

Mary Lu Lageman, Narrator

Anneliese Abbott, Interviewer

July 7, 2021

Location: Grailville, Loveland, Ohio

ML=Mary Lu Lageman

AA=Anneliese Abbott

AA: All right, this is July 7, 2021, and this is Anneliese Abbott doing an interview with—

ML: Mary Lu Lageman.

AA: And we are doing this interview at Grailville, actually, in Ohio, near Cincinnati.

ML: Yes, in Loveland, Ohio.

AA: Loveland, Ohio. So thank you so much, Mary Lu, for doing this. And just for the sake of the recording, we just went on a walking tour of Grailville. So why don't you start giving us a little background about yourself and about Grailville and how it's related to organic/sustainable agriculture, a little bit of that history there?

ML: Well, my own history. I'm from Ohio. I was born in Ohio; I was born in Columbus. And I met the Grail in 1958 when I was just turning 18, right out of high school. I came for a course. And I really loved what they were doing with integrating spirituality and working on the land and doing educational work. So I went to a Grail center, and I was there in Philadelphia for a year. I came back to Grailville for two years, for what was called the year school, which was a training program for women. And kind of an integrated life with spirituality being a major focus. And while I was here during that two years I worked on the land. I did other work, too. I worked in the kitchen, I worked in maintenance.

But there were about 70 people living here at the time. The women that were living here, the staff and the students, were running the farm, taking care of the beef cattle, the dairy cattle, the chickens, the land, doing the field work, bringing in the hay, and doing all of that work. At the same time, with plenty of time to study and pray and do artwork and do other things as well. So it was a very good, integrated life and a good training ground, being on the farm, particularly for me.

So I fell in love with the farm. And after that decided to go to school, to go to college and study agriculture. Which is what I did, eventually, I got a master's in agricultural economics. And I worked with Peace Corps for a while in Sri Lanka as an agricultural instructor and came back to the States. I had done some work in Kentucky and Tennessee with some development work, rural development work there for that year or so after I went to Peace Corps. When I came back from Peace Corps, I got a master's degree in agricultural economics and then [after the rural development work] went to work for the [United States] Environmental Protection Agency. Because in those days, nobody was training environmental economists. And since I had a degree

in agriculture, I came the closest to what they wanted. So I worked there for 16 years, I worked with the EPA as the regional economist for the six Midwestern states—Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota—as the regional economist. So that was fascinating. It was a different slant on, it wasn't agriculture per se, but it was very much related to environmental issues and what was going on with the air and water in particular. (4:18)

So I did that. And then I left that job to come to Grailville in 1991. And I've been at Grailville ever since. I've worked with the land the whole time. What we had at that time was something called Earth-Land Projects, which was a group of people really focused on the land at Grailville. At that point we had 300 acres. We weren't farming it all; in fact, we were focusing more on working with a smaller acreage more intensively. So we got into vegetable gardening. We did a little bit of orcharding. We leased out some land to beef cattle farmers. We had a few chickens.

And we were doing education. All along, our focus was on education and teaching people. So I had an internship program. We had 60 interns that came over the course of about 11 years and spent anywhere from 2 months to a year or more working on the land and learning. And many of those folks have gone on to have their own gardens or to do some other kind of related work. So that was a good program. We also did programs, weekend programs and other things in sustainable agriculture and gardening and farming and that kind of thing over the years.

Now I am very parttime at Grailville. And I work on organic certification and have a little food forest, a small garden, and work on educational stuff. So that's in brief, very much in brief, where I was coming from. (6:35)

I came back in 1991 because we were starting this new program called Earth-Land Projects. And it was sort of a re-envisioning the land and re-envisioning how we might contribute to sustainable food production on the land. We had a really good group, we worked together very well. We did some good stuff over the years since '91. We had a CSA program started in '94, which was the same year the internship program started. So those two programs kind of went hand-in-hand. The interns worked with the CSA a lot, and at the same time they learned a lot about not only growing food but working with people and how to talk about sustainability and how to work with sustainability in their own lives. Both those programs lasted until 2004. So it was 11 years, 11 seasons. And then we had to, for financial reasons we had to stop both of them.

