

Oral History Interview of Stephen Anderson

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
May 6, 2015
Alma, Kansas**

**Part of the:
*American Agriculture Movement***

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Interview Series Background:

The American Agriculture Movement grew out of the populist agrarian protests of the late 1970s. Officially chartered in August of 1977, it remains active. Materials in the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library reflect principally its formation, the tractorcade protests of 1977-1979, and the farm and rural suicide hotline prevention efforts of the 1980s. Materials include oral history interviews, photographs, video and film, and miscellaneous papers.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Stephen Anderson as he discusses his involvement with the American Agriculture Movement. In this interview, Stephen describes the time he spent fighting for American agriculture and against corporate farming.

Length of Interview: 01:39:52

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Keywords

Agriculture, Farming, Cattle Industry, Livestock, American Agriculture Movement

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

Eighteen-eighty? This house? No.

Stephen Anderson (SA):

These are the original hardwood floors.

AW:

Really?

SA:

The stringers in the basement are about three and a half inch by sixteen inches of good fine lumber. These stone walls will stand forever. I had it pointed up all the way around about three years ago.

AW:

It's a large house for 1880.

SA:

Huge.

AW:

Yeah, when you think about how most houses were built at that time.

SA:

I've seen pictures of Alma at that time and I can't—there's nothing in Alma that compared to this house at that point in time.

AW:

Do you know who built this house?

SA:

Yeah, Louis Tate's family built it in 1880. And in 1885, I think probably the cost of building this house was more debt than he could accommodate and the county was looking for a new poor farm, and so he traded this to them. I think they gave him five thousand dollars and assumed his debt, whatever that was. It didn't say what the debt was. They had—families lived here, farmed the place, had livestock, and looked after the people. The old history book that came with the house showed they had babies from four months of age up to one old man named Bill. He was eighty-six, and in October, received—what was the term I'd use—but in the spring, about April, it'd say, released, gone to work. I can imagine he probably pumped and carried water for somebody's household. Spilt, cook stove wood and whatever he was capable of doing at that age.

AW: I hope at eighty-six I'm capable of splitting wood.

SA:

My dad worked right up until he was eighty and then he had one leg amputated from diabetes, and five years later, the other leg, but we kept him here right up to the end.

AW:

That's amazing.

SA:

My sister'd come over every week and spent the weekend with us, and cleaned house, and cooked up a bunch of stuff ahead of time. Of course, mother was still good up until she was ninety. I can just see him, yep, he sat at that door in the summertime with it open so he could see the traffic in and out. When one of the kids'd come in with a load of hay or anything like that, then he'd wheel out that way or he'd wheel to this south door so he could see him. His orders was, send him up here. I want to hear the news. He never lost his interest.

AW:

Do you mind if I move that chair over here to set this recorder in?

SA:

No.

AW:

I'll get it. I don't mind. I just need something or any chair just to put this in between us so it will capture your voice well. You're quiet spoken. Let me first say for the recording, this is the sixth of May, 2015. Andy Wilkinson at the truly remarkable home, which we have just been discussing of Stephen Anderson. I understand it's, S-t-e-p-h-e-n?

SA:

Yeah.

AW:

A-n-d-e-r-s-o-n?

SA:

O-n, yeah.

AW:

Could I get your date of birth?

SA:

10/25/28.

AW:

Where? This house?

SA:

No, I was born northeast of Alma, right at home in the family farm. It was a ratted farm. We'd spent all the dirty thirties and the Depression there. My dad's uncle was a county commissioner and when George Eckert, the man of the family that [ran] the poor farm at the time, died of cancer right in that bedroom and then that place was up for a new family to move here. Even though he recused himself, I think he probably influenced two commissioners to come and we moved here in March of '41 then. So as it would be, I was county commissioner here in the nineties, then.

AW:

Rick Stevens told me that you run cattle. Is that right?

SA:

Yeah, we run them. I guess probably between five and six hundred head of cows now.

AW:

Cow-calf operation?

SA:

Yeah, cow-calf.

AW:

What kind of cattle? What breed do you—

SA:

Well they pay more for black cattle, we're pretty Angus now. We've still got a lot of those old cross bread cows from when I was using more of a cross breeding program, had Gelbvieh, Saler, and Hereford.

AW:

Back in my country in some southwest part of Texas there, some people are starting to go back to Hereford's.

SA:

Are they?

AW:

Yeah, and I'm not quite sure why, but—

SA:

I've tried to encourage the boys to get some Hereford bulls. I think Hereford Angus is a really good cross for this part of the country, anyway.

AW:

Yeah, but you're right. The packers want it to say black on it. Don't they?

SA:

Yeah, but with Hereford bulls, you'd still have a black hide, maybe a white face. Any type of that animal breeding gives you some extra benefits.

AW:

Have you stayed pretty steady in your numbers through the recent dry spell?

SA:

Pretty steady, yeah. We're fortunate here. Over the years, I—well at one time, I had twenty-three landlords. I grew up in an era when all of the kids left Alma, Kansas. I'd either went to school with them or I knew them. They knew me and so then when the crisis of the 1980s hit, a lot of them had renters that couldn't pay their grass bill or couldn't—you know? And so I gradually accumulated. They usually came to me because they knew I'd pay. I really made my money to get into this cattle business—I raised hundreds, thousands of hogs. Dad and I milked forty head of cows and all them years of slaving away, and now they've corporatized all of that. Actually, beef cattle is the only avenue left open for the individual if you don't want to sign a corporate contract. I swore I'd never do that.

AW:

Again, back home in Texas, the saying is, you have to have some sheep to be able to afford your cows. Same kind of idea.

SA:

Well, these last three or four years have been awful good in the cattle business, but boy, when this crash comes, it's going to be just like corn and bean farmers. You're going to go back to picking shit with the chickens.

AW:

Yeah, I think you're right. I can't tell you how many friends I've got back home that sold off and would like to buy cows back and just can't afford them. They've gotten so high.

SA:

Oh, yeah. Salina had first calf heifers with a baby by their side brought up to thirty-nine hundred dollars here two weeks ago.

AW:

Thirty-nine hundred dollars?

SA:

Yeah.

AW:

Wow.

SA:

Up to the average extreme top for one bunch, but I don't where all the buyers are coming from because all these sale barns are having special calf auctions.

AW:

I wonder—there's a lot of buying and selling that goes on back home over the internet, and people are bidding and buying from all over the place—is that driven up?

SA:

I think so.

AW:

Yeah, I kind of wondered.

SA:

There's a lot of these order buyers that I call them that are making the rounds. There's a lot of new people. You know how any fad or something, gets excited and likes what drives up land prices. It's the same old land that's going to produce the same amount of crops, but we go through these cycles.

AW:

You're right. There's an element of what's popular at a given time that all the new people come

in. I have a distant uncle five generations back named Charlie Goodnight, who blazed the Goodnight Trail.

SA:

He was your uncle? Charlie Goodnight was?

