

Craig Cramer, narrator

Anneliese Abbott, interviewer

November 29, 2022

CC = Craig Cramer

AA = Anneliese Abbott

AA: This is November 29, 2022, and this is Anneliese Abbott interviewing

CC: Craig Cramer.

AA: And we're doing this interview over Zoom. So Craig, thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview today.

CC: Happy to do it.

AA: So why don't we start, give us a little information about when and where you were born, and did you have any connection with agriculture when you were a child?

CC: Sure. I'm coming to you from Cornell University, I'm a communications specialist in the School of Integrative Plant Science at Cornell University, in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences here. I was actually born in Washington, D.C., and grew up until I was about 13 in the northern suburbs of Washington. I was born in '57. I grew up, my preteen years in the sixties, just a suburban kid. Had really no, during that time, no experience in agriculture, farming and the like. But I realize looking back on that time that, first of all, I went to Montgomery County Schools, the best schools in the country, so I had a wonderful early education. Had a sixth grade teacher who told me I would be a writer someday. And God bless Mrs. Goldman, hopefully she'd be proud of me today. And also realized that, even in the suburbs, I learned to love nature.

When I was three, we moved to a subdevelopment where we were literally lived where the sidewalk ends and had woods to explore outside our subdevelopment. We vacationed, we went—instead of going to the Atlantic Coast, be on the seashore, we went to the mountains in West Virginia and stayed in a cabin, hiked in the woods, and all that. So at a very early age I had a great love of nature. And even in Washington, we would go to Rock Creek Park and jump rocks, or go out to Great Falls, or hike along the B&O Canal. So even at an early age I learned to love nature.

Also, when you grow up in Washington, DC, you kind of think maybe everybody spends every weekend going to the Smithsonian, or the National Gallery of Art, and have those kind of enriching experiences. So I had a very rich, rich childhood filled with scientific inquiry, art appreciation. It was Camelot, it was in the Kennedy and Johnson presidencies, and it was a really liberal place to grow up and be. So it was a really good time early on.

1970, when I'm going into the eighth grade, my father chucked his government job—he worked for the Civil Service Commission as a government bureaucrat—and took a job as a United Methodist Church camp director in upstate New York. So I then had this rough transition from suburbia to living in the woods and living in a rural area. It was a real kind of juxtaposition.

But I was able to continue that love of nature. We had a 44-acre lake, and I loved fishing and hiking in the woods and—cross country skiing was a brand-new thing, and I learned how to do that at an early age. So growing up at camp continued that love.

My first exposure to agriculture, next door to the camp was a real hardscrabble dairy farm. And our neighbors, I used to pitch in and help load hay bales during hay season. But that was about the extent of my real agricultural experience as a young child.

I realized fairly early in high school, I remember I had a teacher that taught an environmental studies course. I remember doing a study about the ecology of the lake at the camp where I grew up. And realized that I really, really had a propensity for the natural sciences. And we were about an hour, hour and a half from Syracuse, New York, and on the campus of Syracuse University was the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. And I decided to go there because I could just fill out my work schedule with all kinds of great natural history courses—dendrology, and for a long time there I thought I wanted to be an ichthyologist, I wanted to go to fisheries, because I loved doing that, although I realized that there's only one ichthyologist in the state of New York, and that person wasn't going to die or retire anytime soon. But really, really enjoyed doing that.

During that time, still not too much in the way of agriculture. But we were very, very active with the food co-op in Syracuse. And we would do some of the, the household I lived in—I lived in a vegetarian household, very active in food issues, and I would do a lot of the purchasing for the food co-op, a lot of the volunteer work, the food distribution and the like. So that was sort of my connection in college to that.

AA: What was the name of that food co-op?

CC: The Syracuse Real Food Co-op. It was located in an old storefront, kind of in the college section of town, where a lot of college students lived. I remember it had a manager with this great big bushy beard. He would always store his pencil right in his beard. He would pull his pencil out and start writing stuff down. Don't remember his name, but that was a long time ago. (5:50)

I got done—in the meantime, while I'm doing this work, studying natural sciences, back at the summer camp that my dad managed, I was doing environmental education programs with the kids. I was running around in the woods with them and teaching them a greater appreciation of nature. And I also had, before I started doing the environmental lib, when I was younger, right out of high school, one of my co-workers there that worked in the food service convinced me to become a vegetarian based on a book called *Diet for a Small Planet* by Francis Moore Lappé. A very groundbreaking, and basically how you can eat can affect the politics and the food distribution systems of the world. And I bought into that and became a vegetarian. So I had that connection to my personal lifestyle and food. And it's just interesting that later on I moved on to become the livestock editor of a farm magazine. But for a while there—and actually, with the food issues and how food made a big difference in our lives.

I realized about halfway through my work at SUNY-ESF that I wasn't bound to do research. I remember that around my sophomore year I was asked to apply for some honors research funding, and I won, I proposed to do a project on soil and sustainable forestry, like tracking nutrient flows through forest ecosystems in clear-cut versus other management areas. And I found that it was funded by some forest industry place and they had no interest in me doing that sort of research. I realized, I'm probably not really cut out for research, and the

funding that supports the research probably never would support the stuff that I was really interested in doing. And I realized that I really enjoyed, I enjoyed the information end of things. I realized that, wow, we have a ton of information to solve all kinds of environmental problems that just isn't getting out there and isn't getting applied. And I've got some communication skills. Maybe my niche is to be the liaison between science and the public and the education around environmental issues. So I kind of made that commitment to move away from college, I was going to go more into communications than into research. (8:31)

I got done a semester early. Because my dad worked in the national leadership of the United Methodist Church, I had some connections there, and they were looking for projects. The emphasis in the United Methodist Church for that particular quadrennium was on hunger and justice issues. So they hired me to spend a year researching curriculums and developing curriculums for how their various camp and conference centers around the country could deal with hunger and justice issues. I had activities for youth, changing their food system to serve healthier food, food that was not quite so meat-centered. And I did that for about nine months. And then decided to go on—that was just a short-term project, to develop that, did it during that spring semester and summer—and then came to Cornell in the fall of '79.

I majored, there was a program here in science and environmental education. It was just a little small graduate program. But there were a whole bunch of us there who were all kind of a hotbed for dealing with environmental issues and dealing with just those issues, how to educate the public about very similar environmental issues and solve those problems. Cornell at that point was kind of a hotbed of the alternative agriculture movement that was just getting started. The two semesters I spent here working in the graduate program, I came to understand that, well, Craig, you're an environmentalist, but you know, probably one of the biggest environmental problems in the country, in the US and around the world, is agriculture. And boy, there are all sorts of things coming along here, there are all sorts of people who are interested in alternative agriculture, and ways of farming, that are less harsh on the land. That might be a good niche. So that's where I first developed the interest of applying what I knew about natural systems to agroecosystems and trying to figure out a way forward to transforming the US food system so it was environmentally sound. (11:02)

Am I still on track, giving you the kind of things you are looking for, Anneliese?

AA: Yeah, this is exactly what I want, this is great.

CC: Exactly what you wanted.

I haven't mentioned the names. One of the people here at Cornell, historic people, David Pimentel was a person who did a lot of big picture analyses of food systems and the like, energy use in ag, I believe, is one of his big things. So there were several people like that on campus, faculty that were doing that sort of work. There was—I forget the exact title of it—but there was a sustainable agriculture seminar series, I think it was one of the people in the Cornell United Religious Works organized it, Phil Schneider. And one of the speakers they brought in was Wendell Berry. And he came in, and not only did a seminar but spent a weekend of programming. And I had known of Wendell Berry and read some of his works, so that was a big, “Oh, wow, I'm worshipping at the foot of one of the major movers and shakers of the movement.” So that was a very encouraging thing at that point in my life.

