Chris described these objectives as: the protection of Aboriginal and treaty rights, which means the preservations of stocks, because if future generations are going to have the right to fish, there have to be fish; a secure supply of food for the community; a stable livelihood, and harmonious relations with neighbouring communities.

(Milley)"It's the same objectives everybody has. We want to feed our families and we want a good livelihood. We don't want to see people getting rich at our expense. So it's pretty much the same. Oh yes, and the bottom one here, development and maintenance of harmonious relations with adjacent fishing communities, has been taken so seriously, they've actually not gone after fisheries when they thought the non-Natives in other fishing communities would object. There's been a lot of compromise without people knowing."

Shell fishers

Donna and Lloyd Lewis told us their story at the O'Leary hearing. They make their living raising shellfish on leases held by the Lewis family since the 1950s. They, too, are under pressure, from environmental degradation, in particular the level of nitrates in the water:

(Lloyd Lewis)"High nitrogen levels cause various plants to grow faster than normal. One of these would be sea lettuce. The first of two big problems associated with this are smothering of the shellfish by the sea lettuce. It grows in sheets and blankets the sea bottom, and oysters can't filter or get oxygen from the water, and they die.

Almost all of the soft-shell clam industry here, which at one time was a successful culture project of ours yielding anywhere from 10-30,000 pounds a year, has died—all at once—at every stage of the species growth. Why—haemic neoplasia—which is a form of cancer that weakens the clam and allows other environmental triggers to cause unusually high rates of mortality. It has been linked in the United States to a combination of environmental factors, overntrification, human and animal waste and agricultural run-off."

Other problems faced by the Lewis family come from people's lack of knowledge and respect for what they do for a living:

(Donna Lewis) "I am faced with tourists that are not aware of their rights and obligations in and around the waterways, as well as many other fishermen taking a great deal of opportunity—including today, it's a big risk to be here—to steal product on grounds that are clearly marked according to Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Coast Guard standards. This year has probably been one of the worst years for poaching I've ever seen for oysters. At any given time there are about 8 to 10 boats the minute you turn your back, whether you're on the shore or not, are quickly over the line gathering as much product as they possibly can."

The environment is very volatile at times, and there are times when I actually fear for my safety. If I'm home alone and Lloyd's not there, I won't go out in the boat and chase somebody off the water, because 8 guys, or even 2 guys, when I'm not very big, so I wouldn't want to fall over, have an accident. We've had people that have been intoxicated out there as well causing damage to the leases, so it's very volatile at times.

When I first moved here—I moved here in 1986, I left the corporate world after being there 10 years, and I found it tremendously liberating, physically and mentally, to be

here, work on the water. It was so quiet, seemed to be pristine, a very healthy place to be, and it has changed, it's become very ugly by times."

In her closing sentence, Donna Lewis said that they no longer count on passing the family tradition of shell fishing on to their children, an echo of what we heard in the farming and inshore fishing sectors.

Low-income consumers

Consumers who wish to eat healthy food produced in a healthy environment face many challenges. These emerged in every hearing. For example, the difficulty of accessing locally produced, certified organic food and avoiding genetically modified foods when they are not labelled.

These concerns involve all consumers of food, but there are some particularly urgent issues facing consumers living on a limited income. All three hearings included presentations on the lack of food security among this group of citizens.

How many people in this wealthy country struggle along on less income than they need to eat a healthy diet? According to Jennifer Taylor, presenting at the North Milton hearing, about 10% of Canadians.

How many people on PEI can be defined as low-income? We weren't given that figure, but other statistics would suggest that the prevalence is higher than the National average. At O'Leary, Blye Perry told us that the average income on PEI is $22,000 a year, $10,000 lower than the national average. 43% of Islanders work part-time and more than half work seasonally. Many depend on Employment Insurance, which is usually 55% of employment income.

What does a low income mean for a family's ability to eat a healthy diet? Blye Perry and Marcia Carroll engaged the participants at the O'Leary and Poole's Corner hearings in an exercise. At O'Leary the father of our imaginary family worked at a fish processing plant and the mother just been laid off from an employment development project. We calculated their income and essential expenses, then, using grocery store flyers, we tried to figure out what they could afford to eat.

Three clips: people working with flyers.

We succeeded in making the ends meet, just barely. But then we were reminded that since this is November, and the father works in a fish processing plant, he has just been laid off. The ends no longer came anywhere close. And the exercise did not allow for anything beyond barest survival. Marcia Carroll reminded us:

(Carroll) "But what is even more frightening is what happens if there are unexpected expenses arise throughout the month, some of the scenarios that happen to each and every one of us all the time?