So after about a year, some of our CSA members came back and said, "We would like to lease the land and start our CSA. We want a CSA. We miss it and we would like to have it." So they did lease a piece of land. In '95 we didn't do anything. '96 they leased a piece of land and started an organization called Earth Shares CSA, which was a nonprofit. And their big focus was also education as well as growing vegetables for their CSA. So it was a community-run project, it was run by the CSA members. The CSA members took the responsibility to take care of things, hire the farmers, and supervise them. And then that program lasted until 2017, when the group lost its lease from Grailville. And so since then, we haven't been doing much farming. But before that we not only had the CSA, we were also at the farmers' market. We were gardening, we had a 6-acre plot of which we were gardening about 4 acres with hoop houses and all sorts of things. We had what we called a work share, where people would come work in the garden for part of their share. (10:07)

AA: If you want to just give a little brief background of Grail—

ML: Okay, sure. So the Grail is an international organization of women. It was started in the 1920s in Holland to tap into women's energy for the transformation of the world, or what was then called the conversion of the world. With a recognition that it was time now for women to kind of take a place and do something, make their voices heard. This being the 1920s. It was initiated by a Jesuit priest, Father Jacques van Ginneken, with five of his students, of his women students. So the women took it on, they took on the challenge, and they divided the world up and moved around the world, working with women, educating women for the transformation of the world.

In 1940, it was very much tied to the Catholic Church at that point. In 1940 the Archbishop of Chicago invited—or the assistant, I can't remember who exactly it was—invited the Grail to come to Chicago from Holland. And so two women set out, and the story is they were on the last boat before the Nazis took over, whatever it was they were taking over. They came to Chicago, but by the time they got to Chicago the bishop that had invited them had died. So they worked on a summer camp, were at a camp, and they were running summer programs, working mostly with young men, which was not what they came to do. So they looked around, and they got invited to Cincinnati by the bishop in Cincinnati, invited them to come here, to come to this archdiocese. And so they looked around for a farm. Because at that point, Lydwine van Kersbergen and Joan Overboss, who started the Grail in this country, were very strongly influenced by the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, which is now Catholic Rural Life. (13:14)

Lydwine in particular was interested in rural life and in what the Conference on rural life was doing, which was working with rural parishes and rural people, recognizing that there was a lot of potential and a lot of issues that needed to be resolved. But also the connection with the land. So Catholic Rural Life has a real strong connection with the land. They're somebody to definitely be in touch with, too, because they have this real strong history, and they existed before the Grail got involved with this.

And so with that influence, that utilizing a sort of rural environment for teaching women and training women to build a kind of holistic, integrated lifestyle, that was very much on Lydwine's mind when they were looking for a place around Cincinnati. So there was a place for sale down the road, here on O'Bannonville Road, and they came out and looked at it, and it was too small. But as they went down the road, they saw Grailville. It was not for sale. So they saw the farm, on the other side of the road. And they managed to convince the owner to sell it to them. And he did. And it was a horse farm and a horse and cattle farm, basically. There was even a racetrack on the property, which I've never quite figured out where it is. But I think it's behind the barn someplace. Although I could have sworn when we were working in the garden area that there were some compacted areas, I thought might be part of the racetrack. But I don't know that.

At any rate, they did buy the farm. At that point, when they had been in the Chicago area, there were several women who were interested in joining them. So they moved in and started rehabbing the buildings, getting them set up. Started the first year school, I think, in 1946. [Actually the first year school was 1944-45.](16:12)

So there are a number of people that participated in that first year school. And one of them was Deborah Schak, and I think Francine Wicks was already on the staff at that point, I'm not sure, [Francine was also a student, not on staff] who are still alive. Deborah lives in Cincinnati; she lives at Twin Towers. And she was in the first year school in 1946. [1944-45] So it would be interesting to get her stories, too. And so as the years went on they got more and more women involved. Women would come for a year, for two years, to study here. They got

accreditation with the Catholic University of America, so they could earn credit. And when the women, then they would pick their staff from this pool of women that would come through the program. It kept evolving. That program lasted until the mid-60s. I came to it in '59, '60, '61, I was here for two years. Then I went on to another Grail center in Louisiana this time, before I went to college in agriculture.