There were, as I still find out as I work at Cornell, some of the people who were doing the most exciting things were graduate students. There was a group, I believe it was called the

Ecological Agriculture Research Collective, and it was mostly graduate students who were interested in these topics and working with their advisors to figure out, researching some of the science behind alternative farming systems, weed ecology and the like. I believe one of those people back then was Chuck Mohler, who went on to work here at Cornell later on, contemporary of mine who died just a couple of years ago. And in fact, I'm just doing some correspondence here this morning, his book that was on managing weeds ecologically, we have a website that does the weed profiles, we do updates, and one of the retired USDA weed science people is sending me updates to include on the website. Things back then, paths keep crossing and intersecting in life. (13:34)

So during the Cornell days—now I was here for two semesters, and I went to work the summer after my second, spring semester. There was a camp in Rhode Island, a United Methodist camp, Camp Aldersgate, and the people there wanted to develop an organic gardening program at their camp, a food service program. They really had bought in, they had known about the work I had done for the national church and were interested in applying it to their camp. So I went there, worked for a summer. And this was really my first farming experience. I had a half-acre organic garden. I hadn't done a lot of gardening before, but sort of by the seat of my pants figured out how to take this old burned-out pasture and turn it into a garden that would supply organic produce to the camp kitchen. So that was a good experience.

I took a leave of absence. I didn't come back to finish up my master's degree. Was kind of uncertain what I wanted to pursue in my thesis. It was more like doctoral-level work, looking at how you could teach people, not just—basically, how to teach people values. I was very concerned that people armed with the same information—right now we debate about the information, people have different information sources and all—back then, people would have the same information and would react to it differently. I postulated that there were ways to teach people how to process that information that would lead to certain outcomes. They would either buy into environmental problems and adjust their lifestyles and their politics, or not. It was very, very involved, and I thought, "I should take some time off." And also at that time I found out my girlfriend, now my wife, if we were going to have any kids, we had to do it now. So I got married, had kids, had dogs, and never actually got down to Cornell to finish up my master's. (15:46)

I did go back to that camp in Rhode Island, because I had gotten a longer term, I had gotten a two-year project funded there to further develop the programming at that camp. So I went back there and spent about a year there. Then my wife—we had tandem careers here. Neither of us were really ready to have kids at that point, but she was a nurse and had a goal to become a nurse practitioner midwife. And at that point it was like, she really needed to get back, our kid was getting close to a year old, not so dependent on Mom, and she had to start getting some labor-delivery experience so that she could go on, before she got too old, and become a midwife. So I pulled out of that project early. We came back to Ithaca—in fact, our family is sort of in this area, too, we didn't like being too far away from our family. And we figured I could do some work at Cornell perhaps, and she could work for the local hospital here and get that sort of experience.

So we came back—this would have been like 1982. And I landed—this was the best job I could find in Ithaca related to my experience. I split a quarter-time position with Joanna Green, who's kind of the founder, she's been an activist around here, for the Cornell Small Farms Program and the like. But at that point there was one quarter-time position funded by the Center for Religion, Ethics, and Social Policy called the Center for Local Food and Agriculture. And we

split that position. We both sponged off our spouses, mostly did volunteer work at that point. Looking at, instead of local food and agriculture, we were dealing with the whole smorgasbord of food system issues and farming and the like.

I'm also piecing in some of the themes that you identified later on, about Cornell and the like. One of the projects that we did—we had enough money for a part-time work study student. And I hired a woman named Marcia Eames-Sheavly, who came back to work here, was a colleague of mine the last twenty years here at Cornell, but she was at one time my work study student. And we assigned her the project of identifying what was going on at Cornell that was really positive. Let's find the good and praise it. Everybody was talking about the antagonism between the land grants and organic farming. Let's compile all that Cornell is doing and say, "Wow, great job. Here's things that are going on." And we pulled together—it was kind of a slim volume, but we found, she spent a semester or two going around, digging up information. And the point of this, though, is that when her advisor found out she was doing this, screamed at her and said, "Why are you doing this? This is not positive. This is going back to the past. Sustainable ag is all just bunk"—and all that. So there was some antagonism. It wasn't like you could even get permission to do this sort of thing. We had to work from outside the university system itself, in the Religion and Social Policy part of the university, in order to praise the good things that they were doing, and still met sometimes with that sort of resistance. (19:36)

One of the things that—it's a little hazy, but I think the timeline's about right, around that time, 1982, '83, somewhere around there, probably '82—Joanna organized a retreat. This is Joanna Green. She organized a retreat at the Shackleton Research Center, which is up on Oneida Lake, it's Cornell's freshwater fisheries outpost. I'm not sure if Cornell still owns it anymore. Might have sold it off. But it was kind of a rustic place, but we organized a retreat to bring in organic farmers, food systems activists from around the state, to just have a little powwow get-together strategy session to figure out where to go from there. And I don't know how the connection was made, but Bob Rodale found out about it and invited himself to come. And we were all just like, "Hell, yes! Bring it on, come here! We're just doing our little thing here trying to figure out what to do in New York, and here you are, and you and your family have been synonymous with organic farming and food systems for at that point thirty or forty years." So we had an interesting discussion there, and my recollection of that is that he couldn't have been a nicer, humbler man just fitting in with all these folks kind of struggling to figure out what to do here in New York. And he brought his own perspective there.

And I remember kind of debating with him, because one of the things at that point he was saying was that in trying to transform food systems in the US, it's going to happen very quickly, and the universities and extension system are not equipped to do that. They're just going to be, they're too slow, they don't react, it's going to be private industry, it's going to be farmers that actually do that. And I respectfully disagreed with him at the time. I said, "Yeah, you're right, the farmers are going to take the lead and all that, but you have an extension system that has a network with educators in every county of the country, practically, and it would be a shame to ignore that. No, you're not going to get them to transform totally, but you do have an infrastructure set up that if you work with the folks, you will find people that you can work with who will really aid in this transformation. You shouldn't ignore them."

So that was nice. And at the end of that conference we decided that our next step was to form NOFA-New York. We had a core of farmers that went to—NOFA New England had been around for a while, you had NOFA-Vermont and NOFA-New Hampshire, and the annual conferences over there. The organics had drifted out of New England and into New York, but

we'd always traveled to New England for organics. Let's set up something here in New York so we have our own organization. So '82 and '83 we worked on the formation of that. There was a group of farmers primarily working on that. One person I remember was key—I was kind of, we called ourselves “founding co-chairs,” myself, who also worked on the organization in the farming and education side, and then we had another person, David Yarrow, who was based in Syracuse, who was sort of a foodie person, natural healer, guru kind of guy, but also knew how to do paperwork, knew how to form organizations, follow the IRS tax exempt status and all that. So we sort of worked together. He brought in the consumer end of folks, and NOFA-New York still has a sort of consumer and a farming side. I did the farming side. And I believe it was in January of '83 or winter of '83 we had our first NOFA-New York conference at a large church in Syracuse. Well-attended, with vendors and workshops. It was the right time. We had enough of the critical mass of farmers to form a group, get good attendance, get people starting to work together, connecting with the food activists. Not just farmers, but food activists as well. And got things off the ground. So that was kind of the, Craig Cramer the early years of history, getting up to the founding of NOFA. (24:58)

Also, about that time, it would have been in the fall of '83—I think that first conference was in January—fall of '83, we had our second child. My wife had been working labor and delivery, it was really cool. She came home from her shift one day in October and said, “It's time to go back to the hospital.” We went back to her place at work, she gave birth to our second child right there, with all her co-workers looking. That was a very cool event. But also at that time we realized she did not want to go back to work right away. We were still poor as sin. So I started thinking, “I should probably find a real, something more than a quarter-time position without benefits to support our growing family.” And I fell back on my camping work, and then I took a job at a camp in southeastern Pennsylvania, another United Methodist Church camp that was in need of a camp director. So you got housing and all the freebies. I was free to do the kind of programming I had developed. But at the last minute—they were actually hiring for two camp sites, and one would have been the ideal place to implement those programs, and the other one was a camp that was falling apart and in total disrepair. When I got down there, I found out there were all sorts of toxic relationships going on. I realized, “I don't have the stomach for this. It's not a good match; I need to find another job.”

I decided that on Saturday, and on Sunday I picked up the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and looked at the want ads. I had never looked at the want ads before; I had always found jobs by word of mouth and the like. And there was a position advertising looking for a public services educator at the Rodale Research Center. And I'm like, “That's got my name written all over it.” And I sent in my resumé and cover letter and interviewed. I started the camp position in January, and by the time the weather broke I was working at the research center organizing tours, doing their outreach publications, the self-guided tour brochure, stuff like that.