Your car has broken down and it will cost $500 to repair;
Your child is sick and you must go to Halifax for your sick child. You get paid by the hour so while you are with your child you no longer get paid and you have to pay for food, housing and transportation while you are in Halifax.
It is December 12th and you need to buy Christmas presents for your children.
It is August 18th, and you need to buy school supplies for your children.
You have a death in the family and you are expected to contribute to the funeral expenses.
You need a new roof or you need a service call for your furnace.
That's just to name a few of the things that could come up in the run of a month."

Jennifer Taylor quoted research showing that mothers are 7 times more likely than their children to experience hunger, because in their attempt to give their children enough, they reduce their own servings and skip meals. They cope in other ways as well:

(Taylor) "They say to me: 'Well, if I have to cope, here's what I do. I can skip eating. I have coffee and cigarettes.' I had one mom talk to me about how her parents locked up and rationed food. One of the saddest ones is sending children elsewhere for meals, encouraging someone to go to their friend's for supper. Imagine doing that. It's OK when they want to go and you send them, but when you're saying: 'Why don't you ask Johny if you can come over.' It's to try to save. Writing sick notes for school—one mother kept a child home a couple of times a week, a different child, so that the lunches that she sent to school she could make spread around. She was getting hassled by the school for that, because they were wondering why the kids were missing, but she said that was a strategy that she came up with. It wasn't all perfect, but it was her way."

As our presenters pointed out, inadequate nutrition is related to many diseases. Because of this, food insecurity today means more spending on health care in the future.

This has been the briefest of summaries of what we heard from those key sectors in the food system. My apologies to the presenters for everything I have left out. However, given the time available, we must move on to the key themes that emerged out of the hearings.

Themes

Making ends meet

As you can see from the summaries of key sectors, a constant theme was the difficulty of making ends meet, for both small producers and low-income consumers. However, there is a lot of money in the food system. So where does it go? This is Danny Hendricken:

(Hendricken) "The net farm income in this country will be close to minus $20 million, and considering that the Cargills of this nation will make in excess, I think, in Canada alone, I think it was $15-20 billion in net profit in sales of food this year alone. And to show you how manipulated, and how our priorities have become somewhat obscured, the farmers' share of a box of Wheaties is 5 cents, whereas Tiger Woods, who has his picture on the front of it, receives royalties of 10 cents on that same box."

Vertical integration and corporate control
As Hendricken pointed out, the other side of small producers and consumers struggling to survive is the power of the corporate sector:

(MacKinnon) "Over the past three and half decades it appears the winners have been big business and banks and the losers have been the small family farms and our communities."

Corporations have become the big winners in the food system through vertical integration. Dan Hendricken explained the concept:

(Hendricken) "What they start to do right now is to buy shares into the retail sector, whatever, so that they will control not only the production and the growing of the grain and the inputs that go into the production of the hog, but also they'll control then when the hog goes into the processing of pork chops and loins and hams, whatever, and then they'll also control the facility that also sells you that merchandise

--and the transportation

--and the transportation also

--so they own the whole industry

--so they own the whole industry

-- more and more of it

--and that's a very dangerous precedent to set."

Along with vertical integration, government policies, including so-called "free trade" agreements, have encouraged agribusiness corporations to expand all over the world. This has brought about an unprecedented concentration of wealth in a few hands in the food system. Here is Kevin Arsenault:

(Arsenault)"The facts on just how consolidated ownership and control of the food system has become are astounding, and almost incomprehensible—we hear the figures, but we can't process the full impact of what they actually mean, but let's try. Canada's agri-food exports have tripled between 1988 and 2002, from 10.9 billion to 28.2 billion. At the same time as farmers' realized net income has fallen by 24% and Steven mentioned that the debt's also doubled. Statistics Canada data reveals that the average rate of return for food processors in Canada over a seven year period from 1990 to 1997 was 11.6%. This structured inequity in how the Canadian food dollar is divided between farmers, processors, traders and retailers in the food system has produced a catastrophe for Island farmers: in the 5 year census period between 1996 and 2001, the number of farms declined by 16.2% on Prince Edward Island in that same five-year period, with more

than 50% of farmers with capital less than $200,000 annual capital transfer, less than $200,000--disappearing during this same five year period—half the farms in that five-year period."

Exporting and importing food

Closely related to the theme of corporate control was the theme of import and export of food. Global corporations go wherever they must to buy at the lowest price. This means that residents of this major food-producing island can't eat your own food.

(Arsenault) "While PEI farmers find themselves in a situation where they can't sell their product at any price, food retailers import beef from Argentina fed with GM grains, which Islanders have no way of knowing is not even Island beef, since retailers like the Atlantic Superstore and Sobeys do not label these food products, and are not required to do so. Atlantic Superstore—anytime I go in there, I ask them, 'Is there any Island beef? Is there any Atlantic Canadian beef,' and a few times I've gotten the candid answer, 'All the meat came frozen from New Zealand this week. Next week all of the meat is coming frozen from Argentina."