There's also another center in New York [state] that was also very strongly influenced by the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. In fact, Monsignor Ligutti, of Catholic Rural Life, was the one who found that land and was very instrumental in getting it donated to the Grail to utilize for educational purposes. It's in New York. That land is currently being leased out to another group. There is a group of Grail women, they're interested in doing something with that land to make it an Earth justice center, with a permaculture focus. So that's possibly in the offing at some point in the future.

I guess I can't say strongly enough how important the land focus has been in the Grail for many, many people. Losing the land is hard because it also eliminates that as a big focus. And I think the reason it's such a big focus is because it's related to a kind of spiritual concept of nature being important and Creation being important, and a kind of creation-centered spirituality. And that has always been important in the Grail, but even more so perhaps when we started Earth-Land projects in 1991. That was very important. And built on the work, not just of Catholic Rural Life, but built on the work of Thomas Berry and Miriam Therese MacGillis, who have really written and talked about the story of the universe and the role of our species in that and how that is related to the natural world. For me the important connection there is relating to the natural world and growing food in a way that is natural and sustainable. Because after all, we all eat. We feed off the land. And so that's very much a part of that creation-centered spirituality for me. And I think that was really a big focus of the Earth-Land group. And still, to this day, is a big focus in the sense that many of us do see that as important even though it's kind of not as much in the forefront these days. I think we're going to evolve to that point yet. We haven't got there yet. We're getting there. (21:09)

AA: Yeah, thank you so much. Is there anything you want to talk about your farming methods, or the ones that were used here and how you developed them, what you were influenced by?

ML: Sure. It's interesting because we, from what I gather—and see, I'm not real sure of this—but from what I gather in the '40s and '50s there was very much an emphasis on doing things organically, doing things naturally. Before organic came to be such a big word. Doing things naturally. But we did use some chemicals when necessary. And I remember even when I was in the year school we were using some chemicals. We had a farm manager at that point who had studied agriculture and felt that chemicals were necessary. So we kind of went from the natural into doing a little bit with chemicals, but not much. And they were a last resort, definitely.

Then, one of the things I did forget to mention was around the late '60s, like '68, maybe in there, Grailville leased the farm out to a local farmer. And he was a college-educated farmer. And he used it as an extension of his farm, which was down the road from here. And he used chemicals some. But he was also very conservative with using chemicals. He had the farm until 1990. And in 1990 he was beginning to think about retirement and kind of reducing his footprint, his farming footprint, and bringing his operation closer to home. So at that point, we were looking at getting, going more naturally and going more toward organics.

We had a, there's a story in 1988 of Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis, who came to Grailville. And a small group of people were asking her, "What should we do with our land?" Because had all this land, what do we do? It's being farmed by a local farmer, but is there something we should do [for the environment]? And the first thing they decided to do was to stop using chemicals on the land. But I'm getting ahead of myself, because before that they were looking at the land, "What should we do?" And she [Miriam Therese] said, "Listen to the land. Ask the land, and listen." And so they adopted that approach to do that. So the first thing they did was to say, "We have to stop using chemicals on the land, we can't keep doing this. So the farmer said, "Well, I don't know how to grow organically. I don't want to be responsible for following that. But I'll help you." So they thought, "Well, that's good." So they decided to go organic. They decided to stop using chemicals at that point and to look into organic certification. (25:20)

Well, the connection with Rural Resources was very strong also, because Jody Grundy was a Grail member, was one of the people behind Rural Resources. And Rural Resources, Jody was living here, just down the road, and very involved with Grailville. She was one of the co-founders of the children's meeting house. She was working, she was co-founder of Rural Resources, getting that going.