AW:

Yep.

SA:

You aren't the Andy Wilson that's the songwriter? "Fire to the Wind?"

AW:

Yeah, I am. How do you know that?

SA:

I read about you in a Montana publication, a weekly that I get.

AW:

Really? I'll be darned. Yeah, that's me. I got this job with the university because I did so much research at the Southwest Collection on my plays and songs that I guess they got tired of seeing me around and put me to work. It's good because now, I'm a songwriter that has health insurance. Yeah, that's my song and he was uncle, but after that first year on the trail when he and Oliver Loving would gather cattle and take them up the trail, from then on, he would simply ride the trail and find some fellow who had decided this was a great business to get in, but didn't know anything about it. He'd buy their herd from them because they didn't know how to handle it. I just think about that, even in the 1860s, there was a fad of taking cattle up to trail by people who didn't know what they were doing.

SA:

I was down at the Texas Angus Tour a number of years ago and they took us down there to where Charlie, in that basin—what did they call that? His cowboys—

AW:

Yeah, over by Palo Pinto?

SA:

I think that's where it was. It was a huge basin, but they'd get the cattle down in there as an easy place to accumulate a big enough herd of what they wanted to head north with.

AW:

It's pretty interesting. I've driven pretty much all of the trail, as near as you can in today's world, and those places where they would collect the cattle or where you'd hold them, when you get out there and see it, you understand why a person would pick that spot. You can see the advantages to it.

SA:

Are you acquainted then with Brad Hill?

AW:

Bren Hill?

SA:

Bren Hill.

AW:

Yeah, he's a good friend of mine. In fact, he just recorded "Power in the Wind."

SA:

Did he?

AW:

Yeah, he did a really nice version. He's got a brand new record that's just now out.

SA:

He's going to do some—I guess, a record. Maybe that's your record that he's on this recording with the National Cattleman's Association.

AW:

He hadn't told me about that. This album is called Spirit Wind or Spirit Power—Ride the Spirit? Spirit Rider, maybe that's it. He's done some religious songs and then he's done some old standards like, There's One Empty Bunk—"One Empty Bed in the Bunkhouse Tonight," and then he did that song of mine on that collection. He may have something working with the Cattleman's.

SA:

I think he's a lot like Willie Nelson. He has empathy and a true commitment to agriculture.

AW:

Yeah, he's a good kid too.

SA:

They're going to get a kickback or whatever you call it off of every record that he sells then I think.

AW:

That's good. I hope he puts that one of mine on there. I'd be proud to have that. When we get done here, I'll look in the trunk, see if I have a Charlie Goodnight record with me. If I do, I'll give it to you.

SA:

That'd be great.

AW:

If not, I'll get home and I'll mail you one. I got here because of the Farm Movement. You're a cattleman. Were you farming at some time in the past that got you interested in the American Ag Movement?

SA:

Well I tell you from a child on, I was growing up on hard times. Fear of debt and all of that, but we sat around the kitchen table and my parents were politically minded, and they were always kind of for the underdog and they imbued in us this idea of that the farmers were being taken advantage of all the time. Either by the bankers or the board trade or some corporate entity. I guess that's what drove me—it didn't drive me—it lured me into the American Ag Movement.

AW:

How did you first hear about it? How did you come in contact with people in the Movement?

SA:

I don't even remember. I just was in the newspapers and the media at Laywise [?] [0:15:55] said this is my kind of people and I want to be a part of it. Of course, at that time, kids was too small to run the place the place on their own and I was—had probably a hundred and sixty headed of sows, and I was looking after them the old fashioned way. I kept pretty busy. I wasn't able to go to all of their initial meetings, of course. I think the first American Ag trip—well, we were involved in Tractorcades.

AW:

The ones here in Kansas and then later, the one in D.C.?

SA:

In Kansas. I sent a sixteen year old boy along to Washington.

AW:

Uh-huh. One of your sons?

SA:

Yeah, I got a picture I think out in the car. My sister's, today, she had some clippings and stuff she'd garnered over the years. She said to give them to you. If you go through them and anything is of no interest to you, just throw them in the trash.

AW:

We won't throw anything in the trash, but we'll be interested in them. I'll promise you that.

SA:

She's ninety now.

AW:

Is she?

SA:

This picture is of her and that sixteen year old on a Tractorcade in Wamego, Kansas. [Laughter]

AW:

Really? What did they do up at Wamego? Was it at a courthouse or was there a—

SA:

In those days, a lot of these smaller communities had their own Tractorcades because we had a pretty big group here in Northeast Kansas, in this area. To draw attention to the plight of agriculture, I think the [Phone rings 00:17:51] most significant deal was I had a wheelbarrow full of horsemen who worked with a sign on hinges so it was visible from both directions. It said U.S. Farm Policy, and if a picture's worth a thousand words, that was on the front of all of the newspapers in Kansas. Wherever I went. In fact, I took it as far as Sweet Grass border crossing in Montana, one time when we shut the border down up in the grain and livestock trucks coming from Canada.

AW:

Really? What time was that relative to the '79 Tractorcade? Would that have been before that?

SA:

It was after it, I think. Of course, that made the front page of all the Montana papers.

AW:

That's not an event I've heard of. The Sweet Grass crossing, and a barricade in Montana.

SA:

I don't know how many hours, for probably a day because we had a massive farm rally there at the same time and speakers, and then we went out. They had me lead the march down to the border crossing and shut it down. I never saw any more police cars in my life. They treated us like we was the terrorists of today.

AW:

Did they arrest any of you?

SA:

Not at that one up there, no.

AW:

Did you happen to go to McAllen Bridge?

SA:

No, I got arrested and thrown in jail in Chicago.

AW:

At the Board of Train?

SA:

Yeah, that was over Wayne Cryts, you know how they confiscated his grain that he had on storage? [Phone rings 00:19:58] We went there. I think there were probably thirty-seven of us that got arrested. I'll never forget the chief of detectives.

Voicemail:

Steve, I'm back on the pavement. I guess everything's okay. I appreciate your help. Have a good day and a good week. We'll talk to you later. Goodbye.

AW:

Do you need to grab that?

SA:

I had a guy—brought a bunch of cow-calf pairs to one of my pastures down south here Monday. Yesterday, he called and he said, “I’ve got a cow and a calf that are both beller and looking for a soulmate.” I said, “You better get them loaded and get up there and dump them out up there. That’s the only way you’re going to get them together.”

AW:

He’d taken half of each the first time, hadn’t he?

SA:

He didn’t get them paired up right.

AW:

So the police in Montana were not friendly to the Farm Movement?