I started, they had, one of the things they were doing at that time was they were introducing amaranth as a new crop. And I was the editor, I became instantly the editor of the *Amaranth Today* newsletter. So I got experience dealing with specialty crops and how they're not panaceas and how it's tough to ratchet up the demand from food companies and the production on the part of farmers.

It was an interesting time at the research center. Probably the main focus of their research at that time, I think they were in the third year of what they called the Conversion Project, which later became known as the Farming Systems Trial. And what this was was, they had rented land adjacent to their research center from the cash grain farmer that was next door and were starting

to convert that land into organic farming. So they ran basically three different treatments, one of them being that they continued the cash grains, corn-soybean conventional rotation. Then they added two more complex rotations. One mimicking a cash grain farm, but getting small grains and a legume crop into the rotation, and the other imitating an organic livestock farm where they had a longer rotation that included a couple years of hay. And then basically track the economic results of that. The whole idea just showed that organic farmers had reported that when they converted to organic there was a yield depression early on, and then things got better, which is exactly what the science of that conversion project found. Also things that kind of go without saying. If you're going to convert land to organics, you probably shouldn't start the first year with corn, corn being a heavy nitrogen feeder and a row crop very easily taken over by weeds if you don't have your cultivation schemes down.

That was sort of the theme of my early years there, working there, the research center was trying to develop credibility within the research community, that organic farming wasn't just for a bunch of hippie farmers, that there were ways, it was worth scientific research, and scientific research could reveal ways to ease the transition to organic farming and to keep farmers from going out of business by just going cold turkey on chemicals. So that was kind of what was going on then.

Any questions come to mind at that point? (30:34)

AA: When you were doing the gardening at the camps, is there anything you want to say about where you learned to garden organically? Which books or people influenced you?

CC: My parents gardened a little bit in suburbia. And when we moved to the camp in upstate New York we had, one of our maintenance men was a former dairy farmhand, and they had a big vegetable garden out behind their house, and they taught us city slickers a little bit about gardening. But when I was at Cornell, I was an armchair gardener. I read about it, and my housemate went on to become, he's still a very successful farmer over in Vermont, he's the president of the New England Dairy Growers Association, and he had some experience growing. So we sort of knew what was going on. And I think like anyone else, you learn by hard knocks. You had basic principles, you start, "Okay, soil tests are low in P and K, we need to get some manure on here." The first year was really tough because we were breaking new ground and things weren't very good. We weren't in a situation where, like a farmer, the camp was going to go broke if my eggplant crop failed. It just meant we would not have eggplant parmesan. So it was a real seat-of-the-pants kind of experience in learning how to do that. I think it gave me a little bit of empathy later in my life, that this is hard work.

I read a lot, even at Cornell, even though the focus was more on chemically-oriented agriculture. There were still a lot of extension publications, the basics, "Here's how you grow vegetables, here's the timing that you should shoot for, here are the pests you need to watch out for, here's some solutions for those pests." I think I had a copy of the *Encyclopedia of Organic Gardening*. There was basic stuff like that. But it was not like you were looking for one person to show you everything to do. You were trying to figure it out on your own.

There was one of the camp directors, one of the people who was encouraging them to do this was a neighbor and his wife. He was a professor at the University of Rhode Island—I think he taught English or something—but they had a little farmhouse and they had a nice vegetable garden. So he sort of knew the local situation, he knew the right planting times and all that. So yeah, gardener to gardener, farmer to farmer, you just kind of figure out how to do it. Like I say,

we were not betting the farm on it. It was like, anything we got was gravy and “free produce.” Those were outside funded that funneled into the camping system, the food service. (33:55)

AA: Was that fairly typical for a United Methodist camp to have an organic garden, or was that only at a few camps?

CC: No, it was only at a few camps. That’s part of what I was doing. I developed some curriculum materials, I put publicity out about it around the country. In the process of doing that, we discovered a couple camps that did have kind of market gardens. And part of it was trying to involve—those that had them, that were doing that, it was a way to use that as educational programs, to raise people’s awareness. Already, even back then, we were talking about being separated, kids not knowing where their food comes from. So the idea was not just to have a garden supply some produce for the kitchen, but also to involve the kids in the planting, in the maintenance, in the harvest, to make a good, positive experience to learn more about where produce is coming from.

Strawberries were a good crop because kids like strawberries and they were ripe during camping season. We would do a lot with radishes because they could plant them, thin them, harvest them, basically on a three or four-week schedule, so you would get that. They could see one crop through from planting to harvest. They would do it sequentially, they wouldn’t be there for the whole month, they were just there for a week.

So no, it wasn’t typical, but it was something that the church was promoting. They thought it was good for people to know more about food systems, more about how their own lifestyles affect people around the world. I brought in the environmental aspect of it, that we needed to care for our creation, do a better job of being stewards of the environment, and part of that meant farming in more earth-friendly ways. (36:14)

AA: Go on.

CC: So I was there at the research center in that public services position during that ’84 season, when I quickly got scooped up by the *New Farm* magazine. A little bit of history before I arrived there was that the whole Rodale Press and all was founded by J. I. Rodale, and that was Bob Rodale’s father. And that, I believe, was like 1941 he bought an old rundown farm outside of Emmaus, where their main offices were, and that became known eventually as the old farm. And that was where, he wanted to test organic practices, and he had little demonstrations and all, and people pretty much thought he was kind of a kook, except for a small cult following through the ’60s. And in ’42 he founded *Organic Farming and Gardening* magazine, which went through several changes—I think sometime in the fifties became *Organic Gardening and Farming*.

But anyway, there was that magazine that was kind of J. I.’s place to promote healthy eating, healthy farming, healthy gardening. He died in ’71. Bob Rodale actually at a very early age was like managing—I think still in his teens or early twenties—worked as a managing editor for that magazine. But about 1979 they decided to spin off—J. I. had died in I think ’71, Bob had taken over things—’79 they spun off *The New Farm* magazine, realizing that farming and gardening are two different things. I hit on that a little with the camp garden. We weren’t going to lose our shirts if our eggplant crop failed. Two different audiences. And Bob wanted to reach farmers. So he needed a specialized publication to reach them. So it was a different audience.

At that point that magazine, which had spun off of *Organic Gardening*, was still part of the for-profit side of Rodale Press. Later on it got moved over to a nonprofit side—I'm jumping ahead here a little bit—became part of the nonprofit side. Actually, it almost went down, went under, and went to a newsletter. But those early years, anyway, from '79 before I arrived there, the editorial team, people on site, a fellow by the name of Steve Smyser and Dan Looker were very good editors. I did not know them personally. I read the publication some during my time at Cornell and the various things I was doing back then. But their contributing editors, one of the main movers and shakers of the magazine was Wendell Berry. He was one of their main writers. I don't think he was ever based in Emmaus, but he did it remotely from Kentucky, I believe. And Gene Logsdon, who is a famous writer, who came at it from *Farm Journal*, a journal for major mainstream farming publication. He was one of their writers from his farm in Ohio. He has always been a strong advocate for small farmers. And also a few of the bylines, a fellow by the name of Tom Gettings, who was the photo director for Rodale Press. And he comes back in the story later on.

That crew, there was a transition around 1981, and they sort of filtered out. And my main mentor and the person I came to work for, George DeVault, took over the reins of the magazine in 1981. And I hesitate to mention it because I don't know it for a fact. But I think Wendell and Bob had a little bit of a falling out. I think it had to do over horses. I think Wendell's vision for agriculture was firmly entrenched in small farms, an idealistic, romantic view of horse farming and the like. And Bob—I surmise this because later on, several years later, Bob wrote a piece that appeared in the magazine about how we don't want the horse to be the symbol of sustainable farming. Yes, there are great things about horses. They're powered by the green energy captured by the crops on the farm, and they're not as, ecologically they don't leave the same kind of footprints that a big tractor does in a field, and the like.