(Participant) "Apples from New Zealand? You know when you go to the Superstore, apples from New Zealand, in October for cripes sake, and Chile. Last winter I discovered the Superstore was selling organic peas and corn, which are staples in our house—they had changed from the Canadian—Meadows, something Meadows—and they're importing frozen peas and corn from China. Peas and Corn—to North America! How is it possible that they can buy corn and peas in China and get it here cheaper than they can get it in Saskatchewan or … It's mind boggling!"

(Milley) "We catch—in fact, in 1987, when I was working for the International Centre for Ocean Development, we produced a map, a world fisheries map. We did this with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and at that time, Canada was the largest exporter of fish in the world. We were a small consumer. The average was 14 pounds per year in Canada national average, whereas if you go to Japan, there's a huge consumption. The average consumption is very high. We've always taken our fish and sold it. Now we know that the Omega 3 fatty acids that's available in fish oils and the health benefits of fish in the diet were understated. We didn't realize that the cod liver oil we were getting as kids was really important, and here we are in Atlantic Canada, catching it and shipping it of for somebody else to be healthy, so we can eat chicken."

Ownership of life-forms

Another topic related to corporate control of the food system is private ownership of life-forms. Peter Feldstein made a presentation on plant breeders' rights. Seed patenting is a related issue. Both give corporations rights that limit growers' ability to save their own seed from year to year.

(Feldstein) "They want control over the past, which says, in other words, saying that everything that everyone has done to develop these seeds--and then all of a sudden it became a protected variety because they introduced some change in them, but most of the

germ plasm was developed by farmers. The whole seed culture was a culture of the commons. This whole attack is one more example of privatization of the commons."

Genetically modified organisms

Another closely related issue to variety patenting and plant breeders' rights is genetically modified organisms. Like the struggle to save the herring, this is a current, urgent issue. What are genetically modified organisms? Kevin Arsenault explained:

(Arsenault) "Genetically modified organisms are plants or animals whose fundamental genetic makeup have been modified in the laboratory by introducing genes into the organism from viruses, bacteria or animals. Genetically engineered organisms are never modified with just one gene; each construction must include an array of genes arranged like a cassette, and they're literally blasted with a gun into the genome of the recipient plant or animal. GMO promoters insist that breeders have been manipulating plant and animal genes for centuries, and that GMO technology is simply a natural progression of what we have always done, and this is absolutely inaccurate. GMO varieties are the product of a technology which is categorically distinct from natural plant breeding methods and techniques; that is, the products of genetic engineering would not occur in nature, could not occur in nature, and in fact result from the forced insertion of genes from completely different species."

What are the problems with GMOs? The organic producers explained how GMOs can contaminate their crops through pollen drift and wild plants. There are other concerns, including: research connecting allergies, weakened immune systems and antibiotic resistance with GMO foods and pollen; new viruses from the viral components of GMOs spreading into the environment; destruction of beneficial insects by crops with insecticide genes; the development of herbicide tolerant "super weeds" and the spread of "terminator" technology, which cause plants to produce sterile seeds. Above all:

(Arsenault) " I want to highlight that even if GMOs had nothing but good health and environmental outcomes, we'd still be going down the wrong road, because they are the ticket for the permanent ownership and control of corporations of our food system."

Presenters and participants alike at the hearings were unified in their support for a GMO-free Island, now, before it's too late.

(Davey) "I believe that, from the points of view of the environment, agricultural marketing and public health, the banning of GMO crops in this province will turn out to be a positive, long-term investment."

(Loo) "Another idea that has been mentioned a lot recently is moving to a GMO-free Island. This would clearly distinguish us from the rest of North America as the only Island jurisdiction doing so. Consumers already know about genetically-engineered foods and have concerns. Even if only 1% of consumers in North America would make the effort to buy products they were sure were GMO-free it would provide us with a huge market potential."

(Arsenault) "Any good government would say, ' it's clear, let's do the right thing.' Just several months ago the European Economic Union, most of the big food retailers there have to label their food, and rather than attempt to label food that they know they can't sell to their people, they are demanding GMO-free status. What a marvellous opportunity for Prince Edward Island! We'd be such a little bit of a big market that's available there. And we do have a pristine position, in terms of being an island, being a northern climate, being all these other things that we could in no amount of time strike five-year contracts for production and start a transition away from the kind of conventional US markets or processing markets and the corporate control of those particular methods of producing food."

