

A Farewell to Mr. Chretien!

...now it's your turn to fuddle duddle.



"A proof is a proof. What kind of a proof? It's a proof. A proof is a proof. And when you have a good proof, it's because it's proven."



Portrait by Jeffrey Rosenthal

Editor's Note: In 2000, I worked as Editor for an independent agricultural newspaper on PEI. (It was the first Maritime newspaper to report that Cavendish Farms stopped accepting genetically-engineered potatoes that year, thanks to a reader's tip.) Any review of Chretien's legacy would be incomplete without mentioning his endorsement of genetic engineering technology. What follows is an excerpted editorial I wrote for The Island Farmer newspaper on August 23, 2000, following an event at former Solicitor General, Lawrence MacAulay's residence in St. Peter's, PEI.

Everyone Loves A Charade

(Island Farmer, Aug. 22, 2000)

by Daron Letts

Working for an agricultural bi-weekly on PEI, I rarely see the need or opportunity to participate in media scrums (informal interviews in which a group of journalists pose brief, impromptu questions to government officials).

However, I made a last minute decision to attend the publicity stunt Solicitor General Wayne MacAulay held in his backyard to cap off the Prime Minister's visit to the Island last week. I thought it would be helpful to get some kind of response from Chretien regarding the mandatory labeling of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO's).

I drove down to St. Peter's a little early, and I had a bit of time to enjoy some complimentary ice cream. As I chatted with a co-worker from the Eastern Graphic, an RCMP officer approached and asked what media organizations we represented. We politely informed him.

The officer then directed our attention to a cordoned off area behind which reporters would be required to stand prior to the Prime Minister's arrival.

"They want the harbour to be in the background for photos," the officer explained.

He further advised that after addressing the press, the Prime Minister would descend the garden steps to mingle with the crowd of well-wishers below. Yeah, fine.

About half an hour before Chretien was scheduled to arrive, I staked my position at the edge of the velveteen press barricade. I hoped to line up a shot of the Prime Minister that might also capture the pacing, placard-toting protesters voicing messages like "Save Greenwich, Dump MacAulay" that were visible along the road in the distant background. I thought they provided better news content than the bright blue har-

bour and the puffy white clouds.

A few minutes passed and more local press obediently trickled behind the barricade. There was a handful of radio reporters, including some from the CBC. A Compass camera showed up. Then Newsworld. Then various Francophone media.

The press area became quite congested, really. Islanders and tourists holding cameras at the ready stood alongside the tight pack of corralled journalists, shoulder to shoulder to shoulder, waiting for their Head of State to appear [sic - the Queen is Canada's official Head of State]. Some of us were forced to step over the maroon barricade in order to get out from behind the crowd that had spilled in front of us. I ended up kneeling on MacAulay's lawn, nestled between an enthusiastic tourist and a National Post photographer wielding a two-foot long lens. By the time the Prime Minister arrived, the circulation in both my legs was cut off below the knees and I still had trouble getting a clear view of the microphone through the tightly packed audience.

Both the protesters and the harbour were now obscured by a throng of people. The clicking of a dozen or more shutters could be heard above the sporadic applause (which was often initiated by MacAulay). The Prime Minister broke the ice with a pie joke before launching into his self-deprecating just-a-nice-guy-from-Shawinigan stand up comedy routine. He also took a moment to level a few sophomoric puns at the Reform Party before issuing a string of political platitudes. Of course, he professed his love for PEI (an election approaches). This nonsense went on for about ten or 15 minutes, I suppose. I shot about a half roll of film just for the hell of it. I was really just waiting to ask my question, not that I expected much to come of it. As Chretien wrapped up, I let my camera drop around my neck and raised myself to a squatting position. I pulled my tape recorder from my pocket and prepared to toss out a question or two when the speeches wound down.

Chretien was presented with a piece of artwork from a local photographer and then the Prime Minister was wrapped in a phalanx of RCMP officers and shepherded down the steps to mingle with well-wishers. No scrum. No questions from the press. No answers. Just the stand up routine with the harbour and the puffy clouds in the background.

I was aghast. The crowd cascaded past me as they pursued their Prime Minister. The journalists followed, too. Four times I got close enough to ask the Prime Minister my question [*When will Canada legislate mandatory labelling of GMO's?*].

