

**Group Oral History Interview of
American Agriculture Movement Members:
Scott Flipppo, David Heiens, Donna Riffel, Neil Tischhouser**

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

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

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Preferred Citation for this Document:

American Agriculture Movement Group: Flippo, Heiens, Riffel and Tischhouser Oral History Interview, May 6, 2015. Interview by Andy Wilkinson, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

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Recording Notes:

Original Format: Born Digital Audio

Digitization Details:

Audio Metadata: 44.1kHz/ 16bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Related Interviews:

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: Andy Wilkinson

Audio Editor: N/A

Transcription: Elizabeth Groening

Editor(s): Kayci Rush

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 Scott Flippo, David Heiens, Donna Riffel, Niel Tischhouser as they discuss the Tractorcade and farm movement that they participated in. Note: this interview was conducted in a noisy café, making the difficult hard to understand at times.

Length of Interview: 01:35:07

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Purpose for this interview	13	00:08:33
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Keywords

Agriculture, Farming

Niel Tischhouser (NH):

I might as well. Yeah. I don't know, it makes me go to the bathroom a long time. I ate something and something happened.

Scott Flippo (SF):

No, not coffee. Glass of water or something like that.

David Heiens (DH):

That's the football stadium in Lubbock. Andy's from Lubbock.

SF:

He wants a little coffee with a lot of milk.

NH:

Holy Toledo.

Donna Riffel (DR)

Do you use anything in yours Andy?

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

No ma'am, just right. Is that a recent—yeah

SF:

Stadium full of water.

AW:

Yeah, we've had a—Tahoka, just south of Lubbock, about thirty miles, got 9.7 inches in one day

NT:

Do y'all have decaf?

US:

We do not have decaf.

NT:

Forget it then. Thank you. That's a lot of—they got a restroom in here?

DH:

Yeah, straight back where it says exit.

AW:

That is double the annual that they got in 2011. [Laughter] Shows you how bad 2011 was, but also what a change we've got now.

DH:

I bet Weston, Kansas is seeing some new colors in their world.

AW:

I'll tell you, driving up yesterday, first of all, I didn't get started until about ten because it was so wet in Lubbock you couldn't get out of town.

DH:

I would imagine.

AW:

And then it rained pretty much all the way up here, but I was so struck by how green Kansas is right now. It's gorgeous. If you're going to sell the place, this would be the year to do it, I guess.

DH:

That's—well most land auctions are in springtime.

SF:

For us, David and I live just a mile apart from each other, we had half an inch this morning and we had three, or at least I had three, yesterday morning.

DH:

I only got a quarter.

SF:

You only—tonight to this morning?

DR:

What'd you have last night, Scott?

SF:

What?

DR:

What'd you have last night?

SF:

Yesterday, we had three.

DR:

I had two and a half.

SF:

And then this morning, I had a half an inch.

DR:

I had a half this morning too.

SF:

But anyways, that's the first big batch of rain that we have had really in a long time.

DR:

Yeah, that we have seen in forever.

DH:

Yeah, we had an inch and then we have two—another one that was an inch. We hadn't had nothing all winter.

DR:

No, we had nothing but a piddly one.

SF:

Well, when you got those inches, I got half and forty just a mile apart.

DH:

Well, I guess it's your turn.

DR:

Well, Laurie got four and half north of Chapman. She had water everywhere.

AW:

We've really had a good spring and not that bad a winter. I mean, we're still catching up, but it does look a lot better.

SF:

Yeah, that's been a long time ago. Jiminy Christmas.

AW:

Scott, can I get some contact information for you?

SF:

Okay, like what? Telephone number?

AW:

Telephone and an email and then a snail mail address too.

SF:

Okay, telephone there at the house is area code, [REDACTED], and then cellphone, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED], and then email is [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

AW:

What a great name.

SF:

Yeah, .com.

AW:

Oh, that's wonderful.

SF:

And then the physical address is [REDACTED] – which one's that?

Unknown Speaker (US):

This is the water. I mean, this the—I just don't want to set it down because I'm a klutz.

SF:

Oh, [REDACTED].

AW:

[REDACTED].

SF:

Yep. Road.

AW:

And that's [REDACTED]?

SF:

Yeah.

AW:

And zip?

SF:

[REDACTED].

AW:

Okay.

SF:

And David will be—

AW:

David, spell your last name for me. I don't remember.

David Heiens (DH):

H-e-i-e-n-s.

AW:

H-e-i-n-e-s.

DH:

No.

Scott:

H-e-i-e.

AW:

H-e-i-e-n-s. Okay, got it.

DH:

You can tell he's educated. Probably when I was in Lubbock, I had a cowboy hat on and a mustache, that's probable. It's not fair to you.

AW:

No, actually when you shook my hand, I knew I knew you, but I couldn't remember whether—I've been up a couple of times and did some entertainment for Don Teskey when they had KFU meetings.

DH:

Right, I met you there too.

AW:

And so I was thinking maybe I had met you with Don. Let me—can I have your contact information too? I probably have it, but I want to make sure.

DH:

Okay.

AW:

Okay, phone number and an address and email, if you—

DH:

[REDACTED]

US:

[REDACTED]. [Laughter]

DH:

And address is [REDACTED]

AW:

Okay. Same zip and everything, I suppose?

DH:

[REDACTED], yep. And then email would be [REDACTED].

AW:

Okay, and how do you spell your first name?

Neil Tischhauser (NT):

N-e-i-l.

AW:

N-e-i-l. Okay, that's good because I would probably—and spell your last name too for me.

NT:

First half of it is T-i-s-c-h. Got that?

AW:

Um-hm.

NT:

Last half is another h-a-u-s-e-r. Very German.

AW:

A-u-s?

NT:

T-i-s-c-h-h-a-u-s-e-r.

AW:

E-r. Okay, great. And how would I get ahold of you? Phone and email and such.

NT:

Phone is [REDACTED] Email would be the [REDACTED].

AW:

[REDACTED]?

NT:

Yeah, [REDACTED].

AW:

Okay, at?

NT:

[REDACTED].

AW:

And a regular address?

NT:

██████.

AW:

██████?

NT:

██████████████████.

AW:

Say—██████████████████?

NT:

██████████.

AW:

That's ████████?

NT:

No, that's ████████.

AW:

██████, okay and a zip code?

NT:

██████.

AW:

Got it.

NT:

I'm going to croak with the 666. [AW Laughs]

AW:

You know, there was a Highway 666 up near in northwest New Mexico, and they changed the number. They went through the Navajo reservation, and they finally said, this is part of our bad luck.

DR:

I know that one time we went through [inaudible] [0:08:08] Colorado, on our way to [inaudible].

[Inaudible crosstalk 0:08:17]

NT:

My daughter wanted me to come down there. I did.

DR:

Well, that's good.

AW:

Well, my—I think you probably all know what we're doing, but if you'd like, I can talk a little bit about why we're here and what we're doing with all of this.

NT:

That would be a good idea.

AW:

Several years ago, I happen to be sitting on a board of an outfit called Ogallala Commons which was a—it still is a group of folks that go across all eight states that have a part of the Ogallala on it. And the original mission of the group was to look at how do you husband the resource of the aquifer and also, how do you keep the producers, ranches and farms, vital economically in modern world? From that grew the idea that we're also losing small towns, and a lot of that to the leaving of young people, and so that lead to discussion about why they leave? And so we did some surveys and taught some visits with school administrators and such in various towns and one of the surprising—or what was surprising to me was the number of young people who said, “Well, I'm going someplace where things happen and they have a history, and nothing ever happened here.” You know? And so the superintendent of schools in Campo, Colorado and I decided to do a program where we would—just an experimental program—where I would go out and train their high school students in conducting oral history interviews and let them actually interview their parents, and grandparents, and aunts, and uncles, and so forth. Which we did and got done and one of the things that started right off the bat was—the superintendent said, “The first issue you're going to find is that these kids are really interested in the Tractorcade.” And so I actually didn't know much about Campo's history in the Tractorcade. I knew about our part of the world because I knew Gerald McCatherine and Mel Cherry and a number of those folks just from living there near them. So as soon as I got to Campo and we started interviewing Gene Schroder As soon as I got into that, it was this incredibly fascinating story and I knew that what little I knew about the Tractorcade just from the Panhandle of Texas was just a little, tiny piece of the story. Also, from a scholarly point of view, we found out pretty quickly that there weren't really any large archival collections about the American Ag Movement or the Tractorcade anywhere. There was a bit of stuff at Iowa State. There were little pieces scattered out here and there, but nobody was really doing anything about it, so we thought well, we ought to get high

and behind and get started. So we began there with Campo, and we progressed down to Gerald, and some of the folks that were still alive in Texas Panhandle, and then a couple of years ago, I went to the American Ag Movement meeting in Oklahoma City, met a bunch of folks. In the meantime, Don Teskey, who was also on that board with me, had invited me out to some Kansas Farmer Union conferences and I met some other people from here, Kansas, that were active. So we began to collect materials. Those included things like scrapbooks, photographs, newspaper articles. When they thought they were going to be kicked out of the building in Campo, where the movement had started seventy years ago, we went up in sort of a last ditch effort and brought back some banners and some posters and things like that just to keep them from getting destroyed. Over the last several years, we've built up quite a collection. We had a meeting in Lubbock two years ago, three years ago?