Beneath the surface

One theme that struck me is the contrast between the pastoral and abundant appearance of the PEI food system on the surface and the ominously fragile reality underneath. Marcia Carroll remarked that anyone walking through a supermarket on PEI would be amazed that there is any problem with the Island's food system. At the O'Leary hearing, Dr Ron Mitsusaki shared his observations of what lies beneath the surface:

(Mitsusaki) "I came here and I thought everything was wonderful. I thought, this is terrific, it's a beautiful place, the people are friendly. But then, the longer I was here, the more I saw people dying of cancer everywhere around me. There's a wake it seems like every other week. OK, something' wrong, something's wrong, something's wrong. And then I learned about the spraying, and then it didn't take very long to start linking this together. One thing that should not be is the incidence of cancer in little children, especially the rarer cancers—that's one thing that should not be. OK, you take that and you compile statistics--OK we have two 11-year-olds with bone cancer in West Prince, with a population of less than 30,000, when the incidence of bone cancer is 500 cases a year in the United States with a quarter of a billion people. And then you take adults who are dying in their 30s, 40s and 50s, some of them, again of relatively uncommon cancers, and we have some cancers here in adults that are rare. And another thing is if you go along certain strips, certain neighbourhoods, you're looking at an incidence of cancer of 50 to 100 percent in households in a small circumscribed area--another example of things that should not be."

Health

Dr Ron's observations have brought us into the theme of health. We have already heard comments from Chris Milley about the relationship between traditional diet and health in Aboriginal communities and from Blye Perry, Jennifer Taylor and Marcia Carroll about the impact of inadequate nutrition on the health of people who cannot afford to eat healthy food. We've heard about the possible health consequences of agricultural chemicals and genetically modified organisms. These health consequences are one of the hidden costs of food produced in an industrial food system.

The environment

Another hidden cost of an industrial food system is damage to the environment; for example, the disappearance of species. Earlier Doug Fraser and Gerard Steele talked about the destruction of commercial fishing stocks. Donna and Lloyd Lewis told about the death of hundreds of thousands of soft-shell clams from a form of cancer. Irene Novaczek described the complete extinction of many species from the Island:

(Novaczek) "Species on islands are very easily driven to extinction. In fact, 75% of all the animals that we know have gone extinct for sure since the year 1600 have gone extinct on islands. They have been endemic island species.

We got into species extinction back in the 1800s in a big way with overharvesting of wild animals for food as well as for fur and sport. We used to have passenger pigeons, the old guys say, 'stretching five miles … so thick I could see no sun.' They were exterminated by 1780. Heath hens, another abundant food bird, said goodbye in 1830. Eskimo curlew, there were 'so many … it was like clouds of mosquitoes"--gone by 1900. Right whales, walrus were extinct by the early 1800s. Black bear, wolf, golden eagle, marten, fisher, wolverine—they were all on this island, hunted out by the early 1900s. Lynx disappeared in 1940. Otters were last seen in 1975.

Industrial food production has resulted in the loss of 90% of all the crop varieties that farmers used to grow on this planet—90% are gone, gone, never to be recovered. Half of the breeds of livestock, the chickens and other animals that used to be grown on farms are also gone."

Presenters described the damage done by the industrialized food system to many other aspects of the environment. For example, to the soil:

(Loo) "Anyone who has planted a crop on PEI knows how sandy our soil is, how susceptible it is to wind and water erosion, and how shallow the layer of topsoil is. Potato-growing areas are particularly vulnerable to water erosion, since the potatoes are grown on hills that generally run up and down slopes, are harvested late in the fall not allowing time for cover crops to be planted and that since potatoes are the most lucrative cash crop for farmers, proper crop rotation is not being adhered to."

The forests:

(Loo) "*Growing up I spent a lot of time roaming the woodland at the back of our farm in Springfield--the stream that housed trout where we occasionally fished, the stand of sugar maple that we tapped for a bit of maple syrup and, of course, who could forget the huge old oak tree that had become hollow and could be crawled into. I took all those things for granted. They had been there for so long I thought they would last forever. Our neighbour on the next farm became ill and had to sell the farm. The new owner saw the large stand of sugar maple as a good way to make some cash. Other neighbours decided to square their fields to make way for large potato production equipment and significantly reduced the size of the woodland area. Now the brook has a red silted*

bottom rather than a pebbled one. It has been a long time since I have seen any fish there."

The climate:

(Novaczek) "Climate change is a big one and living, as we are, on an island, of course that will mean dramatic change for our grandchildren, in that, over the next hundred years the sea level will rise at least 80 centimetres, because we're sinking and it's coming up to meet us. And if the Antarctic ice shelves fall into the sea, add another metre on to that. And throw in a few extra-strength, heavy-frequency tropical cyclones, and before too long we will be living on three islands, not one. That's Environment Canada's projection."