But he traced things all the way back to Jethro Tull, the English agronomist who invented rowcropping, basically, and said that horses first became popular because they made row cropping possible. You could pull implements through the field and you could do the sort of tillage that destroyed soil. And that basically we needed to find new ways to farm, and horses weren't the way to do it. I don't think he ever said it, but I would add to it, too, I was a fan of horse farming. I always dreamed of having my own draft horses. But if you're trying to get credibility to sustainable farming, holding up horses as the ultimate source of power for your farm was only going to make it with a small group of people. I still have friends locally who farm with horses, and I love them, and I wish I was doing the same thing right now, there's a nice thing about it. But that didn't fly.

So anyway, George took over in 1981. And the magazine really was trying to target farmers of all types. One of the main things that they did back then was they did a soil test series. For many years they did editorials where they basically sent out soil tests to a whole bunch of different labs, and what they learned was the labs did the chemical analysis of the soils fairly consistently. They could tell you what was in the soil. But then they would come back with a whole wide, wide range of fertilizer recommendations. And that was kind of scandalous, then pointing out that, well, if you're relying on your fertilizer dealer to tell you how much fertilizer to put on your fields, that's probably not the person with the most objective advice since they have a conflict of interest there. So that was one of the big things during those early years that George took over. (43:57)

'82, before I arrived on the scene, was the first time I found—I'm going back and flipping through the magazines—that Bob wrote a guest editorial that used the term

“regenerative agriculture.” And he did not like the term—at that point, I think it was still a little premature, but they had the low-input sustainable agriculture, the LISA term coming around. He didn’t like that idea. Didn’t like “sustainable” because he did not want people—if our present system isn’t all that hot, why would you want to sustain it? Sustainable, he had a bit of a marketing side to it. Sustainable is just kind of blah. Sustainable. And he wanted to shoot much higher. He thought our farming systems should not just sustain what we have, but improve what we have, that they should regenerate soil, they should regenerate our rural communities that are in decline, they should regenerate our personal health because we’re eating better foods and the like, and that that was a better term to use moving forward than just sustainable.

He also—I don’t he actually used these words—regenerative was also aspirational. Very similar to health. You never achieve health. I mean, you always strive for ways to be healthier. You look for ways to improve your health. If you’re really unhealthy, you try to get better. If you’re pretty healthy, you try to get to peak performance, but you’re always trying to move along a spectrum from really unhealthy and near death to functioning pretty well. So it was always a spectrum. As opposed to, even at that point, organic. Organic, which implies a set of standards which you either achieve or you don’t. It’s black and white. You’re either organic or you’re not. If you’re not organic, it’s illegal for you to sell your products in the organic market. If you are organic, you can sell your products in the organic market.

I think even back then we recognized that some of the early organic standards, even though they required a farm plan and the like, that some organic farmers were motivated more by money and weren’t necessarily buying into the whole regenerative aspect and trying to do the best they can to develop a farm plan and farming system on their farm that was improving the health. They were more tied into, “How am I going to get enough product to sell that I can put the organic stamp on?” Not the majority; the majority are motivated by other things. Bob, I think, saw the problems of the black and white and saw more of a spectrum, and let’s work towards improving that. So that was the first, in those early days, the first recognition of the regenerative banner.

And I think that also opened things up, we’re not preaching to the choir and working more with conventional farmers. If everyone was able to farm organically and went out and did it right away, the bottom would drop out of the organic market. But still, we don’t want to ignore the people that aren’t farming organically. We want to bring them into the fold, too. It was almost, if you want to put it in religious terms, it was almost the gospel. It’s for everybody! We want everyone to be able to do this. We want them to become more regenerative whether or not they ever plan to be organic or not. So that is sort of where we were early in *The New Farm*. (48:06)

I remember one time—it’s funny, I couldn’t find this letter to the editor. I remember in our publishing policies early on, when I was just an entry-level editor with the magazine, we had a farmer write in that he was growing sunflowers, and he had to combine them, and conventionally-grown sunflowers still have a lot of green material, a lot of leaves and all on them, and they’re tough to get through a combine. So usually what you do is you fly on paraquat or some other burndown herbicide to dry them down and make them easier to combine. He was wondering, “Well, what should I do? I don’t want to spray paraquat. Do I have any alternatives?” And our research director at that time was a fellow by the name of Bill Liebhardt, was a fertilizer guy background. Went on to UC-Davis to become their first head of sustainable farming at UC-Davis, University of California system. He said, “Well, you know what you could do, you could take liquid nitrogen fertilizer and fly that on. And that would burn those leaves right down, and

it's not a ton of nitrogen, it would be like a starter fertilizer application. And that would certainly have fewer environmental or health concerns than flying on the paraquat." So we had to go to Bob Rodale to get permission to do that, because we had never really written or recommended a practice that wasn't organic. Bob said, "Sure, liquid nitrogen sure beats paraquat. That is an improvement on that spectrum." So that was the straw that broke the camel's back, the floodwaters came out. From that time on we were able to write about how farmers were making improvements even if they weren't strictly organic, but they were working in that direction. That was sort of an apocryphal story there. (50:08)

During that early time when I was there at Rodale, working under George DeVault, honing my editorial shots, I mentioned that there was that quest for credibility. One of the things that happened early on was the USDA put a soil scientist at the Rodale research center. USDA said, "What you're doing in that conversion study is really important, and we want to figure out what's going on with the soils there." So Jerry Radke, who's the scientist, he's going to be our head there. I know I got to be friends with a fellow by the name of John Doran, who was a soil scientist with the USDA out of Nebraska. And he came and did all sorts of soil health analysis for those plots there. And he started tracking what changes were going on in the soil. Another Nebraska agronomist, Chuck Francis. He came and worked at the research center for several years in agronomy and also hoping to develop an international program. The Institute was not only doing research there, but also was getting people out into—they started in Tanzania. The government of Tanzania wanted to know what was going on, how these practices could help them in their country.

I remember we had an international program director by the name of Mike Sands. And one of the things he always said to me, I said, "In our magazine we can report on what you're doing, but it's not like we can really sell magazines to farmers from Tanzania about what farming practices they should do there. The conditions are a little different than what we face here." And he was like, "I don't care. Every time I go over there, I pack a box full of magazines to hand out to farmers. And just the fact that they can see American farmers are looking for solutions that are regenerative will have a big influence. So keep doing what you're doing on the US front, and we can go from there."

At that point there was still a lot of sparring in the industry. The industry, I think, felt threatened in a way. Our vision of an agriculture that relied less on purchased inputs did not sit very well with them. We found more partners in universities, a few private ag consultants and the like. But not much from industry at that point. A big focus—again, at this time and from here on out—is looking for how do we take this theory, this vision of a better way of farming, and make it more practical? And one of the first projects I worked on was called the *Farmer's Fertilizer Handbook*. Which basically—okay, we criticized the fertilizer industry for over-recommending fertilizers that had economic and environmental detriments to farmers. This book helped the farmers get the information they needed to make their own fertilizer recommendations, to credit their manure applications, to credit their cover crop and legume plowdowns and the like, and come up with a rate that is profitable and more environmentally sound. And that was more or less what we did for the next ten years, the next ten years as long as *New Farm* was going. (54:07)

I know in working for George one of the things that we found from our reader surveys was that our readers were driven by, motivated by money, by staying profitable, and it's like almost every title or subhead or cover blurb or whatever always had a dollar sign in it. We evolved a little bit from that later on. But there was a time there too where there was a farm crisis

and consolidation of farming, people were trying to make their farms—they were still relatively small—profitable enough to keep them alive and maybe pass them on to children, whatever. And they were motivated, a big motivation of the readership of the magazine was to save money. Let's be frugal.

1986 was like the first, one of the things we did is we started, even though we had collaborations with USDA and the land grant universities going on, there was also a focus on farmers as the center of information flow. We did a series of what we called “Take Charge” workshops during the winter, started with three. We did three across Ohio, Illinois, and Wisconsin in 1986 where basically we took our show on the road. Did slide presentations and talked about the fertilizer aspects. We usually had a farmer from the local area who was a leading sustainable farmer, and we would give them a chance to keynote, share about their farming operation. It was an attempt to sort of bring farmers together. I can remember starting early on, I had farmers confess to me, “I'm the only one in my county that does anything like this and everybody thinks I'm crazy.” This was a chance that people could all get together in the same room. And we did have stories at a couple of workshops that people saw their neighbors there that they had been keeping it secret that they were doing stuff. “You read the *New Farm*?”