SF:

I believe two.

AW:

Yeah, I think so. Two. Where we invited just all of the people that we had information for to come down and we'd have a meeting, and so we did a lot of interviews there and collected a lot of material. People like David brought things down and we've been working on it ever since. I don't have to tell you because you know the importance of the movement, but there are a lot of people out there who don't, and they're forgetting about and so we try to—by continuing to collect information and by doing some exhibits and things. In fact, Larry Matlack, whom I suppose most of you know, is right this minute, in Lubbock at the American Ag Museum having a meeting with some of our people about how to create a permanent exhibit there at the museum. Of course, we're happy to work with anybody who wants to exhibit things.

DH:

That is quite a museum, by the way.

AW:

It is quite a museum.

NT:

And this is in Lubbock?

AW:

Yeah.

DH:

Yeah, I was very impressed with the museums there. We had meetings there.

AW:

Too far?

NT:

I mean—never mind, just—nothing.

DH:

It's worth your time to go down there and see that stuff.

AW:

Yeah, well Dan Taylor, who helped get it started, was also on the Tractorcade.

NT:

Who's this?

AW:

Dan Taylor from Roachville. At the time he was on the Tractorcade, he ran buster's gin in Ropesville, Texas, and farm.

DH:

And he has—on his farm, he has his own museum of cottons gins.

AW:

Gins. Including a Whitney, I mean, one of the old—it sits on the top of a table. It's not very big.

DH:

Yeah, that's amazing.

AW:

So he helped. Yeah, he contributed a lot of his gin historical items to that museum. We're a little short on wheat equivalent, but there's a lot of cotton stuff down there as you might expect.

DH:

You can see wheat any place. [Laughter]

AW:

No, not in our country.

NT:

So you started this in Campo, did they tell you actually how it really did start?

AW:

Well, there are several stories about that and the interesting thing to me about the Farm Movement and the Tractorcade itself, all the various protests sort of events, is that if you talk to four people, you get about six different versions of how it started. Not that they're contradictory, but they all add something which is true of a really grass routes' populous movement because it's not coming from the top down, it's coming from the bottom up, so there are a lot of stories and that's one of the reasons we're interested in getting as many oral history interviews as we can.

NT:

I would have thought Gene would told you about the Bill Chevy's irrigation [inaudible] [00:16:11] He didn't tell you about that?

AW:

No, about shutting the irrigation pumps? No, I don't think so. I don't remember that.

NT:

There was no such thing as American Ag. Bill Chevy's pump [inaudible] [00:16:23] because you couldn't afford to pump the water from what it was going to get out of his model. It upset his dad.

SF:

Daryl.

NT:

So his dad goes to town with a bunch of them. These were all old former NFO [**National Farmers Organization**] guys when they were young. They still had the phone connections that went around. They knew who they were.

AW:

The phone trees?

NT:

Phone trees. Anyway, they went to have coffee and Daryl was telling me his son shut his—

SF:

Well, there were seven.

NT:

Was there seven?

SF:

Original seven.

NT:

You take it from here.

SF:

Well, you go on.

NT:

No, you're doing better than I am. I've forgotten. I got crushed.

SF:

Well, and I'm trying to—I can name all five of those original seven—Darryl Schroder, the father. Bill and Jen, and then Alvin Jenkins, Jerry Wright, and then the other two—there was another part of the Schroder family, and I can't name off the other two.

DR:

This was a lot of them that were involved there to begin with [inaudible] [00:17:28]. And I thought this is almost a wonderful time because I got so many of the big guys.

NT:

This is the ones out of a Campo? This is the ones out of a Campo?

DR:

That and some of the others. You remember who all they were, Scott.

SF:

Well, this one here is Marvin Urkey. From down there in Butler

DR:

Yeah, he's Texas.

NT:

That was later. We're talking about before that.

DR:

This was at the meeting in Salina.

AW:

Oh, that's great it's got the names on the back.

NT:

That's different ones. That's later.

DR:

I don't have them all, only have part of them.

DH:

That's super.

AW:

Yeah, one of our problems is we have a lot of scrapbooks with a lot of pictures that are just pictures, and we don't know necessarily who's who.

DR:

I think primarily in here because this is Phil Roy. Brownie points to this I left some of it at home.

SF:

And with knowing Bill, there was good reasons why Bill just all of a sudden did it because he out of—you know, Gene had gone to school for veterinarian—and Bill hadn't. Bill stayed home, took care of all the farm and everything. In fact, Daryl's father was the one that started all of that out there in Colorado with the family. He went out there right there during the Depression and he had three thousand dollars, and he was buying ground for pennies. And I think he initially didn't grandpa—he bought three thousand acres or something or other for a pittance, and that was the basis then that Gene, and Bill, and then their father Daryl, then all came up out of that. But yeah, it mystified me when I was out there. Here these guys had all these irrigation wells and pivots and everything else. Can't run them. It's not affordable. It takes more money to run these crazy things than what we were getting out of it, and with that being the case, something is not right and so shut the suckers off.

NT:

What blew my mind was they were growing milo when we were up there, because wheat took moisture all year long. Milo just took a few months to make it [inaudible] [00:19:47] because the ground he bought, he realized, it was from the county. He knew where the ground was that held water was like a little lake. When Bill shut that off and they had that meeting with those seven guys, and they decided they ought to do something. It was not to be incorporated. It was just something to cause a reaction. It caused one wave of a reaction. [Laughter]

SF:

Well, yeah. And with as close proximity as they were because Campo wasn't that far away from all the flying farmers out in western Kansas, there with Johnson and all. We—this is interesting because out of the American Ag Movement, we wound up with our son.

AW:

Okay, explain that. [Laughs]

SF:

Well, my wife and I were never able to have any kids. Anyways, Laurie Schroder. Laurie, we kept track of each other. When my Laurie—so we got two Laurie's and they're both Laurie Anne, so it's real tough when we get together.

AW:

Oh, that is confusing.

SF:

So it's Grandma Schroder, for one, if anything else. I look at Schroder and I say, "You look like a grandma don't you?" and she goes, "Shut up, Scott."

NT:

I bet she loved you for that.

DR:

Should have smacked him one of these times, good and hard.

SF:

It's not so bad now, where she is a grandmother, you know? But when my Laurie and I got married, we went that direction for honeymoon and stopped at Schroder's and we went from there off down to where they were racing horses because Laurie Schroder had a race horse at that time. And then from there, we went on out to Grand Canyon, but anyways, it—I lost my train of thought.

AW:

Something to do with the son.

SF:

Oh, yeah. My son. Laurie Schroder, she and I had talked at different times and she knew that we were taking the state classes for adoption, and also for foster care. She called me up one day and she goes, "Are you guys—have you done anything?", "No," and she says, "Well, we have a little fourteen year old neighbor girl that got pregnant," and "Okay?" The interesting part about it is when I was out there in the winter and lived with Schroder's when we were working on the fuel alcohol stuff, this girl's folks I watched play basketball there at Campo. [Laughter]

DH:

It's a small world.

NT:

I didn't know that.

SF:

You didn't know this story or part of this story?

NT:

No, I didn't know that.