And Water:

(Biggar) "In the late 70s and 80s we began to become aware of the clogging of the waterway. I have an interest in angling. I saw what was happening. Governments encouraged large farms. Hedgerows were destroyed. Now water runs too fast without the advantage of the natural filtering process. Farmers have drained wetlands to expand their farming operations. Much of the natural filtering was directly removed. Bullrushes, for example, disappeared. Springs clogged up because of high siltation. The runoff involved the pouring of incredible amounts of nitrates into our water system.

PEI has one of the most fragile drinking water sources in Canada. All we have is the ground water. Nitrates and other chemicals in the waterways result in serious problems for the quality of our drinking water. The consumption of nitrates is known to be harmful to mammals. Maximum levels have been set for drinking water on a national basis. Our water is showing significant concentrations of nitrates. Many wells produce water with levels of nitrates above that deemed acceptable. There is little doubt that the nitrates are seeping into the ground water from the fertilizers applied to the fields.

Just look at the increase in the bottled water. Every time we see a bottle of that store-bought water, we have to see it as a warning sign. It is a symptom that there is a serious problem. Every bottle of water should tell us to wake up. Bottled water is another reminder that the capitalist system needs to come up with superficial cures without looking at the root causes in order to change things."

Novaczek described PEIs "ecological footprint."

(Novaczek) "Our ecological footprint is basically the number of hectares of productive land that is required to support our individual lifestyles. So if you take all the productive land that's available on the planet and divide it by the number of people currently on the planet, you soon find out that we each have an allotment of 1.7 hectares to get along with.

So you consider the food, other crops, forest products, minerals, land occupied by roads and buildings and so on, and energy consumed. If you look at that for the average Canadian, you find that it takes 8.84 hectares of land to support the way that we conduct ourselves today in Canada, on average. So now, you'd think that here on PEI, well, this is an agricultural province. We don't have big smokestacks, we don't have big industries. People tell us we're poor, we have relatively modest incomes. Surely we consume less than the average Canadian. Our footprint should be smaller. Guess what. Our average footprint is 8.98 hectares. It's higher than the Canadian average. And do you know, out of all those things that they add up—roads and buildings, energy and—where we are most out of step with the rest of Canada? Where we really blow it, footprint-wise?

--Cars?

No, food. Food! We live in an agricultural province, and we have a significantly larger food imprint, ecological footprint, than any other province. Why is that? According to Ron Coleman, first, we eat too much, and we've got the overweight and obesity stats to show for it, and we import processed food from very long distances instead of eating what we grow ourselves, and that's it. We live in an agricultural province and we don't even eat our own food."

Spiritual Connection with the Land

Chris Milley spoke of the sacredness of the land and sea to the Mi'kmaq people. Long ago, European people shared this perspective:

(Novaczek) "Prior to the times of the industrial revolution, most of the peoples of the world saw nature as something that was sacred, our ancestors and various spirits—I mean, people talked to trees. They talked to babbling brooks—they babbled to the brooks, the brooks babbled back. The mountains and areas of trees and rivers were invested with the spirits of ancestors. Many areas were inviolate, and this really kind of kept a lid on our destructive tendencies."

A group named Gaia, for the ancient Greek goddess of the earth and a twentieth-century theory that the earth is one living organism, treated the North Milton hearing to music and reflection on our connection with the land.

Three clips of "Oh, Beautiful Gaia," with the PEI Gaia group.

Visions

At the Citizen Hearings we were given stories of a depressing array of problems in the PEI food system, but we were also given some moving visions of what could be.

(Theresa Perry) "And if we can imbue more Islanders to imagine PEI as an organic place, or as a place where people do not use pesticides, it is possible that it can happen. It really is. If we can put it into our psyche, into the psyche or our children and our friends, whoever we have, it is possible."

(Rodd) "PEI has great potential, if political will would only kick in, you know? We could make our province unique in Canada, and for that matter perhaps unique in the world. If we were to become GMO-free, if we were to enact regulations to reduce pesticides in transition to certified organic production over the next 10 years, for example. If we could provide ecological compensation to certified organic farmers. If we could recognize certified organic farming as a distinct farming system, apart from the conventional and any other that comes on the board. That would be a great stand. If we could provide opportunities for processing and distribution companies so as to provide a wider choice of certified organic products for consumers, if our government would adopt regulations that would protect certified organic farmers and consumers, the world would be at Prince Edward Island's doorstep."

(Steele) "The benefits to small communities of a strong viable fishery are obvious. Naturally, a healthy economy would be one result and along with that the communities could diversify, schools, hospitals and other service providers could take their place in small communities. Citizens would have a sense of self worth and confidence knowing they are a valued member of society."

(Novaczek) "If we could imagine a tourism industry where tourists come here because the water's clean, the air is clean, they can have—they come here for stress release and detox, where we have a place that's safe for elders and safe for small children. Wouldn't that be a wonderful tourism industry to have? We could go there. Why can't we go there? Of course we can go there."