Building that community amongst farmers. We had something called FONE, the Farmers' Own Network for Extension, where we tried to get farmers to fill out a survey detailing their farming operations, which gave us fodder for good stories, but also sharing their names with local groups they were trying to form. Like we founded NOFA-New York in New York, founding those groups in the Midwest, trying to enable them to bring farmers together to build local solutions.

We had a flagship farm. I got to be very good friends with Dick and Sharon Thompson, who had a farm in Boone, Iowa, just a few miles down the road from Ames, Iowa State University. And they were the premier farmers as far as developing alternative farming practices, ridge tillage in particular. They also raised hogs and beef cattle. But also, Dick and Sharon developed methods for actually doing randomized and replicated research on farms. Because they also had this quest for credibility. Everybody in Iowa thought they were kooks, that they were just religious cultists. In fact, they did farming systems that were very profitable and environmentally sound. (58:05)

Also in 1986—going back to Bob, Bob Rodale—probably the quintessential article he wrote about regenerative farming appeared in 1986. I was just hurrying to finish up my homework this morning, flipping through the last couple issues of *The New Farm*. Last couple issues of *The New Farm* we reprised this piece. “Your Farm Is Worth More Than Ever.” It first appeared in '86. This is where he really detailed what he meant by regenerative farming. And I covered some of this a little earlier. Wanting to regenerate farms, communities, and ecosystems, not just sustain them. Looking for information intensive farms, where people apply knowledge—and you know, that was part of our goal, was to apply the knowledge. But he made a distinction, there's this big two-sided chart of external versus internal farm inputs, and how regeneration was all about looking at how you could rely more on the internal resources of your farm and less on the external resources that you had to bring in from outside. And that's just a very, very clear statement of what he's looking for, what his vision is. It's not necessarily black and white. More of the internal and less of the external.

Conventional farms—bare soil much of the year. Not gathering as much of the sun's energy as possible. A regenerative farm relies on the internal resources, keeps the soil covered with photosynthesizing cover crops or pastures or whatever. Water, external irrigation. On a

regenerative farm you work practices in the soil that retain water instead of letting it run off. Helps survive drought. And when there's too much water, it still drains off. So they focus on soil health, internal resources of the farm. Detailed that with minerals and nitrogen and pest and weed control, energy. Seeds. Seed was one where I didn't always agree with Bob. Seed I disagreed with. He thought a regenerative farmer would grow a lot of their own seed, harvest their seed and use it. And I said farmers didn't have any time to do that. But what they would do is focus their time on matching the correct genetics of their seeds to their farming system. I remember writing an article at that time about choosing corn varieties for organic systems. Some varieties that use corn over a longer part of the growing season are better-suited, workhorse varieties that do that, better suited for organic systems or regenerative systems than other varieties which want a big shot of nitrogen early on in the season. (1:01:15)

The last one he said in there was management decisions. The internal resource for management decisions is, they're focused in the head of the farmer, the farm family. And we've seen it all too often that much of the management had been off-farm, had gone to the fertilizer dealers, the market consultants, and the like. And his idea was to educate the farmers and bring them in so that they were taking charge of their farm, farming in more environmentally sound ways. Or regenerative ways.

And, of course, his goal was even bigger than that. He thought farmers would lead a transformation of society, that because farmers ran their businesses so close to nature and could see the impacts of what they do on their farm and in the ecosystems around their communities, they would be the first ones to know that we needed to live within the capacity of nature to supply us with resources and to absorb our wastes. And they would lead the world and find a new relationship with the planet.

Anything else spark your mind here? Got another transition before we move on. (1:02:58)

AA: With the readership of *New Farm* magazine, where would you say they were mostly located geographically? Was it evenly distributed over the country, or were there more in certain regions?

CC: No. This comes in, I may repeat myself later on. At the time, we're moving into the time now where I'm going to transition into being the head of *The New Farm*, it would have been the early, mid-'90s. And our readership base—I won't say all—but our readership base was in the Midwest. Most of them were grain and livestock farmers. A majority. But also high-value farmers as well. We've always had that tension between—when I say Midwest, there's also Corn Belt and livestock production areas that come into Pennsylvania and New York and cross into the Plains, and north and south some. But then also people who were growing fruits and vegetables, high-value crops in those areas as well. Usually smaller operations. But our focus, our base was the Midwest corn, bean, livestock, forage group. The ones who were trying to do things, who were trying to break away and do things a little different. Some who had never bought into the conventional routine. That was basically where we were centered.

'88. 1988 was a big year for me because our kids were getting a little older, and my wife, they were old enough that she'd gone back to work parttime, working for an OBGYN. And she was ready, willing, and able to go ahead and take the next step and become a certified nurse practitioner midwife. And she decided that the best program was at the University of Minnesota. So we picked up, moved to Minnesota, and she worked on that degree. I had originally proposed that maybe I could work remotely. That was kind of a weird thing to do back in the day,

telecommute, work remotely, it was not a thing. I got my going away present and moved to Minnesota, and I actually took a job out there. There was a group called the Land Stewardship Project, we got to be good friends with their founder, Ron Kroese. They're still going strong as far as I know. He was the founder of that project. And they had a cooperative project going with a camp and conference center for the Wilder Foundation outside of the Twin Cities that had a demonstration farm where Dick and Sharon Thompson were on the advisory board for their demonstration farm. And they were trying to do education programs centered around the farm. And they had kids and youth groups touring the farm, so they hired me as kind of their outreach coordinator. Kind of coupled with what I did at the research center, at the Methodist camps, and *The New Farm*, and all that.

I started that job in January of '88, and within a few months *The New Farm* came back and said, "You know, maybe we were a little quick about that. Why don't you work remotely for us? I think we could do that." So I ended up cutting back to just quarter-time with the Wilder forest, Land Stewardship Project, and ended up working three-quarter time with *New Farm*—our kids were elementary school age at that time—while still getting the kids off to school. The nice part about that, though, the whole thing, was that I was good friends and worked closely with the people in the Land Stewardship Project. I was out there in the Midwest. I was right there with all of our people. You segued nicely into this part. I was in the base, the primary readership out there. So that was a really, really good thing for me to really have that base and that feel for the Midwest. (1:07:22)

You know, I visited, I'd been out there visiting farmers as a junior editor, but now as a contributing editor, being based out there, this was now my home. Of course, it was only my home for a couple of years. It was just a really great time out there. Getting involved with the local farming groups, going to their conferences and their field days, and writing articles about their farmers and the like. Then my wife finished up her midwifery program. We thought about—it was about two years, about 1990—well, what's our next move? And one option would be to stay there. We really liked it. We lived in Stillwater, Minnesota, beautiful, beautiful place. Good people, good friends. But our families were back here in the Northeast. And our kids were growing up, and people were not really happy with us when we moved to Minnesota with the kids so young.

So we came back. And we moved to Cortland, New York, which is just one county east of us here in Ithaca now, with the idea that it's close to Cornell, it's close to our families. She also knew, she basically had applied, it was a job opening with a midwifery practice that worked under the tutelage of several doctors. And the woman who was the midwife, the main midwife for that, her husband was Robert Perry, who was a local organic farmer, who I worked with back in the NOFA days, organizing NOFA-New York, and continued to have a relationship with. He not only farmed, but also worked as an inspector and a board member and the like for NOFA-New York over the last twenty, twenty-five years.

So I'm back in Cortland, I'm still working for the magazine as a remote contributing editor. This was 1990, Bob Rodale wrote another guest editorial. He wasn't like hands-on with the magazine, he kind of kept track of what was going on. He read everything we wrote. But it was just like, you guys do what you do, and do a good job, and occasionally I will come to you and say, "I want to write something," and give me some space. And heck, you're the boss, you write such good stuff, of course we'd do that. But he wrote a piece called, "A brighter farming future," where he made the bold prediction that what's now thought of as alternative would be conventional by 1993. Bob was nothing if not optimistic. But he said, "Farmers and consumers

are really driving the whole move to regenerative farming. Government and industry is a little slow on the uptake; they're not doing a whole lot."