SF:

Renee's mom and dad both, especially because the girls' basketball out there was the big thing when we were building alcohol plants. Boys' basketball, not that much.

NT:

That was when I discovered they had girls' basketball.

SF:

Oh yeah, and girls' basketball out there was every bit as exciting as boys' basketball was.

AW:

Yeah, it's the same way in the Texas Panhandle. The girls' basketball is what the community—they go watch boys play football in the fall, but in the rest year, it's the girls' basketball.

NT:

Really?

AW:

Yeah, it's an interesting thing.

SF:

Anyways, then we went out and got to meet Renee and her father and her mother. Now, her father and mother were divorced by this time. But part of—and what I was getting around to as to why the connection in the Campo and the Johnson area—like this girl, her doctor was in Johnson. So it was great when it got down to when we actually did the adoption and everything because Byron, our son, was born in Johnson, in Kansas, not Colorado even though they lived in Colorado. We got the phone call early October the 13th, '97, and said, "Hey, we're headed to the doctor." And then we made a five hour trip out to Johnson quick, got out there, and then Byron wasn't born until like 9:10 that night. There's a lot of—Campo, Springfield, but they came this way for other stuff. There wasn't that much—there was a lot of the cultural stuff. Those folks in Colorado came this way.

AW:

Yeah, there's nothing really north of them and there's nothing really south of them for a long way, so Western Kansas is their stomping ground.

SF:

And so it stood to reason then, that that mushroomed this way, and then down in the Boise city in Lubbock, going south, and it was just a real wildfire that came out of that and I know, Alvin came back. Jenkins came back into here many times on sponsored speaking trips when they would have—they got to Salina, and Salina would have a meeting, and some of us around in here went to it and then all of the sudden, it comes to Abilene, and they got guys to come to Abilene. Later, after it was already established, we always made those monthly trips out to great Bend for the Ag meeting out there at the Black Angus. You got to know the road real well driving from here to Great Bend.

DR:

Yeah, I kind of half way knew it. I did it not too many times, but I did.

SF:

Like for me, I was just a brand new kid out of high school. I graduated in '77, had been through American Government class, and then that winter of '78, we were in Washington D.C. on a bus a trip, and we took a whole—

AW:

In the winter of '78?

SF:

Yeah, winter of '78, we took a busload of people, American Ag guys, back there and that was when we'd coming and—on the way back, we got stranded in Columbus. Snowed in right there next to the campus and they told all of us to stay away from the campus because it probably wouldn't be a good idea with the dorm girls and everything else on campus.

AW:

And of course, the first thing you did was—

Scott:

Some of them did, [Laughter] but by this time, we were broke. We were out of money. We weren't anticipating it. We were supposed to be back that night. Rearden's, there on the bank over at Solomon, they were doing something that was unheard of. They were having a cash rent auction and American Ag was really against cash rent auction. There had never been anything like that, and we were supposed to get back and go to Salina, and we were going to picket that cash rent auction. Well, we never made it because we got snowed in there in Columbus, Ohio.

DR:

Didn't the auction get postponed? There was a bunch of it that went over.

Scott:

Yeah, a lot of the local guys that stayed here went on over there and they made nuisances of themselves to the point where they just didn't have the auction.

DR:

Because I know Ryan was in that bunch because his dad was—my husband, was stranded.

Scott:

Yeah, and very nice people there at the motel that we were at there in Columbus. They were willing to take every one of us. They would take personal checks. They figured, well a bunch of farmers, checks have got to be good. That was before nowadays where you wonder about everybody's check is any good. And then the next winter, then '79, was when we went back with tractors. So we had from '78, going back there on the bus, all of that next year then to gear up for all of the things that then took place after that. That was when the groundwork was laid for a lot of the things that happened. There were a tremendous amount of—in fact, to raise money to send us back there, we had auction. There was a lot because I know you guys had a lot of stuff and we had stuff. We bought some of your stuff. You bought some of our stuff. [Laughter]

DR:

Probably, we probably did and I know Laurie, my daughter and I, would get up at three o'clock in the morning, drive into Abilene, and we're getting all this nasty, bad weather, snow and what have you. Get in the old four wheel drive, drive to Abilene, for alliance [?], serve pancakes to the tractorcades that were coming through and stopped in Abilene. We religiously got up and came in so we secured the four o'clock to fix breakfast for all those tractor drivers.

Scott:

And before we ever went to Washington we had—

DR:

That was before we left.

Scott:

Yeah, we had tractorcades to Topeka, and all around Topeka, and I know we took that eleven hundred Massey [Ferguson tractor], and I was scared to death to shut it off. It sat out there all night.

AW:

Was it diesel?

Scott:

Yeah, it was diesel. It was cold as the devil.

DR:

Most all of them were diesel.

DH:

It was, out there on that airport.

SF:

Yeah, sat out there on Forbes Air Force base and it sat there and ran all night long.

NT:

My father went down there. He said there was somebody that got all antsy in a Ford Falcon car and they were having it appraised. This tractor wheel went by so he gunned that thing, jumped out there in between it, didn't realize it was a four wheel drive. He said, "The tractor—he watched to his hat—went right over the hood." The car just went [grunt]. Ran right in front of the windshield down in Topeka. I'd like to see that.

SF:

But there was a lot of—the little Tractorcades that went on were the breeding grounds for us to go to Washington.

AW:

Is a matter of training or just it created the idea?

SF:

Initially, a lot of us at that time had no idea that we were going to go to Washington that year. It was to stir up the interest, get it out there. It's like, I had to laugh. When we stopped the bread trucks here in Abilene, we did not allow Bet's Bakery, or something, deliver any bread to any of the stores or any place here in Abilene. That night, I had to laugh. There was Ira Doer.

US:

He's still kicking.

SF:

Yeah, he's still around. He was a cop on the Abilene Police Force and we was also kind of a short tail farmer. Ira came up there and he says, "Guys, I've never got involved with anything like this." We were standing there and told Bet's they couldn't unload their bread. Ira was going, "Guys, I don't want to take you to jail, but you can't do this." Well then, there was a bunch of—because the younger kids, we were the kids at the time, but the dads were on the telephone and they were talking to Bet's Bakery down there in Hutch. Luckily, Bet's did not press charges and

they said, "Yeah, we're good with it. We won't deliver any bread." And they left and so Ira didn't have to arrest any of us. [Laughter] We were all going, "God, what would we do? Ira, arrest us. Take us to jail."

AW:

We've talked about, in other interviews, those blockages of people like Bet's, but for this interview, explain why you would stop a bread company from delivering bread.

Scott:

Well, for us here in Dickinson County, all of us that were involved were pretty much all wheat farmers.

NT:

With the exception of me and her.

Scott:

Right.

AW:

What did you farm?

DR:

We had wheat. We had a big cattle herd. Pure bread Pole Herefords.

US:

But you were primary cattle.

US:

Yeah, Okay, this is the tractor my son drove. Scott was in the other one. We still have it. It's a '67, three cylinder, Ford made.

DH:

Made twenty miles the gallon. About froze to death in it. It didn't put out any heat. Scott's made ten miles a gallon. You could leave the door open, it was still warm in there. [Laughter]

DR:

Well, you couldn't see. We had kind of a rig—

DH:

Under Canvas Cabs, which worked pretty good.

DR:

And then, this was my husband, who was always dealing with stuff. And John Carleton, who did end up being our governor, campaigning. This from Capitol Hill in D.C. They had a real bull.

AW:

Instead of the fake bull's [inaudible] [00:32:32].

DH:

Leon had that bull on stage and I don't remember what building.

DR:

It was one of his sons in Topeka.

DH:

Was that in Topeka?

DR:

Larry King George's sons we had in Topeka.

DH:

Maybe that's what I'm remembering.

DR:

This was Dan Gettman, he was a U.S. Representative. We are on Capitol Hill. This is [inaudible] [00:32:53] and this is my husband and King George.

AW:

That's the—King George is the bull.

US:

Yes, and I have another one picture. I don't know if it's in there or what have you, but that Capitol cops had never seen a real live bull, let alone touch one, so I had a photo with them lined up. Hell, somewhere in this. They were so fascinated by seeing an actual, real live one, and he was real tame. But we had another U.S. Representative, he wouldn't come near him. He would go anywhere he wants to. "You can keep that bull in a fence this high, it wasn't electric."

