



Choux Questionnaire: Bryan Dale

A riff on [the well-riffed Proust Questionnaire](#), the CFS Choux Questionnaire is meant to elicit a tasty and perhaps surprising experience, framed within a seemingly humble exterior. (And yes, some questions have a bit more *craquelin* than others.) Straightforward on their own, the queries combined start to form a celebratory pyramid of extravagance. How that composite croquembouche is assembled and taken apart, however, is up to the respondents and readers to determine. Respondents are invited to answer as many questions as they choose.

The final question posed—*What question would you add to this questionnaire?*—prompts each respondent to incorporate their own inquisitive biome into the mix, feeding a forever renewed starter culture for future participants.

Our Choux Questionnaire respondent for this issue is [Bryan Dale](#). He is an Associate Professor in the [Department of Environment, Agriculture, and Geography](#) at Bishop's University, located on Abenaki Territory in Sherbrooke, QC. Before Bishop's, Bryan was a postdoctoral fellow at the Culinarium Research Centre at U of T Scarborough. His research and teaching cover a range of topics, including food sovereignty, agroecology, climate change, environmental justice, social movements, agriculture, food security, and labour and equality in the food system.

What is your idea of a perfect food?

A food that doesn't proclaim to be perfect. It is a food that carries much less pretense than is typically associated with aspirations to perfection, and yet is ambitious nonetheless. My perfect food would strive towards flavour and innovation on the one hand, and a representation of socio-ecological balance and justice on

the other hand. It would be a food that is quite special, evidently, yet not elitist.

Of what food or food context are you afraid?

I would be afraid of a context in which I were compelled to eat nothing but fast food and ultra-processed foods without exception. This might represent the ideal

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situation for the McDonald's Restaurants and PepsiCos of the world (and their shareholders), but to me it would be a complete dystopia. I'm not suggesting that I'm too pure to eat the occasional junk food, but I know my body would find it absolutely revolting to be constantly bombarded with the "holy trinity" of fat, sugar, and salt, mixed with chemicals.

What word or concept describes an admirable food system?

The three concepts I continue to focus on in my research are *food sovereignty*, *agroecology*, and *the just transition*. To me the three concepts overlap in important ways, and considering their relationality is one way to help prevent any of them from being interpreted in ways that would lead to a co-optation or a watering down of the intention behind them. Actualizing these concepts requires context-specific considerations though, and deep political conversations.

What word or concept prevents many food systems from becoming admirable?

As with the previous answer, I feel that I need to state two interrelated concepts: *capitalism* and *colonialism*. One thing I've appreciated learning from scholarly mentors though is that we shouldn't look at such concepts in abstract or essentializing ways. Understanding the specific tendencies that operate within our food system (and political economy more broadly) are important. For example, when we look at the profit motive, and the commodification of both food and land, we can also identify exceptions that exist within communities that can offer a glimmer of hope that it may be possible to overcome such tendencies.

Which food person do you most admire?

I admire parents, and it is still disproportionately mothers specifically, who continue to do the hard food-related work for their families day-to-day and week-to-week. I'm specifically thinking of mothers who are facing various intersecting and systemic challenges who strive to ensure their children and other loved ones are eating well. I appreciate the disproportionate amount of work my mother did in this regard as I grew up, and we didn't face the financial and other difficulties that many families do.

Which food innovation do you try to ignore?

The Choux Questionnaire. It's SO overdone. ;)

What is your greatest gastronomic extravagance?

I've had the privilege of eating at some very nice restaurants for special occasions. For example, since moving to Sherbrooke, Québec, I've eaten at L'Antidote FoodLab and le Restaurant Les Mal-Aimés. I'm very aware of the elitism that can be associated with fine dining, but the gastronomic experiences themselves can be very memorable...and impossible to put into words.

What is your current state of hunger?

As I'm writing this, I'm hungry as I haven't eaten for about seven hours. At the same time, I've been incredibly privileged in my life to have never truly been hungry. It is devastating to consider how many people are food insecure globally, with the most acute situations typically intermingling with complex causes such as war and climate change. The Israel-Palestine conflict is top-of-mind for me in that regard, but there are so many other food crises that do not make it into the media in any

sustained manner. The Global Hunger Index is one resource that I share with my students on these topics:

www.globalhungerindex.org

What do you consider to be the most overrated food or food context?

Fun Dip is quite an overrated food (or “pseudo food” as Anthony Winson would say). I’m not sure what I found so appealing about eating colourful flavoured sugar when I was a pre-teen. It’s amazing that this is still a product on the market.

On what occasion do you feign satiety?