Okay, I apologize, I was way off there. In 1975 I went to Chicago. That same year or the following year, Rural Resources was started. And it was—Jody was in contact with me, and I decided since I'm in Chicago I'm not going to be involved with that, because it's too far away. Well, nothing is too far away when you're doing some innovative work like that. But at any rate, Rural Resources really did a good job of getting things started in sustainable agriculture in the area. At some point—and I don't know when, this is what I have to find out, in the '80s—in 1988 is when I think they decided to stop using chemicals on the land here and to get organic. But there had been, I think before that they had applied for organic certification or something. It's muddled in the records, and I haven't been able to figure out quite what. And the person responsible at that time has since passed away. So I'm hoping I can figure out when we first applied for organic certification, when Grailville first applied for organic certification. And got the certification.

And then something happened—this was all in the '80s—something happened that somebody forgot to fill out the paperwork or something, I don't know what happened. But something happened that brought that into question. So I don't know if we lost the organic certification. But then we got reinstated in the early '90s. So we were one of the early ones. Our number is 159, is our certification number. That makes us the 59th farm to be certified by OEFFA because they started at 101. And it would make sense, because two Grail women, Jody and Maria Duivenvoorden, were involved with Rural Resources. And Rural Resources was instrumental in the story of OEFFA. I don't need to tell that story because you've got that one.

An interesting aside, the first conference in '79 of OEFFA took place at the school that I went to when I was growing up, my elementary school. That's just kind of an interesting aside.

Anyhow, back to the '90s, when I came. We were in the process of getting recertified, I think, organic, because I was very unclear. And we were certifying the whole farm, all the acres. The farmer was helping us, but he was absolutely right that he didn't know how to grow organically, because when you're growing organically, you can't just follow a schedule of applying chemicals. He was basically following a schedule. You have to be there, you have to watch, it's much more consuming in the sense that you have to be on top of it. And then I tried to

do some farming myself when I first came. And I was too busy to really stay on top of the weeds, which were rampant, probably because the land was still recovering from chemicals.

And we were trying to do some commodity cropping. We were trying to grow dry beans and sell them on the market. We couldn't grow enough. And our fields were not big enough to get a good organic rotation going and still be able to produce enough beans for a load to ship to Michigan for the international market. So we decided that maybe the commodity route was not a good way for us. And we began to focus at that point on vegetable growing, which is a gardening approach, garden-farming approach, and takes much less land. Much of the land we just kind of held in abeyance until we could do something more with it. And really focused on building up the vegetable operation and doing all of this organically. (31:40)

We didn't certify, at some point we stopped certifying all the fields in the farm, and began to simply certify the gardens because that's where we were focusing our energy. Then one year we had an inspector who questioned, "Why aren't you certifying the fields?" And we thought, "Well, why not?" So we started certifying the fields again. So we've been sort of in and out of the organic certification piece, though we definitely stopped using chemicals some time in the mid to late '80s. So we had certified most of the fields, and we had certified the gardens. We were still focusing on the gardens and certifying the fields even though we weren't doing much until we came up to the sale.

Now that said, we did not certify the pasture, because we were not growing the animals ourselves. We were leasing the pasture out to a farmer who said that, well, he was doing things better than organic anyhow, so he wasn't going to bother getting certified. Well, the fact of the matter was, he had his own market, he didn't have to be certified. People knew how he grew, and he was selling locally. And so he didn't need to be certified. And when we started the CSA, we didn't really need to be certified, either, because we had our own people, they knew how we grew things. But it was important to our CSA members that we be certified organic. And so we continued the certification.

And we are still certified now, we are still certifying the fields that we walked through below, the ones that used to be crop fields on the north side. We stopped certifying the south side, which is where we had our focus before. And we're trying to build up the north side. It's difficult because the land has not been really, is lacking in fertility and tends to be waterlogged. So it's going to take some building. And it's very weedy. And poison ivy is everywhere. So it's a real challenge to try to build that up. We are maintaining the certification on the two fields that we have left down there. We have three fields—one we never certified because that was a pig pasture, and again, that was leased out to another farmer. But the two big crop fields we are certifying, and we're also certifying the conservation easement, the woodlands that's in the conservation easement.