NT:

This thing, actually, you brought it down to real simply just things, but a lot of those guys out there understood the fact that the agriculture dollar turns over five times in the state, seven times nationally. When you're going to do something for the economy, you need to think farm. He's gone because they're buying all this equipment and stuff. Grain men needed the money. Cattlemen needed the amount of our business. Bankers told them they couldn't sell their grain for either price [Inaudible 00:34:18]. The dummies told them to go buy cattle and sell your green

to your cattle. Well, they overfed them. They knocked the price out of them. They killed us guys who were doing, so they went because they needed to price cattle because we wanted them to get a price to get them out of our business. [AW laughs] That's basically what it amounted to because for example, they were talking about all the '77, I remember Tommy Dorsey sitting up there talking about running around D.C. in that Case tractor with the duels on, and some cop [00:34:56] tried to slow down and he was starting to realize that he was going like this and the car went like this, the cop car and when it hit the brakes, shot out. These kind of things did happen, but it was to let them know there was a problem. For example, I wasn't involved back in that. I never got involved until Jimmy Carter opened the imports in 1978, about late May. Man, he hit us so hard that even my father-in-law he took us for a hundred and twelve thousand in three days. I wanted to know—when I got up there, I—we were mad. We knew the cattle were not there. They opened the imports. There was nothing to come in. All they had to do was read cattle facts. So while we were there, we went up. You know, the government buys their information for cattle because there's no government program for cattle—that they buy their information from cattle facts and that's what they put out. It was too dumb to read it. That was the only reason I went. I wanted to know who was dumb enough to do this. They paid a hundred and two people first class to go around the world looking for roads and fat cattle to bring in there was none. It's basically—the whole thing was to get the price up for the economy of the nation.

AW:

Right. What motivated someone as young as you were—

DR:

Oh, we had a lot of young ones.

SF:

Yeah, also back onto why would we stop the bread trucks.

AW:

Right.

SF:

Because we were wheat farmers, but also at the same time, we were realizing that as we got further down the way with generations, generations were getting further and further away from the farm. We had people in town that had no idea that their food was coming from a farmer somewhere. It comes from the grocery store. Go get the milk at the grocery store. It doesn't come from a cow.

AW:

Yeah, meat comes in Styrofoam.

SF:

Right, so in stopping bread, bread was something that—we're producing wheat here—it's being milled by a lot of mills in the state of Kansas and then being baked at Bet's Bakery here in the state of Kansas. So we have a direct lineage connection here all the way through the whole process, and bread is a staple that the local people could—you know, hey, Kansas is a wheat state. We were looking at something that would be a real big knee jerk reaction on a standpoint of a consumer that, oh hey, we don't have any bread today. We don't have toast at the local eating establishment or anything like that. So it was to be a large reaction and a quick one as far as the public was concerned, and that was a lot of what we did in those early days was how do you get the biggest bang for what you're going to do? Later on, we went down to Fleming's Foods and shut them down in Topeka, so that they couldn't transport any of their trucks out. And then we got into a mess when they turned the police dog loose on us and one of our guys here in the county smacked the dog in the head with a break over bar and then we all wound up going and testifying with the trial that happened afterwards.

DR:

When I opened this book a while ago, that is where it popped open to [inaudible] being charged one time [00:38:51].

SF:

A lot of people wondered why in the world would a guy hit a dog, and you know, all of us as farmers deal with dogs that are unruly one way or the other. You smack the dog. You don't even think about the fact that one dog is the same as if you hit that police officer. Then on your other question as to why me as—okay, here I am just out of high school that first year and then, Bryan, when we got into the second year, he was just fresh out of high school because he was a year behind me. David is four years out of high school. Had you done some junior college by that time? He'd been to Cloud County. We were, out of our particular generation here in the county, there's only about what? Seven or eight of us that farmed?

DR:

There weren't too many.

SF:

There weren't that many.

AW:

Growing up in farming families and so only a very few of you stayed in farm.

SF:

Out of our particular group, we've got two of us that aren't here. Three of the five are still farming.

DR:

Ryan has his farm. He has cattle.

SF:

We have Randy Hon and Ryan. That's two that aren't here, so out of our five, David's still farming. I'm farming and Randy Hon's farming.

DR:

Ryan does.

SF:

Niel did for a long time after that, but we were realizing that we didn't have any young ones coming on. Out of my graduating class of '77, David's class of '73, and Ryan's class of '78, you might have one maybe that would stay in farming.

DH:

You were a minority.

SF:

Because it wasn't so much. Now, you say, well the kids aren't staying because nothing goes on. My timeframe, kids were not staying on a farm because there wasn't any money there. Why do you want to work those kinds of hours? Even if you're your own boss, that's not enough to overcome not having the money. Why do you want that kind of a lifestyle? And bring a wife into that and a family and all that kind of stuff. So we were genuinely concerned that—and the farmers are getting older. We don't have anybody coming on to replace them, so what do you do? And then all of a sudden, just shortly after America—well, right there during American Ag and the first few years after we'd gone back to D.C. with the tractors, *The Grass and Grain*, which is a local farm newspaper, was about probably three times thicker than it is now. And there'd be thirty five to forty farm auctions every week in that thing because the farms were just selling out right and left. The only thing was the few that were left had to become bigger. Unfortunately, we now are feeling the effects of the bigger farms. The way that we farm now, which is not—and I know you've got a brother that's working, doing organics and that type of stuff.

AW:

No, some friends.

SF:

Friends? Okay, I was thinking that there was a brother.

AW:

I've got some friends who—

US:

No, that's Steve's.

SF:

Oh, excuse me. That's Gregg's family out west, but I have some real issues with the way that we farm now because we've made the farmers that stuck around have to farm lots of ground. I don't farm any more ground basically than my father and my grandfather and great grandfather did.

AW:

Really? How do you manage to?

SF:

Well, I have a wife that's a school teacher so that helps. [Laughter]

AW:

Yeah, in West Texas, you drive by a farm with a pump jack on it and the common comment is, "There's a farmer that understands cash flow."

SF:

But when my great grandfather came down here from Marshall County up in northern Kansas, a four hundred acre farm. It was the largest farm in the county. Well, I'm still a four hundred acre farm. One of the smaller in the county now, but I do an aspect instead of quantity, but quality. Let's look at a better quality of stuff that we're producing, then that ties into the organic thing and organics, I know for David and myself, that was the offshoot coming out of American Ag. It was just one step. American Ag, then the fuel alcohol, and then the organics. Now, David is organic. I am not, but I use a lot of the same principles that go along with it because a lot of times, it's cheaper.

AW:

Yeah, we—you know in Ogallala Commons we wrestle with the whole notion of organic and decided, A, we didn't know what that was, but B, that the really important thing was the local producer. It doesn't matter whether they're fully organic or not. For a lot of things, if you know who produces, then you know whom to trust and that's a—but when it's a huge corporate farm, you can't go out and talk to the farmer.

SF:

Yeah, did Jimmy or Billy or George that worked there, were they the responsible party that created the problem or whatever? No direct accountability.

AW:

I'd like to ask about the impact overall in just a minute, but before we get to that, one of the other things that really struck me in doing these first sets of interviews was several years ago when I

got started was how the Ag Movement grew up and then all of a sudden, there were two kind of basic camps. Talk a little bit about that. I think it's very interesting.

SF:

Well, and for me, we're back in Washington D.C. with the tractors in '79. That January of '79. It was all still one, and there were some of us that came out of that deal going—when we got done said, “You know what? Washington D.C. isn't going to do anything for us.” We needed to have a mindset instead of growing food and growing food is a form of energy. It just happens to be body energy.

AW:

Yeah, you're selling sunlight.