SA:

No, I’ve looked through just a few publications back here and you know, they talked about even the Catholic church came out and had this big story about warning about these right-winged extremists, and this diocese, it was called the leaving. It wasn’t just the Catholic Church, other churches too. They painted us as less than patriotic American citizens, and the courthouses had big signs in them. But that chief of police or the chief of detectives up there in Chicago come to three or four of us there that he perceived as maybe some of the leadership and he said, “I wish you guys would go home,” because it was twenty below zero. It was January. He said, “You’re no problem for me. You’re not afraid of our policemen on horses, you’re not afraid of our dogs. These snotty-nosed-wet-behind-the-ears-cocaine-sniffing-commodity-trailers are my problem in this city.” [AW Laughs]

AW:

Not the farmers and ranchers.

SA:

Not the farmers. I think it was just to show that they were on the ball so they arrested thirty-seven of us. I made the front page special edition of the *Chicago Sun Times* that day because I was the last one they drug and threw in a patty wagon. I recognized a photo op and I was turned around and was going like that out of the back of that with my fist raised out of the back of that patty wagon. That was on the front page of the *Chicago Sun Times*.

AW:

That's great.

SA:

That was January of 1985. By then, that farm crisis was really heated up.

AW:

Yeah, I don't know what it was like here in Kansas, but one of the interesting to me, and sad things that we've been collecting information on is how that crisis was playing out in those years in Oklahoma, and they had such a huge spike in farmer suicides. Was that something happening here as well?

SA:

I told my son about that just this morning, and I went to the Kansas legislature. They had a big rally up here in Kansas. I didn't go to it the night before, but then I went to legislature the next day and brought them this information that nine farm suicides in Cheyenne County, Kansas, and the population of the entire county is less than two thousand people. I said, "Shouldn't this make you realize that something is wrong?" But I had way more luck talking to city legislatures than I ever did a rural legislature.

AW:

Really?

SA:

They were all brainwashed by the farm bureau, and the Kansas livestock association.

AW:

The rural legislatures?

SA:

The rural legislatures, and there was never a pro-corporate farming bill that a farm bureau and a KLA [**Kansas Livestock Association**] didn't like.

AW:

Right.

SA:

It just—well Kansas, at that time when the farm crisis started, had a usury law, which put a limit on interest and the farm bureau and the KLA was chief cheerleaders to take that cap off because it come before. I'd sat right there and listen to them say, "You know, with this usury lid on here,

these farmers aren't going to be able to borrow any money anymore. You'll just shut down agriculture in Kansas." Of course, we had this bloviated buffoon up here at Kansas State University, Barry Flinchbaugh, and he'd been preaching to his students, and it was in the newspapers prior to that, you know, if you're not 80 percent leverage, you're a poor money manager. He got them all in debt, took the usury lid off, and interest rates went to 21 percent. If we were making money, people couldn't live with that.

AW:

Yeah, that's exactly right. The same thing happened in Texas. I think our usury law changed in 1979.

SA:

In '79? In Kansas, it was later than that. It was after the crisis was getting pretty full blown. I couldn't believe that they'd do that, but they did.

AW:

Yeah, the reason I remember, my wife and I had just moved back home from Colorado and we were trying to buy a house and you couldn't get a loan. Nobody would give me a loan because they were waiting for the new law. They weren't going to loan any money under the old law.

SA:

The bankers were waiting.

AW:

Yeah, they were waiting so we couldn't—

SA:

Yeah, I think that was typical everywhere you went. Every state.

AW:

Yeah, it was exactly. Going back to Chicago, did they prosecute you?

SA:

No, we were bailed out and we all come home. I guess with modern ways of looking at stuff, I suppose if I'd get a speeding ticket in Illinois, that old warrant would be there laying for my arrest. I don't drive in Illinois as much if I can help it. [Laughter]

AW:

That's probably smart. Did you—

SA:

One other thing I wanted to mention, when they picked me up out here at I-7099 junction, it was twenty below zero.

AW:

For the Tractorcade?

SA:

No, going to Chicago.

AW:

Twenty below.

SA:

As we was going on, there was guys a lot smarter than I, but we started seeing vehicles sitting along the side of the road and one of the guys more knowledgeable about mechanics than me, said, "Hell, I'll bet their batteries are freezing up." We pulled into a 24/7 there in the middle of the night. They bought a bunch of newspapers and three vanloads of us, and they packed those batteries with newspapers and we got on and went to Chicago. Now, I'm just passing on the information.

AW:

I didn't know a battery could freeze. I mean, I know if you let them sit there, the trick we'd use in Colorado when it was—it was never twenty below—I had an old Diesel car and it was hard to crank even in the warm weather, but you'd run your headlights.

SA:

A little while to warm the battery.

AW:

Warm the battery up, yeah. But I had no idea that you could freeze one while you were actually using it.

SA:

I didn't either. I never thought of it, but evidently that was a problem because there was numerous vehicles just sitting along the highways then. The wind chill was probably sixty below or more and the speed you're travelling, so it could—

AW:

Yeah, golly. That's interesting. You had a long time involvement in the Ag Movement. There

were a lot of people that were there for the beginnings of it, then dropped out pretty soon after '79. You've seen really kind of two crisis. One crisis in the late seventies that had as much to do with international money policy and trade, and then by the mid-eighties, it was much more, and correct me if I'm wrong on this, but it was much more domestically driven in terms of the sources of the crisis. Is that a fair assessment?

SA:

I think so, yeah. One thing I pulled out of the file here was Neil Harl, the professor of economics of Iowa State University. He was at a big forum of certified public accountants and stuff here and he says, "Farmers could take quite a sabbatical and not even be missed. What we have now is beyond a reasonable supply of food." Now, what do you think the general public thought to have this noted Ag economist from Iowa come and tell them that we don't even need farmers—hell?

AW:

[Laughs] We got enough in the cupboard. It's scary when you think about it. What, I guess, kept your involvement? It sounds to me—let me—I'm coming up with my own question here on the fly and not doing a very good job of it. But it strikes me that you're appreciation of the political side of this was more developed than a lot of the people I've talked to and I guess, going back to your parents and your upbringing. Did you see—did you have any companions in this movement that were paying attention to that so much as they were maybe the local issues?

SA:

I don't think there was one person out of a hundred that realized that part of it. The Chicago Border Trade and this letting gamblers who had no investment, no land, no fuel, no fertilizer.

AW:

"And we're going to take delivery on a carload of soybeans or soybean meal or anything else," right?

SA:

Right, but worse than that is their ability to sell into a down market and continue to sell crops that don't exist. It further depressing the market price and then they could buy it when it got low enough to where it was breaking the farmer and then they can ride the price wave and make a fortune. Now, they do it nanoseconds. In those days, it took a little longer. They had to persevere a little more. Hell, they can make a year's wages today just [snaps fingers] with a blip of a computer. They're willing to trade for a lot less money, two cents a bushel or a cent a pound on beef today.

AW:

Those computer programs also make it extremely unpredictable to think about—I mean, when

they can actually throw the market place as they have done on stocks as well because they trade automatically.

SA:

Right and people like Cargill have access to so much more global information and they have a day when that trader goes to the office in the morning, he got all that information that happened around the world over night. The farmer, we don't get that information. Kansas Ag's statistics tells us about it six months later. Hell, that's no comparison to knowledge of what's actually going on now, that we're in a global market.