We are not and have not been selling the last two summers, nor this summer. We're not selling product because we're not growing enough product to sell. We're just doing the very minimum to keep our garlic crop going and developing the food forest, a five-acre food forest, which hopefully will one day be pretty substantial. But our motto is, or our mantra is, that whatever we do has to be portable and temporary because we don't know what's going to happen or what we're going to be doing with the land in the future. In the meantime, we're keeping the certification, and we're doing some things and thinking about maybe, the one maybe exception to the temporary and portable is the food forest, which is organically certified. So if we ever get fruits and nuts, we'll have a nice thing going there. And in the food forest we can develop that into a perennial agriculture style.

I should say that also one of the big things that happened, one of the big influences that happened, in 1990 we had a ten-day workshop in permaculture, and we did a resource audit at the time as well. Now the resource auditing process was something that was really started by a Jesuit [priest] named Al Frisch, Father Al Frisch. He was interested in working with convents and monasteries across the country to help them do something sustainable with their land. And he was very good at this. He brought people together. He went around doing what he called resource audits, where he would audit one of these places and audit their land and come up with some recommendations. He had a whole group of professionals that worked with him to come up with recommendations of what they could do with their land and their buildings. And so we had a resource audit done in 1990. At the same time, we wedded that to a permaculture workshop.

That was really a watershed moment in 1990 when that happened. And that resulted in us moving, we had the resource audit done, we had the report from them, we had done the permaculture workshop. It was an introduction to permaculture for me and for a lot of people, and it's part of what inspired me to come back in '91 and work on these projects. A lot of what's in the resource audit that was done, a lot of those recommendations did get followed through in many ways. The educational pieces, the work with the land, the gardening. Some of the building stuff was followed through, not all of it. We had a ten-year follow-up audit in 2000 by Father Frisch, and that audit recognized what had been done. We had not followed it perfectly, but we had done a lot of what was in the audit. And permaculture also was something that took off from that 1990 workshop. We did some workshops after that, some shorter workshops.

And I went for my permaculture training and got a certificate in '92. Then we continued to work with the permaculture model at Grailville, a little bit. Our big focus was on gardening, and permaculture is much broader than gardening, so we didn't do a lot of what we were learning about permaculture. But it was always our philosophy. And it was very instrumental in the internship program. It was something we taught the interns about permaculture. (40:14)

We did, in '94 [1993] I believe it was, we had an international meeting in Grailville, and we decided we were going to do a permaculture workshop at the international meeting. So we did that and got a lot of interest from the participants from Uganda, so we ended up getting a grant to do some exchange between Uganda and the US. Two Ugandans came to the US and spent some time, spent I think a year or close to a year in the US studying permaculture and then working with Grailville. And then I went to Uganda for a few weeks to take permaculture there and do some projects there. So that's been a very strong influence, too, and had international repercussions. What I hear from the Ugandans, they have definitely followed up with their permaculture piece, and they have created, they have done some marvelous work with permaculture in their Grail centers in Uganda. So that's pretty exciting, that they have stuck with that. Anyhow, that's a strong influence, a very strong influence, and one that we're hoping to go further with, especially with our New York center in this country. And I'm hoping we can do it at Grailville, too. (41:55)

AA: Thank you so much for sharing that. Is there anything you want to share about your philosophies of farming and how they've changed over time?

ML: Oh yeah. Well, I think that it's been more a slow evolution than a big change. I was a college-educated farmer, too. The other college-educated farmers I know are very much into the conventional model. And it's been slow to catch on. There are some exceptions, but it's been slow to catch on. And now there's lots of programs in sustainable agriculture at the colleges, but

in those days there weren't. And I remember when I decided I wanted to study agriculture, I was interested in farming. I wasn't even thinking about conventional, organic, because that wasn't even talked about. When I went to school, I realized that it was really geared toward big farmers, toward conventional farming, and began to distinguish that. I mean, I knew what I was getting into, it wasn't that I was blind to that. But I really was able then to decipher, this is this and that is that. To be able to distinguish some of the differences and how in the conventional model you're using the land, it's a resource, it's a source of wealth for you to build your bank account.