SF:

Right. Okay, American public doesn't seem to be excited about wanting to pay anything for their food, but we saw it firsthand with the oil embargo on the gas lines and everything else. They'll pay for their fuel and so, you know what? We can grow fuel energy just as easily as we can grow food energy, so I know Schroder's, they came back and said, “You know what? This isn't going to work. We can talk until we're blue in the face with the legislature in Colorado or Kansas or Washington D.C. The only way that the farmers are going to get anywhere is we're going to have to look after ourselves, take care of each other, let's take a good look at fuel, being able to produce some type of fuel on a farm.” You get to do a couple of things. You get energy dependent, as far as a farm's concerned, so you don't have to buy the OPEC [**Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries**] oil. You also get to put your feed stocks into an area that we don't have the stigma of not wanting to pay for food, and so I know—and that's interesting because here, you're talking about part of the family that was part of the seven that started American Ag. Now, we're going to do fuel alcohol, but at the same time, there was an awful lot of the guys that were American Ag guys here in the state of Kansas that were coming to the same conclusion. We're not going to get anywhere beating a dead horse trying to go after the food dollar, so if we can do things to cut down our input costs and also be able to sell into another market, that helps us and then we don't have to fight this food dollar deal. That was—for me anyways—that was the beginning of some separation. There still were the American Ag people that still wanted to beat the food dollar deal, try to get that, but some of us had just decided, you know, we tried it. We tried the strike. We tried stopping food and everything else under the sun. Yeah, it made a big difference. I know when my folks went to Washington D.C. the summer of '79, people in D.C. wanted to know, are the farmers going to come back? The people on Capitol Hill liked the farms. They thought that they were an interesting animal that they'd never seen before. [Laughter]

DR:

Exactly.

AW:

A lot of photo ops.

SF:

Yeah.

NT:

They didn't—anytime they had people come in it was nice. Nobody came up and lobbied. Farmers got off their tractors, and they were out with their night sticks trying to beat up these tractors and there wasn't anybody there, and we all went to the hill or we went to the Ag department, the FDA [Food and Drug Administration] and them not knowing what they were doing. They sent these PR's [Public Relations] to talk to us like children. We'd get up and leave, and then eventually, it got to where they had some people at the upper branch come on. They didn't know a whole lot either. That's when we go back to just strictly lobbying. It got so bad, when I went back the second time, I did some pretty good research, was digging around in the library and came up with what we went up there for and it was documented by them. So a bunch of us set up meetings to work stuff out of their documentation, set up appointments with the guys on the Ag committee. We went to the first one, shocked him so bad, when we got to the second one, the guy said, "Before we get into this—" we walked into the apartment—"Before we get into this—" like Georgia—"I have a question for you. How much did you donate to my campaign?", "Well, we didn't donate anything, but your people did and that's who we're representing.", "But that don't count. So I don't have to talk to you. You didn't donate." Every one of them did that because we had the documentation of why we were there and what would happen if they raised the floor price—in other words, a loan. That's when I came home and told my father, "There's no use going up there. You can't lobby it. You've got to do something else."

SF:

And something then, to go a little further with what Niel is saying is that a lot of that core grass roots that started the American Agriculture Movement, AAM, and not that AAM Ink, got disillusioned and we went some other way. Part of us went fuel alcohol and Gene Schroder was an interesting conundrum. He would still—he wanted to try to help out as far as ink was concerned, but yet we're starting to deal with alcohol and looking at constitutional stuff. He wrote the book, *Constitution: Fact or Fiction?* And a lot of what Niel's talking about, Gene had so many feet in so many different camps. I know Gene and I would sit around many years afterwards and say, what would it have been like if we would've had the internet then because instantaneous information instead of on the phone because there was times I tried to call out to Schroder's, forget it. They were on the phone.

NT:

I felt sorry for kids in—it's not my stable work but about six weeks work of all the alcohol fuel out there [?] [00:51:29] in 1980. You didn't talk to Gene at night. It was somebody else talking

to him. And that robbed your family, robbed everything. It was a pain. You couldn't get ahold of him. Go ahead. I'm sorry, didn't mean to interrupt.

SF:

That main grass route, it's in Colorado, in Oklahoma, down in Texas, over here in Kansas, now has decided, okay, we did our thing. We tried it. Now, American Ag is more looking at it from the standpoint of we got to figure out different things that are going to help each other out, so then it became more of a trying to help one another whatever it might be, and then we still had people though, that thought that American Ag was the right thing. So then Inc. starts coming out of it. Inc. then becomes the lobbying, the political—well, how do you play the political game? Where a lot of the grass roots, people said, we don't want to play the political game. We're more interested in making sure that we take care of Donna that we take care of Niel, that we take care of David, and that we take care of Forest, and Jim, and Bill, and everybody else. Whatever that might be, if it's through something with constitution, if it's through the alcohol or anything else.

AW:

Is it fair to or is it a good assumption that part of the motivation or drive behind AAM Inc., was that none of the other farm organizations had stepped up to fill that spot? At least in Texas, the other farm organization was Farm Bureau which was, at that time at least, completely on the other side of the coin.

NT:

They were.

SF:

Now, one thing that happened here in the state of Kansas was that—I know in a lot of our American Ag meetings that we had out at Great Bend, those monthly meetings. It was decided out there that American Agriculture Movement was going to actively infiltrate farm bureau, and there were a lot of the NFO and NFU [**National Farmers Union**] boys, that were American Ag guys to start with. So there wasn't that much of a need to try to infiltrate those because that's where some of those ranks were coming from. Farm Bureau, we didn't have that many people that were in American Ag that were not Farm Bureau members, for the most part.

DH:

We were Farm Bureau members.

NT:

I was until they pulled that stunt in 1981.

DH:

Yeah. We all dropped our memberships.

SF:

And the sad part about it was that a lot of them, if there were American Ag people that were Farm Bureau members, it was because of the insurance.

AW:

Not because of any political work that they did.

SF:

Right. And so, then that was another thing that then happened was is that there was—and there were some major changes that happened within farm bureau. For a period of time there, there were some—they were starting to have some shadows of American Ag. Not a lot, but there was some subtle changes in their philosophies, and some of that was because of my brother-in-law that's two years younger than me, he got really indoctrinated with some of my thoughts and he was strong Farm Bureau. I wasn't involved with Farm Bureau. They tried to get me involved with Farm Bureau, and I went a couple times to some meetings that they were doing to try to raise membership and, "Oh my, you're such a good person and you talk and speak your mind and you got such a good command. We need you, we need you." I looked at them and I said, "I don't think so. We're too far apart."

NT:

I came across [00:55:33] in '81, we started the farm placement [?] [00:55:36] in the state of Kansas, which was American Ag to start with, but to make work you needed coalition farm groups, so we had to bring them all together. And we were doing this, but then because we supplied—I can't remember—it was thirty two or forty two percent of the total world export of hardwood winter [00:55:58] came out of the state of Kansas. It was one millionth school in the world, K-State, takes a blend of hardwood winter or hardwood spring. We had the hardwood winter worldwide. Also at that time, we found out when Jimmy Carter embargoed the wheat to Russia, he did not embargo the flour. Flour people had it made, man. They were kicking the hell out of us. They were killing us.

AW:

Um-hm because now, your wheat was cheap. The price had gone down, and so they're making a big margin on the flour.

NT:

Yeah, made a big margin on the flour and when that happened, all these—let's see, they had NFO, Farmers Union, American Ag, and there was somebody else. We had—John Junior was gone. He was the president of NFO, national convention, whatever. We talked to the county. We talked to the vice president of the Kansas Farm Bureau. They had said, "Yeah, we'll be in this." John finds this out and they call him in the big wigs and says, "Oh, no. That's going to interfere with our plan." Never called us. Never asked why he's doing research. Not one word made them

turn that around, and they lost a lot of members at that time because that was plat stupid. It's like when Allen Cover [0:57:30] was on the board of directors.

AW:

Allen who?

NT:

Allen Cover was on the board of directors of NFO at that time, and he called me. He lived out here and he calls me, and I mean he just chewed my button for about ten minutes, that this is ridiculous. They were doing all of this. When he got done, all I said is, "Allen, do you really think that Washington D.C.'s going to allow the little old state of Kansas have a better program than theirs?" That's all I said. [Laughter] Allen says, "Wow that might work." As a result, he told the others and NFO came in. The whole bunch, we represented AG members from working on that bill for NFO and people from Farm—what was Jack?

DR:

He was in Farmers Union. Yeah, he was a strong farmer.

NT:

Farmers Union. Farmers Union He was. We had to have him. We had five young nuts, would do anything and then you had a normal one named Jack.

DR:

Jack was real sharp.