AW:

Plus, six months, that kind of time delay doesn't help you with the decision anyway.

SA:

No, it's too late.

AW:

To change your planning or your stocking or whatever else it might affect. Do you think that the Movement has had an impact, and if so, what kind of impact has that been?

SA:

I think it delayed the inevitable for probably another twenty years. I think it would all be over now if it hadn't have been for the Ag Movement, but it—

AW:

And by inevitable, what do you mean?

SA:

Inevitably, we're going to face a situation where if you're not hooked up with one of these global corporations, you can produce all you want, but you'll have no place you can sell it. Back at that point in time—well I think what lead me to become the state spokesman for the American Ag Movement was the fact that they had a huge rally in Topeka, there in about '85, during '85, in the spring or summer of '85. There was a group gathered to decide who was going to speak and who wasn't going to speak, and I guess I shouldn't say this, but a local auctioneer, who was also part of the American Ag Movement, he said, "Well you can always make lemonade out of lemons. I find that I make a lot of money crying these farm auctions." He was going to be one of the speakers and I told the group there, I said, "If you have him get up on that podium in front of these thousands of people that are coming to the state capital in Topeka, I'm going to come up there and throw him down the steps." They said, "Well do you want to speak?" I said, "Yeah I would. I think I got a message that beats hell out of that," saying that these farm sales are—it

kind of reminds me of the flood of '93, and Tuttle Creek Dam almost went out, and they threw all the flood gates wide open and flooded the entire river valley from Manhattan to Mississippi, I guess you'd say. After the flood, at that time, I was the agriculture liaison for the Kansas governor, Joan Finney, for four years while she was the first woman governor of the state of Kansas. The core of engineers come out and brag on what a great economic boon that was to the states because all of this new building, rebuilding, that was going to have to go on in the lumber, and supply, and the carpenters, and what all was going to be involved. I said, "If you can put that kind of a spin on an economic disaster of people out here in this flooded region. The same is true." Analogy to what we were just talking about.

AW:

It's saying that a hail storm is good for the local comers because we roof all the houses.

SA:

That's analogy, and it just defies economic or common sense, period.

AW:

It's early one to boon to those people land who was washed away.

SA:

No.

AW:

How did you get that post with Governor Finney, and what was it like to be in that spot.

SA:

Well, it kind of strange. I was putting up alfalfa and come in here at noon for dinner, my dad met me at the door in his wheelchair and he said, "Come on in, you got a call from the governor." What the hell for? I thought. I had a number and I called her and she said, "Steve, I want somebody with dirt under their fingernails and a brain in their head to come and be my agriculture liaison. Would you please come in and discuss it with me?" I said, "By God governor, I'm bailing alfalfa today, but I can come in tomorrow if we get done." I went in and visited with her. Well, I think what probably gave me a boot up on that was that the American Ag Movement, while I was a state spokesman, we had a number of rallies and it was my belief that you don't always be on the defense, you've got to go on the offense. I was barely elected state spokesman. We held a big rally in Hutchinson, Kansas, and that huge convention center was packed, overflowing. I had two or three guys go around and I said, "Is there anybody of noteworthy here, was actually interested to come to listen? Politicians?" Joan Finney was the state treasurer at that time, and she was there. She was the only one, the only politician of note that came to that rally to listen. I made a big deal about introducing the Kansas state treasurer. I

said, "Is our governor here?" That was John Carlen, at the time. "No, he ain't here." I said, "I guess he's more interested in young women than he is young farmers," because he had this history of being a skirt chaser. Later on, when I got in the governor's office, I was the only man there and Joan told me, she said, "Steve, I want you to settle these damn cat fights that'll happen amongst these women here. I don't want to hear about them. You just settle them."

AW:

That's a big order.

SA:

I got a habit of hobnobbing with just the ordinary people and I made friends with the security guards, and the cleaning ladies, and this cleaning lady, after we got pretty well acquainted, she'd come in every few days and sat down for five or ten minutes just to talk. What's going on? And everything. She said, "You ought to have been here when John Carlen was governor. They'd bring-- some young gal would come in, lock the door back there in the governor's office. You can imagine what was going on then, with the door locked." I guess that the rumors had more truth than fiction to them, but anyway, going back to Hutchinson, she remembered that because I made a big deal about it. I felt it should be. She was the only statewide elected politician that cared enough to come and listen. I'm sorry if I get emotional.

AW:

No. I—

SA:

There was so much heartache. Those suicides. Different farm sales. Good people that I knew. That still gets to me today.

AW:

It's a very tough time. Were you able to accomplish anything while you were in that office? Do you feel like?

SA:

No. One thing, yes, I'll say one thing, Sam Brownback was the Kansas Secretary of Agriculture who was appointed, anointed by the farm bureau and the KLA for years. He was promoting corporate—Kansas had strict anti-corporate farming laws up until that point in time. They came in, the farm bureau, and the KLA, and I'm sure the records are in there because they had to submit copies of their testimony. They were there day after day testifying, and then they were lobbying, take the lid off of corporate farming, take the lid off of corporate farming. One year, the first year, they got corporate chickens. The next year, they got corporate dairy. The third year, they got even corporate ratites. Can you imagine that? [Laughter] That's true. Don't laugh.

It's true, by God. Corporate ratites and they were promoting that they were going to have these center pivots on wheat and raise the—

AW:

Emus and ostriches.

SA:

Emus and ostriches. Low and behold, a few years later, a car pulled in the yard here. They were from Nebraska, Omaha, Nebraska. They were businessmen, and they had been sucked into that investment scam and they'd lost thousands and thousands of dollars in corporate ratites. To get back to did I accomplish anything? Two things, I think. One, Brownback wanted the governor to turn the irrigators lose and pump and use the Ogallala and I said, "That's a finite resource. What will the western half of Kansas do when that Ogallala is gone?" She did slow that down a lot and tried to change the direction. The other issue was corporate hogs. I can remember, it was back in 1985, when they first started that push for corporate hogs because seaboard corporation, English, foreign owned corporation, wanted the lid taken off. Brownback got me on a plane with three or four guys and we flew out to Garden City to some kind of meeting and he spent that entire plane ride trying to convince me that I should convince Governor Finney that it would be a good thing. That grain prices would soar and we'd have packing corporate hog plants all over Kansas, and it was just going to make the economy boom. She was even wiser than I. I didn't want her to do anything, but she finally saw that it was going to happen sometime, so she got it stipulated that it should go to a county by county vote. Vote of the people. Finally, they got their corporate hogs, but it had to be on a county by county basis, and a lot of counties—like after that, I was asked to come and speak at a number of counties where the corporations were trying to move in and was able to rally the people. But the long and short of it was, by 1998, they drove the price of hogs down to nine dollars, and they broke all of—

AW:

All the small.