In sustainable agriculture it's much more—well, in my philosophy, I guess—much more working with nature to help nature help us. That may not be as much a philosophical shift over time as it is a recognition of some of the characteristics of getting more into organic and natural ways of getting our food, growing our food. And I think the shift that maybe I did is that in 1979 I came to a workshop. I was living in Chicago, and I came to a workshop here at Grailville with Father Thomas Berry, a passionate priest who was really a very outspoken voice in how we needed to make creation sort of the center of our spiritual existence if you will. And I was very inspired by him and by his writings. Even before he wrote *Dream of the Earth*, that really is a way to care for our whole planet, including the land and the soil. And I think that much more recently, with climate change entering the picture, I'm recognizing how conventional agriculture contributes to climate change. So again, it's not a shift in philosophy as much as it's sort of a recognition of the characteristics that we can really do something. The way we treat the land is really going to make a difference to the planet, because the soil is a major way to sequester carbon.

So I had much more recently a whole lot more focus on soil and soil life than I used to. I was, being an agricultural economist, I was more trained in the social sciences. And I've gotten closer to the physical sciences since, biological in particular. I have to drive a tractor. And it's not my favorite thing, because it's so mechanical. And if the tractor breaks down, I'm like, "Man, nooo, it broke down! It doesn't work anymore! Maybe if I leave it alone it will get well!" Because I think biologically. So I've really begun to really get, kind of swim in, that existence of the biological soil life, the soil, the plants, the trees, all of that. (47:22)

AA: Thank you so much. Is there anything you want to share about your perspective on the connection between organic or sustainable agriculture, kind of like the broader historical and cultural context and maybe involvement in other movements, if there's anything that's connected there?

ML: Yeah. I think it's rather exciting to see that nowadays there's a lot more movements involved in sustainable agriculture. And a lot of the stuff that we used to talk about almost behind closed doors—not quite, but almost—is really kind of out there now for everybody to talk about and be involved in. There's a lot more awareness of the food that we put into our bodies, there's a lot more awareness of our real connections with nature as the base of our existence. And a lot more recognition that we are the planet. We are not separate from the planet. And that we have to take care of our habitat, of our environment.

I think it's just that a whole lot more people, sustainable agriculture's entering a lot more into the mainstream, into, there's a lot more connection now between the physical and social sciences as well because it's recognized that there is that connection, and it's breaking that connection that really makes for destroying the environment. Farmers' markets are much more

common all over the place, CSAs are. It's really good to see how those connections are happening. (49:47)

AA: Is there anything you want to say about—and you mentioned a lot of it earlier—about involvement in organizations? Is there anything you want to say about that?

ML: Yeah. I think that there are a lot more organizations, too. And a lot more organizations to be involved in. That's what I have found. And wow, I would like to be involved in all of them. There's a lot more environmental organizations, there's a lot more agricultural organizations. There's the Cincinnati Permaculture Institute, is only 7 or 8 years old, it's a fairly new organization. And it's doing a lot of good work, too, in Cincinnati. There's other permaculture organizations, there's the Great Lakes, which is the whole upper Midwest region, the Great Lakes Permaculture. There's just a whole lot more organizations. And they're doing good work. They're doing good work. I think—who was it I heard one time speaking?—was talking about, if you were to take all of the organizations now that are focused on the environment and sustainability and sustainable agriculture, it really, it's a huge portion of the world population that is involved in these organizations. So we're turning a corner. And hopefully we'll keep turning that corner before it's too late. (51:44)

AA: Is there anything you want to share about your perspective on organic certification and the differences before and after USDA certification?