DH:

Jack dad's (0:58:39)?

DR:

Yeah, he was sharp.

NT:

He'd been there and said, "Now fellows, Let's think about this." You need that one older one. Most of us doing the digging and all that stuff. We were headed down, but he kept control of it, I tell you what. We—in ten days after—not [inaudible] [00:59:07] what if we don't get anybody? I've lost more than that. Anyway, in ten days, we put together the first successful coalition farm groups for cause of the history of the state. If it hadn't of been for American Ag, it would've never gotten started.

AW:

That's really interesting. That's very interesting. How long did the coalition hold together?

NT:

That year. We tried it again the following year and they came up with a bill that didn't amount to shit. It died, but the first one was a real battle. I mean, it was something. It was a rodeo. We had a wheat farm—not wheat farm—what was the name of that dumb guy over farm economics down at K-State?

SF:

Leonard Schruben [?][0:59:56]?

NT:

No, it wasn't.

SF:

Oh, Flinchbaugh, Barry.

AW:

Did you say Fenchball?

SF:

Barry Flinchbaugh.

NT:

He came in. He's gone on how supply and demand, and this'll do this, and he's up there in front of the committee. It was really comical because he got done right behind me. We had a farmer in Western Kansas, had his PhD in statistics. Old Chase stops at the next. After he gets done, he comes in to me, talking real slow and he had all this stuff drawn up. He goes, "I don't know where he gets his information. He didn't come to our department. He just got through on a PhD, on a doctorate of Penn State." Blah, blah, blah. And, "He didn't come to our department," and all this. When he laid it down, he made Flinchbaugh look so bad, when they tried to get him back to testify, he wouldn't come back.

DR:

He was a mess.

AW:

Was there any substantial membership in, area in Kansas, at that time?

US:

In Grange? In what?

SF:

Grange.

DR:

I don't think so. Was there? I don't remember.

NT:

I don't think so.

AW:

We didn't have any in Texas either, but I see them coming back typically out to Colorado.

US:

Nice seeing you.

NT:

Are you leaving me?

US:

I was telling her how we're related.

NT:

Oh, okay.

AW:

Other places now, I mean—

US:

Yeah, See you.

NT:

Good seeing you.

AW:

--Let's jump ahead real quickly because I think it will help us backfill some things, but if someone says to you—well, like I'm about to say to you—what's the impact of the Ag Movement?

NT:

It delayed farming the freedom to go broke beyond ten years. That's what it did. It was there to come out, because of us, they delayed it. They call it freedom to farm.

AW:

Yeah, freedom to go broke. You know, I was just saying on the radio this morning—you're all too young, but I like old music—Uncle Dave Macon had this song called Farm Relief and he

said, this little spoken introduction says, "Well now, we've got farm relief." He was talking about the New Deal. He said they just about relieved the farmer of everything he's got. I always thought that was a great description.

DR:

See the little tags I put on the table? I got an extension office back there behind salt and pepper.

NT:

If you eat today, thank a farmer. That's a good idea. Kansas doesn't believe that. Eating and food are a luxury. It's taxed in this state.

DR:

Yes, Nebraska's not.

AW:

Scott, what would you add as the impact?

SF:

I'd say—hell, from the standpoint of the impact that American Ag had, first off, there was an awakening of farmers in that you can't rely on somebody else to do it for you. You can't rely on government to look after you. You're going to have to be there advocating for yourself. It's interesting now. You listen to KFRM, it's Ag radio, and the generation that's younger than me—I'm fifty six—these twenty and thirty year old farmers are on the internet like mad with videos of them working their cattle, milking cows, or whatever. I think American Ag was the basis for this younger bunch of farmers that we've got now realizing American Ag, woke up the farm sector that you have to look after yourself. You have to advocate for yourself because if you don't, somebody else will do it for you, and they won't do what you want to have done. And that was evident in all of the travelling across the state that my dad and I did because once we got away from the original reason for the strike and got into the fuel alcohol, we used the American Ag Movement to start educating all of the farmers. Because we go to American Ag meetings out in Ulysses or wherever it might be. We got a little bit for gasoline money to go out there and we were talking to those guys as to what to do or what not to do as far as energy was concerned, and they're just—and besides them, the awakening that happened within the farm sector and is continuing on now, it laid the groundworks for that. We laid the groundworks for, on a political side of it, maybe we have been a little too asleep and we haven't done a good job of listening. You know, the politicians, because there got to be an overwhelming amount of things that they were trying to throw at us. Well hey, how about if we give you this or give you that or whatever? So there was some groundwork awakening as far as politics is concerned that has carried on. Nowadays, there's still people that will say, "Well, do we want to do that? What will happen as far as the farm sector is concerned?" Instead of farming just being sound asleep themselves, the farmers themselves, and the others, the said, "Hey." And there was also a major awakening as far as economics was concerned because my dad was a history teacher in high school, and history

gets to deal with all the subjects that are in a school. There was a lot of people that didn't understand economics. American Ag got some basis' out there for economics.

AW:

Yeah, and like reminding consumers that of its subsidy is really for the consumer, not for the producer.

SF:

And to go one step further, farm subsidies are for the bankers to get them out of hot water.

AW:

David, what would you add or ditto? When did you move to organic farming? Has it been a long time coming?

DH:

Eighty-eight, maybe.

AW:

That's a long time ago in terms of the organic movement. How did you come to that?

DH:

Well, [laughter] a lot of things. One of it, of course, is the health issue. People dying of cancer. You go to a funeral and unless they're getting close a hundred, they probably died of something they ate over the last twenty or fifty years. And then this income, looking for a better income revenue.

AW:

Was there any part of that motivation that came from divorcing yourself from the corporate?

DH:

Well yeah, you're not buying so many inputs. And it is based on doing as much as you can on your farm and not buying off farm insurance.

AW:

Right, and being controlled by that. Yeah, it was interesting to me, I heard one person talk about the tractor, how the real fundamental issue of the tractor and the way that it changed American agriculture was by taking the farm away from being self-sufficient in energy. And that once farming became dependent upon outside inputs for energy to start with like running the tractor and then later for fertilizers and now for GMO seed and whatever else, then the control of the farmer over, just kept going away, going away. That's really interesting.

SF:

One other thing that I don't know—and David will probably say, “Yeah,” Charlie Walders. *Acres USA*. Originally *Gas Haul USA*. Charlie Walders was every bit as much could have been an American Ag, one of the original seven, as anybody else. *Gas Haul USA* was a publication that was a short lived publication, and then *Acres USA* then came out of that. *Acres USA* did a lot besides Mickey Melace and her American Ag paper that she had. Those original *Acres USA* papers dealing with alternative farming practices, organics, did a lot in those later years, but early years, as far as trying to help perpetuate American Ag and a lot of the thoughts that were happening, because Charles Walters was online economically the same as Gene Schroder and all those other guys out there.

NT:

But I thought he came out from NORM [**National Organization of Raw Materials**].

SF:

Do what?

NT:

I thought he came out of NORM.

SF:

NORM.

NT:

National Organization of Raw Materials.

SF:

Right, yeah. And see, you've got NORM also, and there were a lot of American Ag guys that went over into NORM. American Ag was an interesting crucible to create guys that went into other deals.

NT:

Or were already in them when he came into it.

SF:

Right, and Norm was a big one. It's amazing, the breeding ground that this silly little thing right here had and how many different fingers that went out and touched other things that are now today.

AW:

So is it safe for me to say to people that when you see young farmers who are starting to create their own organizations of young farmers and a lot of them are going to grains and several

places—like Colorado is getting this big burst of members up in grains [?] [01:10:37]. They're on the internet. Is it safe to say that that is an impact or result of getting these young people who are in farming to think in an independent and a different way?

SF:

I would say that in whatever and however it affected them, whether it affected—like the guys that are running KFRN up there, that radio station, they're our age. They are—whatever. American Ag affected them one way or another. They, in turn, now are affecting these younger guys because we've got a lot of the downy people that raise cattle over here in Eastern Kansas. They're always calling up there to KFRN, and so we may think that okay, American Ag has been a long time ago, but still, as each one of us that have participated in it, in some way something rubs off of us onto a younger farmer. Whether it be talking like we're doing right now or saying, "Hey, do you realize that when Niel was trying to the farm bill—the floor pricing, and all of that stuff." I'm a firm believer in history has to be explored and taught because that's the only way the newer generation knows not to stub its toe exactly the same way that we stubbed it.