SA:

All the smaller farmers quit. If you aren't connected with the corporation, you quit anyway, so by de facto, we've got corporate hogs, and it was something I had noticed locally here. Every Saturday was the busiest day for every elevator in Wabaunsee County because all these guys that had full-time jobs in Goodyear were still part-time farmers and they all had a pan of hogs. They'd come and get their hog feed.

AW:

On the weekend.

SA:

On the weekend. In fact, it got to where they had to call in and get it ordered on Friday to even get delivery on Saturday. You take that statewide, I'm sure it was the same in every county. Look at what we did to the local economy by corporate hogs. Now, Brownback is governor and seaboard has doubled their size out there in Greely County, I think it is, and all reports I get that corporate dairies, the corporate chicken houses, and pigpens, they're all being used in this illegal Mexican labor in them because they can hire them cheaper. They can fire them at will. There's nothing. They don't have to provide them any benefits, so they become a drain on tax payers of each county where there's so many of them in, they'd overload the school system. They overload the hospitals. I feel for them people too because we caused this massive migration out of Mexico by opening the doors down there. A car deal flooded their markets with corn, which was a Mexican farmers, what kept them on land. While I was with Governor Finney, we went to Mexico on a trade mission, and they gave us a resume on all of the top officials in Mexican [phone rings 00:49:55] commerce, agriculture, and everything. They'd all been educated here in the United States. Harvard graduates, they were sponsored by Pepsi Cola and other Ag corporations. Incidentally, the president of Mexico at that time—what the hell was his name? Later, he was indicted, him and his brother, for murdering their political opponents and he fled. He's in Ireland today because they don't have an extradition treaty with the United States. Someplace I got a picture of us all there—altogether. El Presidente Salinas.

AW:

Salinas, yes. I was trying to remember which one. I'm just checking the battery here. Let me stop just one second and change batteries before I run out. [Pause in recording] The Ogallala there is pretty thin. It's not like Nebraska where it recharges with the sand hills. No, our water, like yours is when it's used up, it's gone.

SA:

We had what they called Molasses Days, a farm up the west of Alma at one point in time and I met an old man there. He said, "I was a baby, come across the Pecos River in a covered wagon. At that time, we had these—" what do they call a free flowing? Water just comes out of the ground.

AW:

Spring.

SA:

He had another word for it.

AW:

Not Artisan.

SA:

Anyway, he said, "We run out of that water. We used it all up. Everybody took advantage, poked down in the ground. Let her run. We moved to western Kansas. We're going to run out of water there. I'm travelling across the country ahead of time to locate where I can sellout in Western Kansas and move my entire family." It was a big family, big operation, but he said, "I've seen it happen in Texas and it's going to happen in Western Kansas. I want to be ahead of the flow here and move to some other state while my family is intact yet and our operation is still profitable."

AW:

He's a smart man. Fort Stockton, Texas, had Comanche Spring. A big spring with a lake and they had all these celebrations all the time and a big farming operation some twenty to thirty miles away after the second world war began to really put in irrigation and that spring has dried up and it hasn't run since. They've got this big pool and it's really a sad thing. They've got this big pool with these grand stands because they used to have a big pageant in the pool every year. It's all sitting there. It's empty. Dry. Here you are with the governor of the state in that office and the first thing you said when I said, did you have anything in common? You said, no, and then you numbered a few things. What kept—the governor should be a powerful person—what kept her from being able to help with your guidance get some of these things done?

SA:

Well I discovered the answer to that too and that is that bureaucracy that's in place from top to bottom absolutely opposed everything she wanted to do.

AW:

Because it was different or because it was her—

SA:

Because it didn't fit this corporate mind track that they'd all been imbued and had it stuck in their minds. They listen to these land grant economists. Their just glib gurus of regurgitated gibberish. They all say the same thing and it's wrong. That Barry Flinchbaugh up there, I give him—you know, he has his yearly deal every year where he'd have Bob Doyle, and then he had Glickman, and then he'd have Pat Roberts, now, and Jerry Marianne out at the state fair. Just a putrid purveyor or parsimonious pomposity that postures, poses, preens, pretends, and everybody thinks he's just the smartest damn man in the world and he's simply a fool.

AW:

This morning at coffee with those fellows and ladies that passed on their hellos to you, there was not much kind said about the Flinchbaugh.

SA:

Really?

AW:

Yeah, they have the same opinion that you do.

SA:

While I was a state spokesman, we took our movement to campus, K State College campus, and we—Keith Shy was a good old friend of mine from South Central Kansas. He brought his John Deer tractor up there with a high loader lift on it and we hung Barry Flinchbaugh a effegy that day and we spent the entire day there painting the sordid truth of what was going on in agriculture. And his—had my wheelbarrow sitting out there with the horse manure and U.S. farm policy in it and his own students carried that up to his room. They told us he couldn't be there to respond to defend himself, but he ended up, up there in that room that day with his own students and the same old line of crap that he puts out. He's just another narcissistic son of a bitch.

AW:

We're going to have a talk tomorrow at Greg Stevens' at the Smoky Hill Museum and I want to come try to be part of it, but he's calling it the last farm movement talking about American Ag. And somebody asked today, does that mean last in terms of the most recent or does it mean it's the final one? What do you think? Do you think we're going to have another movement?

SA:

No, there's not enough people left to have a movement anymore.

AW:

What's next then?

SA:

I think that the United States is going to have an economic meltdown. I'm a big fan of Ron Paul's. He spent twenty seven years in congress and gave up. He said, "I sponsored some two hundred plus bills to try to straighten this mess out and none of them ever got traction because corporations own the congress. Since 2008, I believe it is, we've pumped three trillion dollars of this fake money out of thin air into the economy, and you know—" I say, no bird ever flew so high it didn't have to come down for a drink of water. That's going to be the case with our economic system. I think they have been setting the stage for years. When the farmers went to D.C. in '79, and they took over the Ag building and they went through all the files and riddle and brought a lot of stuff home with these plans where they only wanted three or four farmers per county. What's the name of it? I had a good copy of it, and I don't know where it lays today, but right after World War II is when things started to boom and business needed hired help and the

nation was in no mood. You know, we'd incarcerated the Japanese that were here during the war, whether they was innocent or guilty. Most of them are just victims because they were of Japanese descent, but the nation was in no mood to bring in the Mexicans and all the other people. In fact, Eisenhower sent those home that were here. It was called—oh, what the hell was the name of it? But it was 245, these land grant economists and major business—representatives of major U.S. businesses because there was such a boom. Everybody wanted a refrigerator and a washing machine. Coming out of the Great Depression—

AW:

And out of the war.