ML: Yeah, well, it's—I think that the organic certification was really an important thing. Is really an important thing. I think it doesn't go far enough in a lot of ways. But I also recognize that when organic went big, because I was kind of involved, starting to get involved with organic before it went big, but when it went big, then you have a very, then you have a process that's very much more distant, and you need a paperwork trail for that. But I remember organics when the inspector came, and he was a friend. The inspector was a friend. The inspector was another farmer, that farmed his own farm, and it was felt that that was not a good thing, but I think that was a very good thing, because organic farmers are going to want to keep the standards up. So anybody that is an organic farmer is not going to let another so-called organic farmer get away with it. So I think that was kind of a false dichotomy that they set up there. But now it has become very much, you don't know your inspector, and you just meet your inspector one time, and then never see them again. And you don't have, it's not the same relationship with OEFFA that it was before it went federal, is I guess what I'm trying to say. But it is what it is. And I can understand how we got there. (53:52)

AA: So I'm curious, what year did you get your degree in agriculture?

ML: Let's see. I got my bachelor's in '67, and I got my master's in '75.

AA: So probably, especially when you got your bachelor's, I'm assuming that was when the universities were still kind of anti-organic in general.

ML: Yeah.

AA: So I'm curious on your perspective about the relationship between the agricultural universities and the organic and sustainable agriculture and how you've seen that change over time.

ML: Okay, yeah. Because when I got my, when I went for the undergraduate, there was nothing in sustainable agriculture really. And I always felt a little distant from the program. I thought, I'm just learning this program because I need to learn this stuff, but I know this is not where I'm going. So that gave me a little distance, which was good, but on the other hand it also kind of interfered with my commitment to my studies. So that was good and bad. But the same thing was kind of true in '75. We hadn't really gotten there yet, either. But I was then, in '75 I was much more involved in the social studies side of it, so I was much more concerned with markets and things like that than I was with production. And over the years I've become more and more concerned about production and marketing. It's on the production side that you really have to abide by the standards. On the marketing side, you get to at least audit the standards, which means you get a little premium. But my experience with the premium is it's not so great anyhow, especially as time has gone on. And a lot more people become aware of organic, there's a lot more organic available. But even so, people are always comparing prices between organic and conventional. Even I don't always buy organic when I have a choice because of the expense. So the premium is pretty minimal to the farmer. But sometimes in the market it feels like it's a lot. So that's about the standards.

I think that there's a move now to be better than the standards, and I think that's good. I think one of the things was, when the organic movement started, at least here in this state, it was much more than just about organics. It was much more than just about using chemicals, not using chemicals, or substituting something else for chemicals. It was much more about some kind of a holistic production method. And as time went on, and especially when the federal government got involved, it got much more cut and dried. Plus it had to, this standard, that standard, so on, the detail of the standards rather than a holistic approach, a holistic attitude. So I think that's one of the ways in which the whole concept of organic has shifted from the very early days. (57:48)

AA: Is there anything else you want to share about your perspective about past and current trends in organic agriculture and maybe some of these controversies, and maybe why some of these things have been controversial over the years? And also, if there's anything you want to share about what you think the most important aspects of this history are to teach to the younger generations. The most important legacies.

ML: Well, I think some of what I was just talking about how they went from a holistic approach to a much more standards approach. I mean, those standards were always there, but they were there in a much more holistic way. It evolved over time in that direction. So getting with the National Organic Program now, it's very kind of, well, does this thing go on the list or that thing go on the list, or what do we do about this or that or the other? And implementing that program. It's, I don't know. It's become much more impersonal. And I think that it's important for history to know that it didn't start out that way. It started out with a much more holistic approach, and with a much more focus on local and things like that that kind of got lost in the standards-building process.

And it started out as kind of a cause, and now it's a regulatory program. So that's a big difference. But the cause, shifting from eating organically, growing organically, has—people

might not realize where it came from and why it's important. It came out of a much more holistic view of how we live and how we eat and what the standards look like. So is that controversial? I don't know. There's always a lot of controversy about what goes on the list, what approved products. But one of the things that I've seen happen is that sometimes in organics—and I fall victim to this myself—where you're looking at that list all that time. Is this approved, can we use this? So it's kind of a substitution of conventional chemicals with organic inputs. And I'm moving much more toward the biological model where the land will take care of itself if you let it, if you encourage it, if you don't till it, if you don't apply chemicals to it. I mean, organics hasn't said much about tillage, yet tillage destroys soil life, it puts carbon into the atmosphere, those kind of things, that's part of a much more holistic view than organics has.