NT:

I talked a lot about that. I got a cousin out south of town. A lot of things concern me. Young guys, we waste our time. He's about like fifty now. We just wasted our time, going to that court there, didn't do a thing. Those people who don't think we did a thing, they're getting benefits because—

AW:

Right, yeah. That's not knowing your history.

SF:

Well, I look at American Ag kind of as the many spinoffs that come out of NASA. American Ag, direct correlation there. The little spinoffs that came out of American Ag and all of the different things that it's affected and continues to affect this day, the same as what is happening with our space exploration and everything else.

AW:

People who are spending money on pure research and they say, "What's the benefit?" The real answer is, we don't know yet. It's going to get around to it. Well, Gregg Stevens is leading this talk tomorrow at the Smoky Hill Museum, and I'm going to chime in just with stories about sitting down with people, but he's calling a talk, The Last Farm Movement. One of the things the radio people asked this morning was, "Do you mean that's the most recent farm movement or that there won't be anymore?" We know it's the most recent, but let me put the question to you. Is it—are we not going to ever have another one?

NT:

There'll be another one. This one is just a follow up of NFO. They became one who then would market production, and we have these things but you've got to have the research to do them. I got so disgusted because I went to work for NFO, and the thing for them was real bluntly—no I won't say it. That sounds bad. You have to write where you've been to know where you're going, and farmers have a bad habit of not doing that. Now that we have computers, if there is another thing, at least I think they'll put it on computers where you can just fast as you can gather [?] [01:14:34] information. Because as long as we have these crooked jackasses setting up, we can't export, except that they say and we get paid off by the majors, we're screwed. That, in fact, all our senators and representatives bought and paid for it, and we went on NAFTA [**North American Free Trade Agreement**] and GATT [**General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade**], which takes away anything we have. The only way you're ever going to bring this country back into whatever is going have to be through what we eat, and there will be another one sometime.

SF:

I think right now we have an electronic farm movement going on. We just don't realize it.

AW:

Really? Describe that. I mean, how would you—

SF:

Well, it's all of the—

AW:

What we just talked about.

SF:

The Facebook stuff that's going on. The farm families that are—and the interesting part about it is that you could take the Downing family in Eastern—just east of us here, in the Flint Hills, and they have—I've listened to her on KFRM talk about, "Well, my Facebook page has got two thousand people that follow the crazy darn fool thing." There's one farm wife that is helping shape a thought and opinion possibly in two thousand people. Way more people than Niel, and David, and Donna, and I ever were able to do. Alvin Jenkins, when he came and talked to all of us over in the hall in Salona, we had, what? Four hundred and fifty, five hundred people there.

AW:

As opposed to two thousand.

SF:

Yeah, as opposed to two thousand and this is just one lady and there's three or four other ladies over there in her area that have got the same thing going on. I guess what I'm saying is that us

have affected these people. These people now are, you know, we've got to continually keep education out there so that the people don't think that the food comes from the grocery store. That there is a face that's producing it. Now, will there ever be something like American Ag? I guess I have to be what dad always taught in his history class. There's always a cycle that goes on. You have the people that are involved and as long as they're still alive, they're going to affect the next couple of generations. When these originals die off, then you still got these three or four generations that they've affected. You get diminishing, diminishing, diminishing, until the cycle comes around, and it has to start over again.

NT:

You couldn't have another Tractorcade like we had. There's not that many out there.

SF:

Well, maybe it's not a Tractorcade. It might be an electronic cade or something.

NT:

If we did the tractors, we'd have a smaller body. Really.

SF:

I don't think that I would—if you look in past history when there's been a farm movement, an uprising within the farm sector here in the United States, it's usually seventy to eighty years.

US:

About that time they put that pipeline through the leaks down on the Ogallala. That covers seven states you've poisoned the water in. You might have an uproar.

SF:

And there is a little bit. There is. It's interesting. There was a real push to East Coast be a country and the West Coast be a country and let us here in the mid be our own country.

AW:

I might vote for that. [Laughter]

SF:

It was interesting because I'm going, oh man, here the mid-section is all American Ag people. Here we go again.

AW:

You'll be interested to know that Texas Tech came about because West Texas threatened to secede from Texas in the 1920's.

NT:

Really?

AW:

Yes, and they had a secession convention in Sweetwater, Texas, and the governor took the train out and train out and says, "What do we have to do? We need a college." [Laughter]

SF:

There was a tremendous amount of people, like up here said, "Hey, Texas is the only one here that's ever been a nation of its own and we need to talk to these people and see how they did that."

AW:

We didn't have a good experience of that, let me tell you. Historically. [Laughter]

NT:

Right there where you live, James Long is somewhere around there.

AW:

James Long?

NT:

He was very sharp and very deeply involved in American Ag. He's about eighty now.

DR:

Oh, just a kid. [Laughter]

SF:

He's sharp. He was.

AW:

You don't remember which town? His name is awfully familiar to me, but I can't place it.

NT:

It was somewhere down in the Panhandle. I don't have it with me anymore, but I used to have his phone number and everything, but I don't know where it's at. In my moves after—

AW:

Was that the last one? American Ag Movement, was that the last farm movement, David?

DH:

No, like Scott said, it'll be an internet movement, I think. You have to have an organization to collect your strength to be a moving power.

SF:

Yeah, and there is the alternative farming, organic, whatever you want to call it, something. We're starting to see the beginnings of an awakening away from the factory farm stuff.

DH:

Consumer wise, yeah, especially.

DR:

My daughter-in-law, I don't know who she ordered it all from, but it's a huge, huge package of food. It's unreal what all's in there for sixty bucks. She was telling me last night. I can't think of the name.

AW:

Is she in the food co-op?

DR:

It's just something she signed up for or something like that.

DH:

Oh, CSA? Communities—

DR:

I don't know what it was, but she was telling me last night what all is it going to come it. It was just phenomenal.

SF:

Jimmy Bakker, you remember his days at PTL [The PTL Club]? Jimmy and Tammy Faye Bakker, you know, they got into trouble.

US:

Oh, boy.

SF:

He's back in Arkansas, down in Branson, on one of our freed air satellite channels that we get.

AW:

Seems appropriate.

SF:

And he's up there selling three years of food for so much money.

DH:

Survival food?

SF:

Yeah, survival food.

DH:

And they sell survival seeds. Open pollinated survival seeds on the internet.

DR:

Well we have that—we still have it going. A Feed the Children down in Oklahoma. I think that is still active, but there's a story behind that. I was on TV through that program.

NT:

Really?

DR:

Yes, my friend in Nebraska saw it. I stacked troops. "Oh, tourists. Oh, Lord!" Anyway, it was a while after that, I got a call from the FBI. Is this legit? It really was.

AW:

So they'd be, "I thought you were legit." They just wanted to—

US:

I wasn't sure they were legit. A friend and I were getting ready to go to Topeka, she was here from Oregon, and there was a crack pot in New York that decided all us widows that had been on this feed the children program, we were the problem for a girlfriend breaking up with him. He was going to come by and shoot us all. I said, "That's nice you had time to jut in here and jet home, and I wouldn't of known why I got shot." [Laughter] But honest to God.

NT:

You might find down the road, you're asking about farms? And I'm going to shoot you an example. Yesterday, Trisha came back. The girl on duty and I went down to her house. Anyway, she came back and she'd been shopping and picked up some milk. They had in there something about—what's the word for it? It wasn't organic.

DH:

Natural? Sustainable?

US:

Natural milk or something like that.

DH:

Natural is the buzz.

US:

She says, what could—and she bought something else—what do they mean by that? Without thinking, I just said, “Well, that’s one that the cow has the calf every year. They’re not shooting it to keep milk and producing to last through.” And you think about this, people wake up, they’re hoping this thing is in there so they don’t dry up. They just keep going until they just burn them out. Then they make hamburger out of them and they feed it to us.

AW:

And in between, those huge dairies in our part of the world are really depleting the Ogallala at phenomenal rate.

DR:

Oh, yeah. I’m sure the ones in Southwestern Kansas are doing the same thing.