I can’t say that I ever feign satiety, as I’m quite flexible about trying different foods. That said, the older I get, the more I’m conscious that I shouldn’t necessarily have a second helping just because the food tastes good!

What do you most dislike about dinner tables?

I only dislike a dinner table when you have to prematurely clear a board game off of it to make room to eat.

What is the quality you most like in a fruit?

I eat apples more than any other fruit. Throughout most of the year I can access ecologically and locally grown apples, and often interesting varieties at that. So, the qualities I prioritize are sustainability and taste. In contrast, I rarely eat bananas, and when I do buy them it’s typically fairly traded, organic bunches that I pick up, storing most of them in the freezer so that they can gradually be added to smoothies, one half banana at a time.

What is the quality you most like in a cut of meat?

I went pescatarian 24 years ago, and for the last ten years I’ve been eating meat about once a year when I’m in a situation where I’m offered ecologically raised meat. The offer is often coming from the people who cared for the animals themselves, so that makes it a special occasion in every instance.

Which condiments do you most overuse?

Is it possible to overuse condiments? From interesting hot sauces to pesto and mustard, what isn’t there to love about condiments?

What kinds of gardens make you happiest?

I’m most excited and happy about my home garden, which my partner and I started this season after being interrupted from community gardening by the COVID pandemic and then a move to a new province.

Which culinary skill would you most like to have?

I’m a pretty good cook but not a culinary genius by any stretch of the imagination, so I would just like to continue the ongoing adventure. There’s a lot to learn but, fortunately, there’s also plenty of time to experiment and improve.

If you could change one thing about nutrition, what would it be?

Nutritionism. It would be great if we could collectively ensure that the chemical components of foods do not overshadow their cultural and social significance.

If you were to die and come back as an (edible) animal, vegetable, or mineral, what would you like it to be?

Hmm... Maybe a serviceberry tree or something else perennial? I mean, why not make the afterlife last a while?

Where (and/or when) would you most like to dine?

When? As soon as I'm done writing this up!

What is your most treasured kitchen implement?

I very much appreciate that my mother-in-law gave me a pastry mixer that she wasn't using. It makes the process of making sourdough bread a lot faster and easier, and this is something I do every week.

What do you consider to be the most processed kind of food?

Fun Dip?

What spice, kitchen implement, or cookbook do you use most rarely?

At the moment, I would say that the juicer we have quite rarely gets used. It is fun (and tasty) to use up a bunch of beets, carrots, or whatever to make veggie juice, but I typically find other things to do with the ingredients I have on hand.

Who are your favourite food scholars?

Food is so multi-dimensional that I could probably name dozens and dozens of scholars that have influenced how I

think about food—in terms of food geographies, food culture, food politics, decolonial approaches to food, and more. I have to say though that the annual assembly of the Canadian Association for Food Studies has been my favourite gathering of food scholars for quite some time. From some people who have passed on, to others who are just getting started in the field, it has been (and continues to be) an impressive group!

With which cuisine do you most identify?

That is a very interesting question. Within the last week I've enjoyed meals from cuisines that can be described as Mexican, Indian, Italian, Québécoise (poutine!), and "Canadian," although scholars have noted that the latter is multifaceted and often hard-to-define. My background is British, but I wouldn't say that I identify with that cuisine, or any one cuisine exclusively for that matter. What's fantastic is that food allows us to be culinary tourists, and that hybridization brings interesting innovations in a world of eating that is simultaneously global and local. Gillian Crowther writes about these points in her book, *Eating Culture*.

What are your favourite agricultural, culinary, or gastronomic words?

The first ones that come to mind are French words that are fun to say:

Topinambour (Jerusalem artichoke)

Miam-miam (yum-yum)

What is it about composting that you most dislike?

The smell! We've been doing vermicomposting for several years, and I do the work of emptying the stainless-steel compost bin that we keep under our sink when it

gets full. Although the “worm condo” itself doesn’t smell on an ongoing basis, as the little critters keep things moving in there, there’s nothing that quite compares to the smell of emptying out a soggy bin of anaerobically half-decomposed veggies and coffee grinds. I’m not complaining though. Your nostrils get used to the assault, and the black gold that is worm castings is well worth the ongoing effort!

What would you eat as your last meal?

Probably a well-made pizza with interesting toppings. We never know if each meal might be our last, so we might as well enjoy every bite... and hope that we have the privilege to grow old and eat high-fibre foods or soft foods or whatever we need to sustain us until our final days.

What foodish epitaph would you assign to yourself?

Here lies Bryan Dale. He wrote about food, thought about food, taught about food ...And now he will be food for worms and other critters. The cycle continues.

What question would you add to this questionnaire?

What is your favourite food-related pop culture or literary reference?