Strategies

The necessity of all citizens taking responsibility for the food system

How, then, to get from where things are now to these dreams of a healthy, robust, egalitarian food system? Our presenters and participants have dozens of ideas.

First, two basic shifts in thinking must take place. We must stop taking the food system for granted and understand that we all share responsibility for its well-being.

(Hendricken) "I think sometimes we take better care and are more aware of our family car that gets us back and forth to work than probably, about whether or not we're going to receive a virus in our e-mails this week that might disrupt our information, rather than giving any thought, or any kind of idea about how our food, that we ingest into our bodies for our long term health, is being grown."

(Shane Perry) "A lot of people seem to want to blame everybody else, but really it's my fault, your fault, it's everybody's fault. Who didn't pollute today? I'm sure everybody polluted in some sort of way today, some sort of way, shape or form. So really, it boils right down to what can I do to do my part?"

(Loo) " There are many models of change we can look to from other parts of the world. We must turn from saying 'we can't do anything' to 'how are we going to get there?' People have power. Everyone has a role to play in making this a healthy island."

Implications of the right to food

The second major shift is to understand that the basic human right to food is not just a slogan. If it were the cornerstone of all our food-related policies, it would transform the whole structure of the food system. We would be talking about programs like guaranteed annual income, support for producers, even programs for food parallel to medicare.

(Phelan) "I was just wondering what you'd think of a foodcare system similar to medicare--some of the principles of medicare in terms of how medicare works in this country. At one time we had to pay for it. Some couldn't afford it; others were left without it, but now I think we've moved up quite considerably with our medicare system where we can be proud of it. I wonder what you think of a foodcare system similar?

--It sounds like a really good idea."

(Burge) "If we could start imagining that, I think we could start imagining back in the system, then. It also stands to reason, if we all have the universal right to food, then those who produce it would be considered the most valuable people in our community.

-- Just not pay us quite as much as doctors.

--Well, close!"

Discouragement with government

The Citizen Hearings were designed to hear from citizens and give the analysis and strategies back to citizens. However, we cannot ignore the crucial role played by government in any form of social change. Government has the mandate to promote and protect the well-being of the whole citizenry, and the power to carry it out with funds obtained through our taxes. However, according to our presenters and participants, the voice of the common good is all too often drowned out by corporate lobbies. We heard many expressions of disappointment with both the Federal and Provincial governments:

(Steele) "And how you get the politician's ear? Has anyone seen a Federal member say a thing? We had them in this room before the election. They were doing everything."

(Arsenault) "We went to present and further discuss some of the information in that document with the PEI Provincial cabinet and, I must say, I was really disappointed by the kinds of responses and the kind of defensive reactions of some of the members. I don't quite understand, because I don't see where they have so much connection with the corporate world they actually fought for that side. I don't know if it's lethargy, lack of interest in the future of the Island? I'm not sure exactly what is motivating our government to commit itself to a stance that lacks any moral courage on this issue."

(Lewis) "When decisions are made by a small number, and because government decides who the consulting body will be that they deal with, ultimately, we as fishers are advised that the industry was consulted, and we are told that we are the ones who asked for the changes, whether they be good or bad. This is morally and fundamentally wrong to me and this needs to change."

(Clausheide) "And in this democracy, we don't really get a say about economics. That's not on the table. We just more or less vote for our favourite millionaire."

(MacKinnon) "One also has to keep in mind, in order for the few to control the many, the decisions of the many have to made by the few and this is what has been happening for a long, long time. In our democratic system, all people 18 years of age and over have the right to vote. It is these individual votes, when added up, which put the person who gets the majority of votes in government to represent us. As far as I know in Canada, a corporation does not get to mark an X on a ballot on voting day. Yet when decisions are made and policies put in place, in the majority of cases, these corporations and big business seem to fair out better than the general population who actually marked the ballots."

Messages to government

Despite deep discouragement with government at all levels, almost every presentation contained requests for action by government. We've already heard some. Here are a few more:

Proportional representation
Higher minimum wage
A social safety net that gives adequate support for people that need it
A farm safety net that kicks in at a lower level and takes organic farmers more into account
Supports for organic farming, such as income support, transition support, information, education and marketing assistance, including a marketing coordinator
Incentives for farmers to increase the organic content of the soil
Abolish destructive fishing technologies
Respect and protection for the Aboriginal fishery and its management principles
The restoration of a well-managed, sustainable seal fishery
A free water test every year to every household
Watershed-based resource management counsels
More wind-power and other renewable energy sources
Investment in energy conservation
Better forestry planning
Reforestation with long-lived mixed species that make up the Acadian forest
Preservation of wild zones
Woodlots designed to demonstrate sustainable forestry practices
Development of recreation that encourages appreciation of streams and wild places and
Agri-tourism that stresses sustainable production

That's just a sampling of good ideas that were addressed to government at the hearings, but as the presenters said in various ways, just asking government to make changes is not enough. We must be prepared to put some force behind our words by taking action. This brings us to citizen strategies for change.