SA:

And out of the war. These young people, millions of them, had seen what it was like to be away from home and they wanted to live in a house in town, and had the luxuries that they'd observed other people having, but they had this, it was an economic program for agriculture. The one thing that stuck in my mind, the most often quoted quote in that entire hundred pages report, was the fact that—I want to get this right. I'm at a loss for words. To move people as rapidly as possible. To move excess resources. Excess resources as rapidly as possible, and in parenthesis after excess resources, it always said, people, out of agriculture as rapidly as possible. Ten years later, they got together again, and said, they had made massive strides. This second report was called the young executives report. They made great strides, but we've got to double down on moving these excess resources, primarily people, out of agriculture as rapidly as possible. Now, when your own government, that's their blueprint for agriculture, I don't have much hope. I think we're going to be—someday, we'll be down to the last legitimate family farmer.

AW:

We'll be pretty hungry by then. Wouldn't you think?

SA:

What have we got with corporate agriculture? We say we have the cheapest food supply in the world, and we have the safest food supply and what is it? Billions of pounds of recalled beef. Billions of dozens of eggs, contaminated eggs. Everything from alfalfa sprouts to watermelons that had poison listeria or something, health causing disease in them. How can they put out this propaganda and people continue to believe it?

AW:

Because they live in town. They don't know where food comes from.

SA:

And that's where my—Did you come through Junction City?

AW:
Yeah.

SA:
Did you see that sign up there bragging? Guess who sponsored it? Monsanto's name at the bottom. K State has a Monsanto Library.

AW:
In fact, if I remember the sign, Monsanto's name was at the top and not at the bottom.

SA:
Wherever it is. They've got these dumb farmers going around prostituting themselves, pimping for them and saying, "Oh this is all family agriculture." Blah, Blah, blah, blah, blah. They know that it's family agriculture being dismembered every year.

AW:
Is there anything that can be done to change it, Stephen?

SA:
I don't know what it would be, unless, the internet may help because we have the ability now, an individual, of course, I'm a hundred percent totally illiterate technologically, so I can't do it. I wish I could because I've got a thousand things I'd like to put out there every day, but the internet has brought light on a lot of subjects and it's possible that with the use of the internet that you could get the truth out to the general public.

AW:
On that point, Scott Flippo, this morning when I asked that question to him and to some of the other folks at the table, I said, "Will there be another movement?" And Scott said, "Yes, it's already underway. It's the internet. I'm seeing young people in farming who are communicating through the internet in the same ways that we used to communicate at the coffee shop or at a meeting." He really thinks, I mean, that was his same point, that at some point, that ability to communicate will make the difference.

SA:
But the flipside of that coin is that corporate agriculture is using it too, and they've got the Peterson brothers and they've got all these individuals. We've got a gal over here in the next county. We've got one here in Wabaunsee County that preach that Monsanto Line. There's GMO's [**Genetically Modified Organisms**] that have been scientifically proven to be no harm. They're just the same as everything else. They haven't proven that scientifically. The only scientific studies I've ever heard of was sponsored by Monsanto, and we've got a couple of ex-

Monsanto employees on the U.S. Supreme Court.

AW:

Isn't it also true that even if it is scientifically okay, that doesn't take away the issue of the fact that it's controlled by corporate owner?

SA:

That's correct, so if the general public could start seeing that light, then there could be some hope. I took the American Ag Movement to Kansas when I was spokesman. We went right to the lion's den down here, the farm credit system. We held a big rally and tractorcade there. I'll say one thing, it shook them up so much that a number of farmers that came to that rally met with them. I wouldn't go. I said, "I don't owe them any money and I'm not going to go up and negotiate for somebody else because I wouldn't feel it would be proper. Let you guys that got farm credit loans go up and meet with them," and they did and there was a number of them farmers that did get some relief that time. But I had two old farmers, they're both—well one of them's in his nineties, can't think of his name. Harvey Volt [?] [1:07:44] is dead, but I had them go down there the week before, just loll around and listen and talk and go through the building. They discovered that the farm credit system went bankrupt, and they sold that Taj Mahal down there to another corporation and leased part of it back for enough money per year for that corporation to pay, make no payments. Now, what kind of bloviating buffoons would strike a deal like that? If they could pay enough rent to make the payments, why couldn't they have just kept it? It don't make—plus, that corporation loaned a lot of that space out, or rented it out, to other organizations that was in need of office space.

AW:

The old rule is follow the money, find out who made the money on that.

SA:

That's right, and we had a heck of a good rally there that day and speakers—I had—Joan Finney come to that and spoke. That would be, I guess, another reason that she had me in mind as somebody that she trusted.

AW:

Did she run for another term?

SA:

No, she'd seen the handwriting on the wall and Kansas swept, just like this last election, every Republican that clear down from the governor to the dog catcher was elected. Now, I may sound like I'm speaking for the Republicans, but I have equal contempt for the Democrat party. I think the Republican and Democrat party are just two heads of the same snake. Most farm movements,

the NFO, the American Ag Movement, ARCAF, U.S.A., they all got in bed with the Democrat party thinking that well, the Democrats gave them lip service, anyway. They never faired any better, really, under a Democrat. As I discovered under Joan Finney, she didn't have the—she was the only person there that really cared and wanted to change things and you cannot change this imbedded bureaucracy.

AW:

I have a cowboy singer friend named Don Edwards who calls them Democans and Republocrats.

SA:

That's a good analogy.

AW:

Pretty good description. What should I have asked you about that I hadn't so far?

SA:

I don't know. I've forgot so much stuff that probably, I could have talked all day long if I—

AW:

I'd like to – I'm going to have to get back here, in just a little bit, back to Salina. We've got a program tonight that we've got to get going, but I'd like to do some more visiting with you. I've got a phone number. If you don't mind, when I'm next through this area, I'll give you a whistle.

SA:

Okay.

AW:

And I'll try to look up a little more information on some of these things you mentioned today, so I can ask some more intelligent questions. I'm really interested about the leadership role that you play. Let me ask one other question. Here's a thing that I run into. At the beginning of the American Ag Movement, it was very much a populous movement. There were people in different places. They were of different political parties and different, other kinds of attitudes and opinions, but they all came together at that one time. Fairly soon, there seemed to develop two kind of camps. There was the more populous camp, and then what became the incorporated camp. How did that—did that affect you any way? Did you have a particular—because you were back in it by the eighties, which was now the American Ag Movement incorporated—I'm assuming that you stayed active in it throughout that schism?

SA:

I was definitely of the populist groups.

AW:

It strikes me that you would be.