At the time the Berlin Wall fell, everything was transforming quickly, things were really happening fast. And there was a survey of consumers where they actually said, "Organic foods are better." They didn't say how much more they would be willing to pay, but they knew the right answer, that organic foods are good, so that was a positive thing. I think the first organic standards came around 1989. It was the 1985 Farm Bill, most of it you can probably track better from other people in policy. 1985 Farm Bill set up the low-input sustainable agriculture program, now the SARE program, for doing on-farm research and regenerative research. National Academy of Sciences came out with an alternative ag report that said, "These systems work." Garth Youngberg—I don't know if Garth is still around. He's somebody you should definitely survey. He was the USDA organic farming coordinator that kind of snuck in under the radar and I think was finally moved on to start the Institute for Alternative Agriculture, later the Wallace Foundation. But they legitimized doing organic research within the USDA and the like.

So things were really looking up. I'm riding a high from having been out in the Midwest, and now working out of my attic, and the magazine's doing well. Bob was starting, he wanted to reach out after the Berlin Wall fell and start a farming magazine in Russia, because Russian agriculture really sucked. It was all the things that were wrong with our agriculture, multiplied. It was just horrible. So Bob being ahead of the game thought, we can go in there, and we can share what we know and help encourage new farming in that part of the world. And in September of 1990, after finalizing the agreement to do *Novii Fermer*, our Russian magazine, on the way back to the airport, he died in an auto accident. So that was like, so much for our everything will be hunky-dory by '93. That was kind of a big, huge letdown.

About that time—needless to say, we all mourned, but we said, "Okay, we've got still a lot of work to do." We picked ourselves up and kept moving on. George DeVault, who was my mentor at *The New Farm*, moved over and took over *Novii Fermer*, the Russian magazine, took over that project and other special products. And at that time I moved up to become the editorial director. So I was actually running the magazine from Cortland, traveling down once a week to supervise the staff down there. But I didn't need to supervise them; I had the best team in the world. They were all very, very motivated people. We were all going to save the world despite Bob's death and figure out how to finish up. Maybe we wouldn't get it all done by 1993, but we would continue the legacy and continue helping farmers move in that direction. (1:14:01)

We had a mission statement on our magazine, and so for the next five years, from '90 until the magazine went out of business in '95, we were going to "put people, profit, and biological permanence back into farming by giving farmers the information they need to take charge of their farms and their futures." So for the next five years that's basically what we did. Our readers—you jumped ahead there a little bit on them being, the focus being on the Midwest. One of the things that was really great about the magazine was that magazines always do surveys for their advertisers, because advertisers want to know what the demographics are of your farmers, where they're located, the size of their operations, etc., etc. So that gave us great information about what to write. And they would let us, the advertising folks would let us sneak in a couple questions every now and again about who the readers are so that we could do a better job of writing about them.

As I've alluded to before, when we surveyed them, consistently the number one reason for their motivations to change their farming system was to increase their profits. It's been a long time, so I don't recall the numbers, but I think that was 75, 80, 90 percent. It was very, very high.

They could check multiple boxes, and the next two—always over half, I think between half and three-quarters—was they wanted to protect the environment and for their personal health and safety. Very, very few farmers like working with chemicals. If you can show them a way they can do it without, they're all for it. But it wasn't their primary reason. Their primary reason was they wanted to stay in business. And then I think it was usually less than half—and this was news to most people—is to tap organic markets. Most of the time back in the '90s, '95, the organic markets were still coming on and not as secure. Even now they're a little tenuous, but back then it was really a headache to market organic products. So a lot of the people in our audience that we would visit and feature would be folks who probably could have gotten certified organic but didn't because they just wanted to grow crops and livestock. They didn't necessarily want to go through the hassles of the marketing.

One of the things I heard a lot from farmers that they liked about this kind of farming—this goes back to that internal resource of management—made farming more fun for them. Farming for many had gotten to be like, I just call up the fertilizer dealer, they put the fertilizer on, I plant the crops, I spray the crops, and there's not much to it. They felt like having goals for this sort of a farming system really made them matter more. So they were really, really happy for that. (1:17:22)

During this time, local groups were taking off. I did a few speaking—as an editorial director, I'm not used to being in the center of things at all, but I did a few speaking engagements. Had a friend who was the director of ATTRA, I think I did their ten-year anniversary or something, and local farming groups and the like. But things were taking off. The local groups, where there had been no groups across the Midwest, there were a bunch of strong groups now. Dick and Sharon Thompson, who I worked with in Iowa, there was this huge Practical Farmers of Iowa founded. I looked them up now, and they have a huge staff. My gosh, things have really taken off.

We faced some problems. It was hard to be a national magazine that one of our main messages was, “You need to find local solutions.” With conventional farming, your recommendations can work over a broad, broad range of climates and ecosystems. Where our recommendations are, “You need to figure out not only what works in your state, your county, and your farm, but field by field.” So it was hard to do that, you're trying to funnel good ideas, but none of the ideas you give people are pat answers. You're almost as much communicating your process of how to utilize your farm, how to change your farm, and providing examples, and all the time telling people, “Your mileage may vary. You need to adapt these practices, not adopt them.” So we saw ourselves as sort of a national hub, with these local groups growing and very, very important, and people continuing that farmer-to-farmer interaction of sharing ideas.

Also—I'll give this a little bit as we wind down—it was a very tough editorial environment to grow a magazine. Our magazine circulation was generally around 50,000 at that time. Sometimes we'd go up a little bit, sometimes down a little bit. But it was hard to grow the numbers. Back then, you grew magazines by sending junk mail. By doing direct mail campaigns. And it was hard to find lists of farmers that you could mail to that would be profitable. Because still the vast majority of people wanted nothing to do with you. But how could you identify the farmers that were innovative, wanted to make changes? You couldn't do it. So it was very, very difficult to grow the numbers. Once we hooked a reader, the statistics were out of this world. They saved their magazines forever. Magazines are disposable; most people read them and throw them away. They had them on their bookshelf. They would share them with other people. It was, what are your information sources for changing the way that you farm? Number one was always

the magazine. Number two was always, “My neighbor” and other farmers. Number three would be the extension folks. So they didn’t write off the extension, but it was never, they weren’t the top source. It was their own ideas, other farmers, our magazine.

Also, I was good friends with our ad director. Our editorial message was, “Spend less, make more.” He was trying to sell ads hitting, putting out advertisements so that people are going to buy stuff, and we’re telling them, “Whoa, not so fast, don’t buy stuff, unless you really, really need it, unless you can prove that it’s going to make a profit.” It was not necessarily the best advertising environment to make a lot of money. Plus, we didn’t take any money from pesticides, herbicides, and the like. So economically, we weren’t rolling in the dough. We always had a skeleton staff. There were always more stories we wanted to do than we had time and paper to afford. So those were some of the problems we faced. (1:22:06)

In those years, what were some of the things we did? This was when we were in our prime here. We did a lot on soil health and soils. Healthy soil, healthy crops, healthy people. A guy I visited with when I was out in the northern Plains, out in Minnesota, over in North Dakota, Fred Kirschenmann, who later was the director of the Leopold Center at Iowa State University, pioneering organic farmer, telling us that the condition of soil is as important as its fertility. Just about everybody we focused in our articles had a focus on soil. And we were kind of obsessive about everything contributing to including soil.

In our coverage we sought to find a balance between the high-value crops and the grain and the livestock people. And when George DeVault was the editor, he was bigger on the high-value crops. He thought that was the future. And he focused on them more. When I came back in, I focused more on the grain and livestock. Not to the exclusion—we still knew we had a bifurcated reading group, bifurcated readership, so we needed to meet the needs of both. So we tried to balance that. We did, our coverage, we did a lot on technology.