I don't know that there's controversy as much as it doesn't go far enough in a holistic perspective. And at the same time focuses on inputs. And there's always new inputs to focus on, there's always new things to look at. (1:02:26)

AA: Well, thank you so much. Is there anything else you want to say before we end the recording?

ML: Oh, I'm sure there's a million things I would like to say. I'm sure there are. There's always a lot more to say. Because it's a big field now. Some of us stuck our toe in the water when nobody was doing that, when nobody was looking. And now it's gotten, it's getting the press, and it's getting out there. Along with climate change. And of course, I really think that's for me the big issues right now are soil life and helping the soil along and growing trees and reversing climate change. Because I think that little sequence of events can really help that out. That's where my focus is at this point.

AA: Are there any other stories or anything you want to share?

ML: I'm sure there are stories, but they're not coming to me.

AA: Thank you so much, and for the tour, too. Is there anything you want to say about any of the things we saw today when we were walking around, for the recording, or not?

ML: Well, yeah, there's a lot of things I could say about that. One of the things I will say is so important. In spite of what we're doing here, it is so important to keep land in agriculture and to find ways to do that. Agricultural use cannot compete with development use. That's the problem. And even though there is money in the state of Ohio, Clean Ohio funds, to be used for agricultural preservation, it can't compete with development. Because theoretically, purchasing development rights, which is basically what that program is doing essentially, should fill the gap between agricultural value of the land and development value of the land. That may happen in some places; it's not happening right here. Not in Loveland. That's not happening. Because the development value of the land is not just a margin above the agricultural value, it's multiples, like ten times the value. And there's no way the Clean Ohio funds can make up that gap. So that's a big issue. That is a big issue. Because I know, I used to say, well, we need to be training more farmers. That's what I used to say is the major issue. And I think that some of those programs exist now. They exist at the university level, they exist at the level of OEFFA and other state institutions. But now, how can a farmer be a farmer unless they have a piece of ground? It's

getting harder and harder for a farmer to find a piece of ground to farm. And that's what kills me more than anything, what's happening here. Because it's been in agriculture as recently as three years ago. And now it's going to be houses. I'm happy with the park district. It's going from agriculture to a natural use. But to go from agriculture to a development use seems so counterproductive to what we needed to be doing for climate change and for the world and for the earth.

Anyhow, that's my gripe. It doesn't feel good to be watching that happen. This is not the only place it's happening. And I can see how it happens. Here's the thing. A farmer farms his land for his whole life. He's retiring. He hasn't built a pension. He doesn't have a pension. His wealth is in his land. He doesn't have a savings account; his wealth is in his land. So the only way to get the wealth out of the land is to really sell it for enough money to be able to live the rest of your life. I used to blame the farmers. But it's the system. It's really the system and the way it's set up and the way it is. It just is that way. And how to change it, it's probably going to take at least two more generations to change that. In the meantime, we're turning all of this good farmland—because the best farmland is near the cities—into houses. And then at the same time, then I think, look at all these suburban households. And look at all the land they've got around them. Boy, they could be gardening their front yards. That's another model, but it could happen. So there we are. My gripe, my pet gripe.

AA: Thank you so much for sharing that and for showing me around. And for the recording, in case people are listening to this and they don't realize what's happening, Grailville was originally 300 acres, and then 130 went to the Parks District that will stay as a conservation natural area. But then 100 acres they're about to sell off for development, to build a housing development. And that includes the heart of the original Grailville, with most of the original buildings and the farm, where you used to have the vegetable garden, the CSA and everything.

ML: Yes, that's true. You've said it very well. Nice summary. And that leaves us with 70 acres, which is plenty to do something with. But we just need to move beyond where we are in order to do something with it.

AA: All right. Is there anything else you want to say before we wrap up?

ML: I don't think so.

AA: All right. Well, thank you so much for doing this!

ML: You're welcome.