SA:

That split, you know, as in every movement that there is—I got jailed in Chicago, and I got teargassed in Miami in 2003. I went down there to protest the South American Free Trade Agreement, but in all of these instances, as soon as some organization like that starts, the government inserts some people into each of these to divide and conquer. They do that very effectively. The second thing that I think about that is that not just farmers, but the public in general, likes to snuggle up to these politicians or people of power or money or stuff like that and pretty soon, that's where, in my opinion, the Inc. crowd, they thought, Boy, we can get into our senator's office at will, and he just treats us like we're really somebody and they like that feeling of power and intimacy with the people in power, but they never get anywhere. I went to Washington one time with a National Farmer's Union fly-in. I said, never again. I could see that—I was always a pretty acute observer of what else is going on. And one of these senators that we had an appointment to meet with, he and his couple staffers, three or four, was in front of him coming out of his office and they immediately seen Ivan Wyatt, and who was coming and they just plugged that door up getting him shoved back in there. We were told that he was busy. Had an appointment with him, but he was busy. He was unavailable, I guess was the term they used. Now, they tried to lead us to believe that he wasn't there, but being as I was politically astute, I recognized him, and so I said, "What's the use of coming here?" We only had about half a dozen friends back in Washington. Marcy Kaptur and Dennis Kucinich and people like that that really loved their country, but there's not enough of them. Like Ron Paul said, I introduced all this various legislation to address our economic crisis, but he said, you can't get traction. That's where our split come, well because of my speech on it at the Topeka Capital, that time at that rally, why the populists come to me and wanted me to run for state spokesman. They didn't come until the day of the meeting. He never said anything to me, caught me off-guard. There was a guy from Southwest Kansas that was of the Inc. crowd that was—they virtually, supposedly a shoe in for the next state spokesmen—well they got me there and we each gave our little talk and as it turned out, they elected me. Then the Inc. crowd, they just dispersed. They all liked our money. Another thing that really struck me was there's so many—the people that I got to know the closest became the closest friends—they weren't in any financial trouble. They were like me. They had been raised to fear debt and they didn't take on debt, but they believed in what the mayor, in parody—they believed in parody—that that was the solution to our national economy. That's what brought—you know, all of the things that Roosevelt promoted during his tenure didn't bring us out of the national recession, or not recession, depression. A lot of them cuss him, and I'll still defend certain things. I tell people today, rural people wouldn't have electricity if it hadn't of been for that. My dad wouldn't have had some of the jobs he had here during the dirty thirties if it wasn't been for the various federal programs that created some—there was no money in circulation out here, but he got some jobs. I know he worked on—the fed sent some money

down to the state, state passed it on to re-rock the roads, well the roads was, when I grew up, was just mud. He worked on a rock crusher. He got ten cents an hour more for standing up on that big steel plate with a crowbar all day rolling them boulders in. I remember one time, he came home and a rock had crushed his foot, and he couldn't hardly get his shoes off and mother soaked his feet half the night in Epsom saltwater and he forced his feet back in them shoes the next day because he had to have that dollar, quarter, or whatever he was getting. Roosevelt did some good things, but it didn't bring us out of—it was the war that brought us—and that put money back everywhere in the economy.

AW:

Roosevelt, too, in his defense, didn't have a completely free hand on the money side. The money supply makes a big difference in depression. One of the big mistakes that the Republican administration that came before him made when the crash happened was to tighten money, which is wrong.

SA:

They're doing that to Greece today.

AW:

Yeah, exactly.

SA:

The only country that really did the right thing there was Iceland, and they just wiped them debts off. The people said, "We're not going to pay it." They prosecuted a number of their top government—some of Iceland's top government officials that created that debt are in prison today in Iceland. That's what I wish Greece and Spain and Ireland would do because that's the only answer to it, and that takes us back, you say Roosevelt didn't—in 1913, under Woodrow Wilson, is when they recreated the Federal Reserve. That's strictly unconstitutional. Only Congress has the power to coin and value money, but they turned it over to these banks. We have five hundred and thirty billionaires in our country today. Just think of that. Fifty-three percent of the population make less than thirty thousand a year. Fifty-three percent. Now, it's easy to say, well the average wage in the U.S. is fifty-six thousand dollars, but that just totally distorts the real picture.

AW:

Exactly. The average doesn't really make any sense in salary. It's a median, the number of people making a certain salary.

SA:

Andrew Jackson was another of my historical heroes because he refused to reauthorize the

Federal Reserve, and they attempted to assassinate him three different times, and I'm still going to believe that that's what got Kennedy killed is because he had started to reissue genuine federal money. They saw the handwriting on the wall. He was starting to understand what some of the real problems of our nation was. I don't know how many times that phone rang since we sat here, but that phone would ring anywhere from midnight until three a.m., while I was state AAM [American Agriculture Movement] spokesman. "What are we going to do?", "We've got to do something.", "I'm due in the courthouse Monday morning until Friday morning." I said, "Well who is this I'm speaking to? Are you part of the American Ag?", "No, I'm not part of the American Ag Movement, but we've got to do something.", I said, "You've already missed your opportunity to really do something. It's too late when you've got the notice from the bank to foreclose on you, it's too late." Time after, night after night, it was amazing.

AW:

That must have tough to live through.

SA:

Oh, it was terrible.

AW:

How long were you in that post?

SA:

Two years, and the stress of it, I couldn't take it anymore. They wanted me to continue and I said, I just—for my own personal health, I can't stay in this position because it's getting to me too much.

AW:

What years were those?

SA:

Eighty-six, and '87.

AW:

Boy that was right in the thick of it.

SA:

That's when the farmers were driving their tractors into the bank walls in Iowa. You know, if you couldn't make a living in that good dirt in Iowa, how would they expect somebody in Kansas or Texas or Oklahoma to survive it?

AW:

You're right. Yeah, you're exactly right.

SA:

I think a lot of times about how this nation was built through the blood, and the sweat, and the tears of our ancestors that built this nation. Raised big families in Iowa, you could do it on a hundred and sixty acres, and the further west you got, the more acres it took, but they did it. Now, I drive these same roads I travelled in '86, and '87, all over this state and every one of those towns, about all that's left is a beer joint, a senior center, a bank, and a funeral home. Here in Alma, we have two funeral homes and two banks. My sons tell me, well they said, "They're just waiting on all of you old people to die, then they'll close them too."

AW:

Yeah, and I know in Western Kansas and on the Texas Panhandle, you see a lot of plywood on the windows and doors.

SA:

I just come through Marysville awhile back. That county lost more boys per capita in World War II, than any place in the United States.

AW:

Really? Marysville?

SA:

That County, Marshall County, and now, that town is boarded up virtually. They still got a filling station and a couple little antique shops and the rest of them are post office, senior center, things that connect you to the government. But what'll happen—free trade it has been the death knell for rural America, especially, but for all of the United States. That's why I was down there in Miami in 2003, and I got a firsthand view of how these government agitators are sent in to everything. There's probably—the city officials estimated to a crowd of thirty thousand people and our people estimated them at closer to sixty thousand. There were just thousands of senior citizens. I went to St. Paul, Minnesota, when the Republican Convention was held in 2008. The city of St. Paul put out a deal where they were accepting people to speak for an hour outside of the Republican National Convention. I was one of them that drew—they said by lottery, I don't know if it was or not, but I drew a number there. In fact, I got a copy of that speech I'm going to send along with you.

AW:

Good.