And weed control. A lot on improved cultivator technology. Some steering guidance systems for cultivators, new weed control tools. We wrote a book, it was called *Steel in the Field*. I forgot the names of some of the publications. But we produced a book on weed control, because that was almost always one of the top needs of our farmers, how to control weeds with fewer chemicals. Yeah, that was the name of it, *Controlling Weeds with Fewer Chemicals*. I think *Steel in the Field* came later as a joint project with SARE that we might have worked on. We worked on changing our language when it came to weed control. People hate weeds very emotionally. There’s a lot of warfare, battling weeds, and the like. And we changed our approach to like, “Let’s manage them, let’s coexist, let’s not annihilate, nuke, etc. in controlling weeds.”

Cover cropping. We were the only people covering cover cropping. And we had several publications, and in fact worked with SARE on several cover crop books, and still *the* cover crop reference book is probably, I think, the third edition of the one that we worked on with SARE. Rotational grazing was big and met all the needs of regenerative farming. Kept the ground covered, more profitable, less energy burned. We covered all the species of grasses, and seeders and fencing and renovating and the like. We used rotational grazing to compare with bovine growth hormone and how rotational grazing beat the heck out of bovine growth hormones as far as profitability and the like goes. (1:25:39)

We also had the tensions between farm size. I know one of the articles I won an award for from the Conservation Technology Information Center, which was a group promoting no-till farming primarily. I wrote an article about Wisconsin farmers, Charlie Opitz, who happened to have a pasture-based dairy and happened to be one of the three biggest farms in Wisconsin. He was milking I think over a thousand cows, if I recall correctly. They were looking for articles

about no-till farmers, but I submitted an article about how this guy was protecting fragile farmland. And not only that, it wasn't just a technology that was meant for small farmers, but it was adaptable by someone as brilliant as Charlie to a farm where they're milking a thousand cows.

We featured a lot, for our livestock growers, we also featured a lot on direct marketing for meat. There was lots going on in that area, direct marketing and cooperatives going on, so that if people were certified or doing something different, they didn't necessarily have to send their meat through conventional channels. They might get some premiums. Did a lot—again, going back to the fertilizer lab story, our fertilizer handbook—did a lot on finetuning fertilizer management. Articles on side-dressing liquid manure, broadly on soil health. We did coverage on agroforestry, there was a lot of that going on. Bob Rodale, before he died, at the old farm, where his residence still was and there was still some farmland, he was developing that into an agroforestry center. He thought trees were the future, and he did coverage of alley cropping, how to graze in the woods without destroying it. It's kind of controversial. Mushroom production. Other ways that you could make the most of your farm woodlot and the like.

From the early years of the magazine we brought back Gene Logsdon from his farm in Ohio, the contrary farmer. And Gene actually, when I took over the magazine, he made a point to come out and visit us, because we were all very young staff, all in our thirties, and he was kind of the old guy to give us some perspective. And he came in and just gave us a pep talk about how we were so fortunate to have had this treasure passed along to us, that we'd better not screw up. And we said, "Great, will you write for us? Because we really could use your voice. We could use the voice of somebody out there who's contrary, controversial, and brings a perspective that we don't have because we're young." And so we used him to cover a lot of controversial topics that maybe there were two sides that needed arguing that we didn't want to be dogmatic about.

And some of those had to do—I just mentioned Charlie Opitz, farm size. I always kind of argued as a devil's advocate, I don't care how big the farms are as long as they're farmed more regeneratively. We have big farmers out there, we shouldn't ignore them, we should come up with solutions, with things they can do on several thousand acres, not just what works on a hundred acres. And he tackled that in an article about herbicides, and what's wrong with herbicides. At that point we were quickly moving to all the no-till systems, drilled beans with Roundup Ready crops and the like. And back then everybody thought Roundup was like pretty pure, not very harmful at all. And his main argument was, "The problem with herbicides is they'll let one person farm too many acres." And that that was the huge detriment to chemicals, that if you had systems that didn't rely on no-till soybeans and Roundup, you would need more farmers, you would have more flourishing rural communities, you'd have all these other benefits as well.

But we would use him to float that, and then we'd get a ton of letters. And we also used him when—what were some of the other examples here?—animal rights. The animal rights folks are gonna stop the way you farm. And he wrote an article saying, "Nah, the animal rights folks, if they have their way, they'll put the big farmers out of business and you midsized family farmers can fill the niche for humanely produced livestock." Good counterpoints. A ton of letters. That's what drives, getting people talking about controversy, that's what drives interest in magazines. And what we do as editors, we follow up with all the livestock production information that helps small farmers compete and tap into alternative markets. Pastured pork. A lot of farmers bringing back old-fashioned A-frame farrowing huts on pastures. Newfangled Swedish farrowing systems using basically what we call now high tunnels, kind of bulked up a

little bit with straw bedding and the like. All these really great production systems that would probably be hard if you were a megafarm, but if you were a family-sized farm, great, inexpensive way of humanely raising animals.

We added a veterinarian as a columnist. So every issue we had—that was one of the concerns with organics. “Oh, with organic dairies, they’re going to withhold antibiotics so they don’t lose their certifications. That’s really cruel.” It’s like, no, let’s get a vet on staff here. Well, he wasn’t on staff. But let’s make sure that we’ve got somebody who’s going to deal with the animal health issues. We also featured things like how to handle livestock. Temple Grandin—I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of her, an autistic woman, I think she’s at Oklahoma State—but anyway, expert on how to handle animals. And several other people, and do that in many ways. Farming for wildlife, making room for wildlife on your farm. Again, back to the old, natural farming’s good for the entire ecosystem, let’s figure out how to do that. We were kind of not really fond of, “Let’s solve the farm crisis and get rid of the corn surplus by turning it into ethanol or plastics and the like.” We spoke out against that. Maybe we should grow less corn, have more complex rotations.

During this time another blast from the past, Tom Gettings, the Rodale Press photo director. He was involved with the magazine early on, back in the late ’70s and early ’80s. He helped out with the magazine right along, but we brought him on board. He would bootleg time to travel with me to the Midwest. Now usually, in two or three weeks over the summer, I would book travel to farmers, and he would come along, he would take his vacation time to come along and shoot pictures, because he was so fascinated with the farmers and their stories. Made it his personal goal to portray them well. I’m an okay photographer, but sometimes alternative farming magazines have fuzzy images, cracked images, back in the day. And he really upped our graphic scheme. And we really portrayed the farmers and their families in a way that really told their stories and did them justice. (1:34:16)

We started doing more and shorter articles. We never got over the, we want a bigger magazine, we want more pages, that was just too expensive. But we stopped writing real, real long articles and did more. There was more to cover, there were more good ideas, there was more sharing going on, so we were able to reflect people’s lack of—even back then, even before the real internet age—people’s shorter attention spans, especially farmers with all they have going on. We’re just quick hitters, short ideas. Try this; here’s what somebody else is doing. Without feeling like we had to lead them down the farm gate and tell them the whole history of a particular farm. We featured women farmers. We featured Black farmers. And we featured gay farmers. Nobody knew it at the time. But we stressed diversity. We stressed new ideas. We didn’t want to toe, we didn’t want business as usual. Who knows where that would have gone if we hadn’t had to wrap things up. (1:35:31)

I’m about to the point of what happened to *The New Farm* and on to Cornell, which is much shorter than what we’ve covered so far. I know you allowed two hours. Is it an hour and a half already? So is there anything from that ’90 to ’95 period, any questions that were on your mind? To me that was kind of a golden age. I was really riding high. I’m really, Bob died, we carried on, things were going well. All sorts of things outside—that’s just what we were doing. What was really great about it was, other people were doing stuff in the local groups. The USDA was doing stuff. There were all sorts of things going on, and you couldn’t keep up with them all. It’s kind of a blur. I’m glad I had the magazines to go back to to refresh my memory about some of the things we did. A vet writing a column? That’s right, we did. That’s right. We brought him

on, because we thought that animals needed to be treated in healthy ways. There was lots of information about what vets can do.