Political tactics

Because I have just finished that amazing list of policy proposals for government, I'll start with political tactics.

Political tactics are based on getting organized to propose alternatives to legislators and then put pressure on them. Proposing alternatives includes doing research on the impact of current policy and thinking through alternatives. Putting on pressure involves developing a base of committed supporters—an "inner circle" so to speak-- and a broader network of people and organizations prepared to respond to occasional requests like writing letters, signing petitions, or attending demonstrations. This base can then be mobilized to work at election time and provide a broadly-based voice during lobbying campaigns.

(Hendricken) "What is government? How do we define government but government looking after what is in the best interests of people for people? And I'm afraid we've allowed our politicians through our political complacency, to get removed from that scenario, and we have to bring them back to the fundamentals. And we do that by making them accountable for their actions and being a damn lot far more politically active than we have been."

Many presenters said that their lobbying would be more effective with more people involved. This is always true, but I would also remind you that lobbying is to some degree a matter of smoke and mirrors. Some very important policy changes have been made by very small groups of lobbyists, through skill and persistence, without necessarily numbers. Creativity, too.

Economic tactics

Many presenters urged us to use economic tactics; that is, putting on pressure by organizing ourselves to use our purchasing power in different ways. Specific proposals included more purchasing of locally and sustainably-produced food, cooperatives, local currencies, community-shared agriculture, asking for organic food at restaurants and from caterers, support for farmer's markets and a permanent week-day market for local produce.

Steven MacKinnon gave us a complete plan for transformation, starting with consumers:

(MacKinnon) "Interested people in a community would come together. A committee would be set up to identify the goals, such as ways to support small family farms, to have a more sustainable and healthier environment, to have better quality food and to build a stronger community. This would then lead to finding the family farms in the community who can and would be willing to work with them to reach these goals. If there wasn't

any family farms in your community, or not enough, or not willing, then you would extend your search outward, keeping in mind your goals.

Next, sub-committees would be set up. One would find out the needs for beef for the group and then line up the family farms to make it happen. Another sub-group would be set up for pork, another for potatoes and vegetables and others be set up to meet as many of the agricultural needs as possible of these interested people of the community.

This wouldn't be limited to just food. It could also include firewood, lumber, compost for your gardens and flower beds, tractor work such as working up your garden, snow blowing, etc. The ideas would be endless."

Alternatives for low-income consumers

Other tactics suggested by presenters involve developing alternatives for low-income consumers, who do not have the dollars to participate in consumer-based strategies. Although our presenters recognized how essential food banks are as a stop-gap measure, all rejected this charity-based approach in the long term in favour of strategies to end poverty. In the meantime, better alternatives include: bulk-buying clubs and cooperatives, community kitchens, community gardens, food-costing projects, providing facilitation and advocates for low-income people. Two presenters suggested specific models that could be imported from other Provinces; for example, the "Good Food Box," produced by farmers and gardeners outside of Toronto and regularly distributed to low-income households by an organization called Field to Table. Another example is nearby, in Nova Scotia, where an organic production cooperative called Sun Root Farm, working with the Department of Community Services, has organized a combination of community garden, community kitchen, nutrition and cooking education for local low-income families.

Ideological tactics

A fourth group of tactics are those designed to change the way people think, examine values, give information and increase communication. These are called ideological tactics. The hearings themselves were an ideological tactic. Several people remarked that the information they got from listening to other's stories changed the way they think about sectors other than their own.

Almost every presentation and discussion talked about education, the need for much more of it, along with some specific ideas, like using property tax bill mail-outs for educating property owners about their responsibility to protect water systems and respect those who make their living from the water. Other tactics involve the creative use of the media, or development of alternative media.

Irene Novaczek urged us to re-evaluate the whole way our culture has conditioned us to think about the natural world:

(Novaczek) "We have to fundamentally change our relationship with nature and, if you look at our ecological footprint, in particular we have to change our relationship with

food. We have to challenge our addiction with the consumer society, really ask what we need rather than what we simply want."

Alternative research

Related to ideological tactics is alternative research. The method can be oriented toward citizen's voices, for example, qualitative research, participatory research and action research. The subject can be issues of importance to citizens, sometimes in opposition to the research carried out by large corporations, like the incidence of certain diseases in areas where certain production practices are followed, as Dr Ron Mitsusaki suggested at O'Leary, or the hidden cost of industrially produced food, as Margie Loo proposed at Poole's Corner.