SA:

The Topeka Capital Journal sent two reporters up there. They only listened to about half of my speech and away they went, and they come back home and wrote an article that said, Anderson spent all his time railing about debt, and the problems of debt, and gloomy outlook. That was in September of 2008. It was October of 2008 that our debt imploded on them. Nobody ever printed a retraction. Nobody ever called and said, "By damn, we're sorry." But I laid it out. I thought I did. I told them what was wrong, what was going to happen, but they gave me fifty-five minutes and I used every damn minute of it too.

AW:

I'm really looking forward to reading the speech.

SA:

I'll have to get your address. I've been a profligate letter to the editor writer, and I encouraged American Ag people, I said, "The best thing you can do is to write a letter to the editor and not rail against everything, but offer some solutions or ask. Tell everybody today that you get way ahead if you'll ask a question." Now, I've had a lot of trouble doing that because I'm pretty opinionated, but I couldn't get people to do that, but I've continued.

AW:

Do you have copies of those letters? I mean, you send them in, but did you make a copy for yourself?

SA:

That's what I was going to say, I'll try to get a bunch of those copies to you if you'd be interested. They don't have anything to do, probably, with your project.

AW:

Doesn't matter. They have to do with you and our interest in an archive is to try to help people remember these things so the next time the debt crisis builds up, they say, "Well you know, we've got some people who have been through this and have talked about it." And whether people are going to pay attention or not, I don't know. At least we're going to have the information there. In the future, when people look back, they need to know who Stephen Anderson was, and all of the other things he did besides this involvement just in the Ag Movement.

SA:

Well go back to Miami, there was one girl from Kalispell, Montana, wore her cowboy hat too, like I had one. Normally, here I dress in overalls.

AW:

I left my hat at home and put on my rain shoes because of the weather. I don't want to get my boots wet.

SA:

I don't want to get my boots or my hat out in the rain. But I noticed several different people totally clothed in black where you couldn't see their face, and they were constantly working the crowd and trying to—see, they had created the—chief of police, or whoever was head of their security operations had, through the newspapers, had created a community of fear down there in Miami that this rabid rabble was coming to destroy their city. I went and marched with the Steel Workers Union people. There wasn't any farm groups there. After our march that we took, thousands of people sitting along the banks, there was a lot of park and area there and people had brought—all those retired people had brought lunches with them and things like that. I'd just walked down in front of the line of the shoulder to shoulder cops in their head to toe battalion gear and everything. These guys in black wasn't getting any luck getting anybody to do anything of violence. So I was right there seeing this one guy, had a bottle of water or something in a bottle, and threw it into that crowd of policemen. At that time, boom, just like a gunshot, something went off, and here they come. They started with their teargas and I've seen it and I got the hell moving. Most people weren't. They would've teargassed thousands of these old retired people sitting around, except fortunately, that day, the wind was blowing from us to them. Here they come. Well I went on up and the businesses along the way had pretty much barricaded themselves in. I went up and tapped on a door. Here was this old man with a cane and looked all like a cowboy dressed up and they let me in so I could watch. A kid right out in front of that business establishment was down in an attitude of prayer and they just come in and beat that living bejesus out of him. When they got on by, pushing everybody on up the street, two blocks or so, here come a van wheeling up in through there, a police van. From them front lines, they had let these guys through. There was two in black and three other people come running, and they opened the doors and jumped in that police van. They were the people that had triggered the altercation that the authorities had predicted was going to happen. I've seen it with my own eyes, and that's what happened with American Ag Movement in Washington and different places, it was government establishment people that had infiltrated. And I think they're the ones that precipitated the American Ag split up between the populists and those that went Inc. They'd agitate the populist and tell them sons of bitches they ain't no account, they're falling—towed end in [?] [1:33:54] with the government and they'd tell the Inc. crowd, them are the damn rabid terrorists that are giving us all a bad name and we've got to separate ourselves from them. Now, that's just my personal opinion.

AW:

There is also the fact that organizations tend very quickly to begin to exist just for themselves.

SA:

I saw that too.

AW:

And forget why they started off.

SA:

I went on numerous groups, protests, or doing different things with the leadership of the American Ag. Pretty soon, a number of them, they'd ensconced themselves in the highest dollar hotel in town because they was spending everybody's money. It wasn't out of their own pocket and they were toed in up with the powers and rubbing shoulders with the politicians and the bankers and the whoever. They had a big deal here in Topeka. They was going to address the farm crisis, and the first speaker got up there and started preaching about farmers that had borrowed too much money. They went on and railed, farmers, they hadn't used good sense. They'd simply borrowed too much money. Now, they're crying they're in trouble. They had a deal set up where they was going to let the crowd recognize some speakers. I just pushed my way through there and I went up and grabbed that microphone and I said, Yeah, but for every farmer that's sat on this side of the table and borrowed too much money, there was a goddamn banker sat on that side of the table and loaned us too much money." Boy, that place just erupted, and it changed the whole tone of that meaning from then on out, I'll guarantee you. And it was true.

AW:

Yeah, it's not like you just go put your name in a slot like a coke machine, then get out a loan, somebody gives it to you and somebody probably talks you into it.

SA:

I think that that was the case. I think that goes back to this old economic blueprint for American Agriculture too. Loan a bunch of money, Paul Volker—they all blamed Jimmy Carter, but it was Paul Volker, the head of the Federal Reserve that shot them interest rates up to 21 percent. There was another just like Governor Finney, you'd think the president would have enough power, but he didn't. He did some stupid things. I'm not defending Jimmy Carter per say, but it wasn't him. It was Paul Volker that triggered the farm crisis. You know what, it brought about the CRP [**Conservation Reserve Program**]? They try to make out like this was a great conservation movement. It wasn't. American Agriculture was just ready to implode and collapse, period. By initiating the CRP, they pumped a lot of money out here into the rural areas. Of course, the insiders that knew what was coming, the producers of grass seed knew two years in advance and had went to Texas and implanted thousands of acres to bluestem and switch grass and Indian grass, and was prepared for that market.

AW:

There was a list of grasses that you could plant to qualify.

SA:

Right, the grasses it took to qualify and they were Bob Doyle's big donors, so they got their information. When I was fighting corporate hogs, very first time they ever had that, they had this huge array of people that come in and testify, they was all in favor of corporate agriculture. Oh, it's going to be such an economic boom. I was the lone person there that day to testify against it. My own congress, Kansas congress legislature, house of representatives, come to me and said, "Stephen, why are you doing this?" Before I went in there. I said, "Don, I'm doing it because you aren't doing what you're supposed to do. You ought to be the guy opposing it." The media, of course, picked up on my railing there that day, and once the public heard about what corporate hogs was and was going to do, that's when we started and we held them off from 1985 until 1994, before they finally got their corporate hog bill through. That's, I'd say, was a plus for family farmers because we got another nine years.

AW:

Well let's, I'm going to say thanks and turn this off and let's look at some of that stuff that you have, and I'm going to give you my card, and also, a form I'd like for you to sign that says people are allowed to listen to your interview for scholarly purposes. Thanks again. This has been a great afternoon.

[End of Recording]