NT:

And there’s old American Ag members right out there at Liberal. I think that’s good. It brings in business. I’m going to wring his neck for telling—

DH:

It brings in cheap labor.

AW:

Well, yeah. That was the thing they all argued in our country. It’ll bring in jobs. Well they brought their jobs with them. They did bring fifty jobs, but they didn’t hire fifty people in Hale County, for instance. They brought in fifty new people. They’ve only been there a short time, most of them, and they’ve already packed up and left because the water got too expensive to pump, and so they were there this very short time. These big huge dairies, not the small.

SF:

They packed up and sat down. Wow.

DR:

They’re milking twenty-four seven. They had so many cows to run it twenty-four seven.

AW:

Thousands of cows. Any of you who know cows, know that that’s a big issue to deal with. What comes out of a cow.

DH:

They had a Civil War movie one time with Patrick Swayze, I believe. I don’t normally know actors, but anyway, the southern confederate guy had a real good friend in the North and they were comparing notes as the war was beginning, I believe. The Northern guy says, you have all

these slaves. That's a bad thing. The southern guy said, you own a factory and you pay those laborers slave wages. What's the difference? That's a pretty good point. Of course, that war was over the price of cotton, not the price of slaves.

NT:

Cotton and—

DH:

Farm products.

NT:

Cigarettes.

DH:

Tobacco.

NT:

Cotton and tobacco. Because the crooked jackasses in Washington D.C. That's true.

AW:

Hold on to your idea for just a second, Scott. Talking about those folks in Washington, it also strikes me, and correct me if I'm wrong in this assumption looking at it from a historical perspective. In some ways, I think of the Tractorcade and American Ag Movement as sounding the death knell to the New Deal. You had the New Deal in the thirties.

NT:

I guess I never thought of that.

AW:

Where politics still—there was a thing called the Farm Vote because a lot of Americans lived on farms or they lived in small towns and they knew farmers. Today, and really by 1979, we didn't have a Farm Vote. Numerically, the number of people that could vote that were connected to the farms had shrunk to insignificance in terms of just—

DH:

Right.

AW:

Yeah. So is that part of this whole equation too? The way that we're as people, not just farmers, but people generally are represented in a representational democracy or democratic republic, whatever you want to call what we have. Has that made a difference in the need for something like a movement as opposed to being able to just go to your congressman or your—in the state or

national office and let them know what you think?

SF:

That's something I had not thought about for a long time because dad teaching American history and his Master's was Cyrus McCormick and his reaper, so Ag history was his love.

AW:

Has he passed away?

SF:

Yes, he's gone.

AW:

I'd sure like to have interviewed him.

SF:

I hadn't even stopped to even think about that, but way back there when all the guys were looking at different ways, dad had—I remember him talking about that very thing, your speculation as to Roosevelt, F.D.R., and his New Deal and everything else. Dad had talked to that a lot, and how much of that still was a stigma in our lifestyle in the seventies, and how much that had contributed to what we were as far as farm was concerned. And then all of the rehashes as different presidents came down the line remaking the same thing with just a different name on it, a different face. There was a lot of discontent with farmers because it would go on up to the ASCS [**Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service**] office, which is what it was called at that time. It's all a direct product of F.D.R.'s New Deal, H and all that. It took farm sector from Depression days up until the seventies to try to finally break some of those shackles. I had forgotten that dad and I had talked about that, and that I had listened to him talk at a couple of the places where we talked about fuel alcohol. That was some of the stuff that he used to talk about. Getting away from that mind set and yeah, I think that's a real good assumption. A direct thing to say, yes.

AW:

Okay, let me get a little more housekeeping stuff done real quick before we run out of time. I just need to get date of birth and place of birth for everybody so that two hundred years from now when people are listening to this, they'll know which Scott, and Donna, and Neil, and David we're talking about. So Donna, if you don't mind, your date of birth, and where?

DR:

10/31/33. I'm older than dirt.

DH:

Just a kid.

AW:

No, and where were you born?

DR:

Emporia, Kansas.

NT:

You're down there at East eighth?

DR:

Pardon?

NT:

You said Emporia?

DR:

Yeah, I grew up in Emporia.

AW:

And Scott?

SF:

I was born February 13, 1959, and it was a Friday, the thirteenth that I was born on. I was born here in Abilene, Kansas. We have tons of thirteens in my family. My son, who was adopted, was born on October the thirteenth.

AW:

How interesting. When you stop and get one of those lottery cards, you know what number to use.

SF:

And my great-great grandfather, when he came down here, he bought the farm that I live on and farm right now, June the 13, 1913.

AW:

My goodness. [Laughter] So have you tried this with any of the lottery?

SF:

No, that's lottery farming. [Laughter]

DH:

Maybe we have to buy one ticket just to see.

AW:

David? Date of birth?

DH:

March 21, '55. Abilene.

US:

You had a big birthday.

DH:

I did.

AW:

And Neil?

NT:

8/2/46.

AW:

You and I are closer together. What place?

NT:

I was in Harrington. Dixon County.

AW:

All right, great.

NT:

She was in Lions County. [Laughter]

SF:

One thing before we quit—

AW:

We don't need—I have to leave here right at noon to go see Stephen Anderson.

DR:

Oh, old Stephen's still around?

NT:

Really? I drove all the way up here and you're going down there to see Steve?

DR:

He was cool.

DH:

You guys should've just went along then or something.

AW:

I didn't know until this morning when Greg told me, here's the plan for this afternoon, but I have to be back by five o'clock.

US:

I didn't know you were going down to see Steve.

DR:

I didn't know he was still kicking.

SF:

You still see Steph in grass and grain once in a while.

NT:

I see him at a dance once and a while. He kicks pretty well.

DH:

That's what I was just going to say. I've seen him out by Great Bend.

SF:

well I was going to say, we have somebody that we have not talked about and he didn't get to Washington with us. Clarence Bamfield.

AW:

How do you spell that?

DR:

B-a-n-f-i-e-l-d.

AW:

B-a-m?

DR:

B-a-n.

US:

I thought it was m.

DR:

No, isn't it n or is it m?

SF:

Bam. B-a-m.

NT:

Bamfield. B-a-m, not n.

SF:

At the time, Clarence was—what was he? Eighty?

DR:

Oh, yes. And had a bicycle. He rode his bicycle.

SF:

He was an alcoholic, and Clarence would tell you, "I'm an alcoholic." He said, "I always will be alcoholic, but I'm a dried out alcoholic." He'd been a farmer, and was not farming at that time. He helped Kenny Wright, and Kenny had the tail ends of a Allis-Chalmers dealership and helped Kenny do some farming. Clarence had a tractor ready to go to Washington D.C.

DR:

What happened to him that he didn't get to go.

SF:

He got sick and it was probably a very good thing that he did get sick because right now, me being fifty-six years old. I'm not eighty. If somebody said, do you want to take a tractor—take that silly old Moline tractor that we took, a 602 Moline, I'd look at them and say, "There's no way in the world," because you had to be nineteen or in your twenties or thirties.

DR:

Ryan was eighteen, just turned eighteen.

SF:

Clarence was—he was just as sick as possible and not able to go with us, and I think the good Lord looked after him that he didn't, but he was a very strong and staunch supporter of all of this. He'd been there. He'd been beat to a pulp as a farmer. To some extent, his drinking was because of the farm and all of that, but he was there in spirit with all of us out there in Washington, and he was salt of the earth.

NT:

[inaudible] [01:34:04] beans, he's the one that told them how to [inaudible] [01:34:12].

AW:

Really? That's interesting.

DR:

This is Stephen Anderson's son and he was the youngest one to go back.

NT:

[Inaudible 01:34:22].

DR:

Andrew was a real support.

AW:

Let's—I'm going to go ahead and shut this recorder off because we're running out of battery and we'll talk about these scrapbooks, and then I've also got a form I'd like for all of you to sign just to say it's okay for people to listen to what we said there. I didn't say this at the beginning so I'm saying it now, so we'll remember this as the sixth of May, 2015, and we're at Amanda's Bakery and Bistro in Abilene, Kansas.

NT:

Which is Donna's granddaughters.

AW:

Granddaughter. And this is Andy Wilkinson, in case anybody cares. Thank you all.

[End of Recording]