General comments on strategy

Several people said to me during the Citizen Hearing process that they hoped I would come up with something new. There are some new ideas here, and many strategies have been changed by something new, and that is the Internet. However, most of the strategies suggested at the hearings are old favourites. I think they are old favourites simply because they work. Sometimes we don't feel like they are working, because we do so much swimming against the tide. We do need more people to become involved, better coordination among our different strategies, more consensus on our direction, better priority-setting, a stronger sense of urgency, the groundswell of larger trends or public issues to propel us forward, but overall, I think the message of the hearings was to keep on keeping on.

Having listened to three days of lively discussion, I have five pieces of advice to offer:

First, organize collectively. Individual decisions about lifestyle and purchasing are important, but they can be a dead end alone. It is a collective structure we are working to change, and the heart of our efforts is collective organization and action. The society we want to create is not just an end product; we are creating it as we go, in the very ways we are learning to work together.

Second, it is crucial that we reach out and make common cause across barriers; that is, the barriers between classes and sectors, for example, or between Aboriginal people and people of European descent. This is really hard work, but it is well worth the effort. The "few who make decision for the many," as Steve MacKinnon called them, count on us not getting together across the lines that we've been taught divide human beings. Eroding those divisions by making common cause is key, I think, to any strategy powerful enough to make change.

Third, hang on to the overview. Dream big. Structural transformation of our global industrialized food system is a huge goal, but everything we do to tackle specific issues or build specific alternatives is a piece of it, and if we don't keep our eye on the horizon, it's possible wander off down side roads.

Fourth, having said "hang on to the overview," the other side of the equation is to think in terms of small steps. Several presenters described what they are proposing as simple, and not overwhelming. I think Steven MacKinnon made this point a lot better than I could:

(MacKinnon) "I think we have to be careful that we don't make it too hard for us to get there too quick. Any kind of movement—like I was saying, if the ship was going that way and it was heading for the iceberg, the ship can't turn around, reverse, when it's got the momentum, but any slight change is better, and hopefully it will be enough to avoid it. And what I find is, one fellow, when I used to tell him some of the things I was doing, what he used to say to me, 'I feel like there's another millstone going around my neck,' and I'd say, 'You're looking at it the wrong way. You should be replacing the heavier millstone with a lighter one. You might not get rid of them all at once, but try and make it beneficial to you and the community.' So I think we have to be careful, like if the money thing didn't work, I don't know for what reason--we have to put in place things that are really easy and workable for the people on both sides."

And finally, hope doesn't just happen. It requires deliberate nurturing. Hang out with good people, have fun, sing songs, read about creative alternatives all over the world. Hope is not a bet on an outcome. Like the process of making the world we want to see through the way we work together, hope is a process, something we create along the way.

Closing Message

My closing message has to do with living on an island. This is a small, self-contained ecosystem. As Dave Biggar, Irene Novaczek and Margie Loo pointed out, industrial food production is eroding your soil, contaminating your water, destroying your forests and eradicating your plant and animal species more quickly than they would in a larger ecosystem. But the good news also has to do with living on an island. Several presenters noted that you can see what's happening to the land in a way people in larger places can't. Many of you know one another, across all sectors of society. You really do have an amazing opportunity for honest communication and movement toward real consensus.

There was a strong message at the hearings that it is not too late to turn around:

(Arsenault)"The good news is that it is not yet too late to take back the reins of control over our food system, and the even better news is that Islanders are quickly becoming aware of the seriousness of the situation and will support the government on this issue. There is no more urgent issue facing us; no greater legacy a government could leave than to take up the challenge and demonstrate this kind of courage and leadership in our present situation it clearly demands."

(MacKinnon) "I think if you look back any time when the community was strong and when it was sustainable and could go on its own, I think actually every person in that community had to make it work. Today we've kind of given up that right. We'd rather be on the Internet, or watching TV or something. And the thing that they want is the thing that we can use to change it the biggest, is the dollar.

The only sad part I'm seeing is, you go out the road here, and you want to take the road to Summerside, you have to take a left. How far toward Charlottetown do you go knowing that you're going the wrong way before you stop and turn around? You're better off stopping right in the middle of the road and sit down. At least it's not going to be as far to go as if you had of kept on going. I think sometimes we think it's too overwhelming, but it's not."

We have no choice but to turn our food system around, re-organize it around the imperatives of life—clean air and water, healthy soil and living within the cycles and limits of the natural world. So, I think the final message of the hearings is to wake up. The time is really now.

(MacKinnon) "We can't change the past but we can learn from it. There will never be an easier or less expensive time to do this than right now, and I mean today."

In closing, Rosemary created another collage, this time of images of the Island. The song was written by Margie Carmichael, and performed at the Poole's Corner hearing:

Multi-media Collage: Island scenes to "The Red Dirt Road."