I'm certain he heard me on every occasion because each time he responded with either a sour glare or by changing course. All he had to say was 'No comment' if he was not capable of an answer. I would have accepted that. He shook hands. Kissed babies. Smiled most of the time. But he never answered my question. I was frustrated. And then I felt a firm tap on my shoulder. "He's not answering questions," some guy said to me. "He's already answered questions this morning at a news conference."

Apparently, this was one of Chretien's 'aids'.

"But I can still ask questions, can't I?" I asked, sort of rhetorically. "He won't answer," the guy repeated as he walked away. I turned and headed in Chretien's direction again. Then another guy touched my elbow. This guy had a cord spiraling out of his ear and carried a walkie-talkie. He said he was with the Prime Minister's Office. He told me his name was Bernie Sagin when I asked. He sternly 'asked' me for identification, then snatched a business card from my hand. After that, I bumped into another colleague working in radio who also got no response to her questions. I think she felt frustrated, too.

I'm disgusted with the dangerous arrogance displayed by this government. It is absolutely horrific that the Prime Minister's Office would engineer a nationally broadcast media event that prohibits Canadian journalists from asking questions.

Editorial originally appeared in the August 23, 2000, issue of The Island Farmer, Island Press Ltd.

Organic Agriculture 101

by Janice Bull

(an organic farmer based in Northampton, New Brunswick)

In view of the recent decision by the government of Prince Edward Island to look at the issue of banning chemicals in agriculture in support of organic farming, it is perhaps timely to look at just what farming organically means.

The Canadian General Standards Board of Canada defines organic agriculture as "a holistic system of production designed to optimize the productivity and fitness of diverse communities within the ecosystem, including soil organisms, plants, livestock and people. The principle goal of organic agriculture is to develop productive enterprises that are sustainable and harmonious to the environment."

Farms that operate under the certified organic system must meet a strict code of standards that are established on the national level. These standards outline all aspects of food production from the field to the store shelf. Each farm is also inspected by a third party inspector who ensures that the standards are being met or surpassed. Organic farming recognizes that the soil is a living organism rich with micro-organisms that must be valued and protected as a national resource. One has only to look to the 'Dirty Thirties' (when the Prairie soil blew away after being plowed repeatedly) to see that farming methods must allow for rejuvenation of the soil.

Soil protection is developed through the use of cover crops of various grasses and grains, which means the ground is rarely left bare; therefore erosion is decreased. The use of buffer zones helps to direct farming activities away from marginal areas and water ways, which helps to protect fragile ecosystems and our water table. The use of composted manure, rather than raw manure, decreases pollution. Compost actually gives the plants a boost rather than having nutrients locked up until the raw manure naturally composts itself. Crop rotation is used to reduce nutrient depletion and disease pressure.

No chemicals are used as herbicides, pesticides, fungicides

or for crop protection (such as waxes). No sewage sludge is allowed on certified organic land. No Genetically Modified Organisms can be used. No growth hormones can be used in meat production. Food irradiation is not allowed as a food preservation process. Food should be produced, sold and consumed locally (strong local economies are good for community health and welfare).

Other methods for managing pests and disease include: adequate spacing for crops and for animals, the use of companion planting, crop rotation, mechanical barriers and organic products such as BT. Some blemishes on fruits and vegetables are noticeable but the costs to the environment for trying to create the picture perfect apple are enormous in terms of spraying applications. The demand for every type of fruit and vegetable year round often involves preservation with fungicide-impregnated waxes coated on the vegetable for transport. Buying local food in season is a more reasonable option for nutrients and for food dollar buying power.

The benefits of buying certified organic produce and meat include things like soil protection for the use of future farmers and a decrease in pollution of water and air. It is interesting to note that the spreading of composted manure, rather than raw manure and slurry, creates very little smell. This is a bonus for those living near these fields. Supporting the local farm economy rather than importing from other countries creates a fresher food supply. With a stronger local farming community more local employment can be created. The water table is likely to be safer from contaminants. Consuming organically produced food decreases exposure to chemicals in our food supply.

Each food purchase can become a great way for the average New Brunswicker to help improve our environment - and our local economy.