1995. The last issue of *The New Farm* came out in May/June 1995. After Christmas we had a big meeting down at our offices. I came down from Cortland. It was an all-staff meeting. I had caught drift that some people worried that something might be up. We all came into a room, and they said, “Well, *The New Farm*’s going to cease publication.” And we were all [shocked]. And our advertising staff, they were immediately let go. They cleaned up their desks and left. The editorial staff, they kept us on to continue to finish up these magazines. So we had a little bit longer transition, it was civil. The reasons given for ending the publication were what we called the “three P’s.” I alluded a little bit earlier to the economics of magazine publishing. The costs of printing, and paper, and postage continued to go up.

We had—I skipped over this, too. *The New Farm* almost went from a magazine to a newsletter back in, I want to say ’81 or something like that. And what they did is they shifted it from the for-profit Rodale Press to the nonprofit, I think then it was called the Soil and Health Society, which later became the Regenerative Agriculture Association, which later became the Rodale Institute. So the idea was that it would be picked up as part of the nonprofit, which also included the research center, the Rodale research center, Rodale Institute research center later on, in Kutztown. And also the international programs that evolved, that also came under that umbrella as well. So these were mission-driven, nonprofit things. The magazine was part of the nonprofit. It served the mission of regenerative agriculture, I’ll just call it the Rodale Institute because that’s what it eventually became, the Rodale Institute.

Through 1990—well, pretty much right along—the magazine never was profitable. Part of it gets back to that advertising environment. It was mission-driven. Bob Rodale, up until his death, would always say—you know, we worried, “Oh, no, we’re losing \$50,000 on a million-dollar budget, what’s our future going to be like?”—he’d be like, “Oh, that’s a cheap price to pay for all the mission you’re achieving.” For Mike Sands to be able to go to Tanzania and hold up that magazine, for the USDA to—one of the reasons they are sending folks to collaborate with us is because they know that we will get the word out to farmers through our publications. We have collaborative relationships, we went on to have collaborative relationships with the SARE program. “That little bit of a loss, well worth it. In the grand scheme of things, that’s just pocket money. We’re not really worried about that. You guys just keep on doing what you’re doing. That would be great.”

After his death, his children took over the company. His widow and children took over the company. And they were supportive for a while, but they had their own things to do. So there was a shift in program emphasis. They just, the magazine did not fit in with what they were wanting to do. We editors thought, “There’s still a lot of work to do, man. We’re not ready to hang it up.” And we made proposals that, let’s, okay, if printing, paper, and postage are expensive, let’s do things like cut back to a newsletter with no advertising, just a spare budget, just a couple of us editors, two or three of us, just so we can maintain the communication. Let’s do an e-newsletter. This was the very, very early days of electronic communications. And nobody would buy on that because our farmers—I think the last survey we did our farmers had a greater penetration of computers than the general public—but like only three percent had internet access at that time. So doing an electronic newsletter, I would argue that probably we would have been able to reach all of our land grant partners, graduate students, educators, extension offices, and a few farmers, and farmers that mattered because they’re on the internet. But that didn’t fly, either.

We, three of us—myself, Greg Bowman, who’s our managing editor, and Chris Shirley, who’s one of our associate editors—we formed a little group, and we came up with business plans for rekindling a new publication. And we came up with, the business plan was okay, but it was just tough to find funding. Garth Youngberg at that point, he had been the USDA organic farming coordinator, at that point I think he had moved on to the Wallace Foundation. Henry Wallace’s, I think daughter was the head of that. And she kicked a little money our ways to help us with that business plan, help try to find what to do. Not a lot. Not enough for any of us to live on. But a few thousand here. And I, if anybody’s interested, they should go back and read the last editorial from the May/June magazine that I wrote, which really sums up the history and the impact of the magazine. If we weren’t running out of time, I’d threaten to read it to you now. But it’s worth reading about what the magazine achieved in that short period of time. And that issue also included a lot of positive feedback from farmers that we had featured and a look ahead as to what would happen in the future. Where is farming headed? And many people confident that things were on the right track.

It was an economist from Missouri, I think, that we featured. I forgot his name now. He said, “The US agriculture in the short run is not going to become sustainable, nothing’s going to change, nothing’s going to happen until resources get so scare that mainstream farmers are forced to make changes.” Maybe higher energy prices, and I think the other thing he cited is phosphate, shortage of phosphate and energy prices. When they skyrocket, that’s when farmers will get serious about the things you guys have been pioneering. And Gene Logsdon, our contrary farmer, also said, “Nope. Nothing’s going to happen until people realize that small farmers are the backbone, that we need to go back to that.” (1:44:25)

I also worked parttime. There was a pasture association here in New York, and they had a little newsletter, and I continued my grazing interest writing about pastures, pasture technology for a smaller group here. I went to work for NOFA-New York for a brief time. This was a time when the organic market, the market for organic foods, was growing. And dairy was jumping in. So there was a huge influx of dairy farms who wanted to be certified organic so that they could market their milk organically. And I was hired to coordinate that program. And I did that, probably just for a year or so. I did not like the role. One of our marketing catchphrases for the magazine toward the end was, “Farmers are heroes. I worship farmers.” And now I’m suddenly in the position of telling farmers, “If you don’t get those calves tagged, we’re going to have to yank your certification, and your farm will probably go under.” And I didn’t fit the tough love policeman role. So I didn’t do that for very long.

And then, towards the end of ’99—so there’s three or four years there, we’re all sort of in limbo. Nothing really moved. There was no grand rebirth of the magazine, and no strong way forward. I had actually gone back to SUNY-Cortland to get my teaching certification. I was going to go back and teach high school biology and coach basketball. That was my dream for a few years. I played at Syracuse when I was in college, I thought, “I still like basketball. Our kids play. I could do that.” But also during that time, too, we collaborated, Chris Shirley, Greg Bowman and I, with SARE on the cover crop book, the *Steel in the Field* book, and the like. So we still had our fingers in it. But it became obvious nothing was really going to come. We weren’t going to re-launch the magazine.

But in 1999 my wife had left, she had done midwifery all through the ’90s. It’s a stressful, she delivered more than a thousand babies, it’s hard on her body, she had a bad back. So she actually transferred and got a doctorate in information science. And she came to work at Cornell doing info tech work. And we moved closer, we moved over from Cortland County, one

county over to Ithaca, where we live now, about five miles outside of town. And that that point I started, our kids were older, they didn't need supervision, and I figured I could commit to a job. One kid in college, the other in high school. And there were several jobs open up at Cornell. One doing communications for the Cornell Small Farms Program, which was doing very, very well. Back in the early days, back when I was first doing stuff at Cornell, they had one parttime person who got fired and ended up going out to Iowa State. But now they had several people on staff, they needed somebody to coordinate their communications.

And another project in horticulture, where they wanted somebody to coordinate a new website for gardeners. And I was always interested in gardeners, since those days back in Rhode Island when I worked at the church camp doing the gardening program. And when I was at Cortland State, and SUNY-Cortland, I took a course in Electronics in Teaching, where they taught us about this new thing called the internet. I learned how to build websites. So I took those two skills and the fact that I had worked with farmers and all that. And I ended up taking the job developing the website for gardeners. Because that was going to get me into a new technology. I was tired of the print and all that, I knew this was going to be the future. So I took that job. (1:48:59)

So since 2000, this coming year, SARE communications advisory committee invited me to join. So I worked on some volunteer directing SARE communications, working with their staff and all—I say directing. In an advisory capacity. Coming back to Cornell, I got more involved with, I was in the horticulture department, it's now the horticulture section of the School of Integrative Plant Science. And what I found from the days back—again, when I had my friend and co-worker who did the survey of sustainable farming at Cornell--there's no longer really a stigma to organic or sustainable farming at Cornell. During that time, I can't say that *The New Farm* changed Cornell. There was a lot of flow of information and people back and forth between Cornell and the Rodale research center. Brian Chabot, who was an administrator here for many years, was on the Rodale Institute board for many times. Was actually the director of research for a couple of years down there. Rhonda Janke, who did her PhD here at Cornell, went down, was the director of research at Cornell. Laurie Drinkwater, a director at Cornell, director of research at Cornell, came back here to Cornell and is on our faculty today. We've been good friends over the years.

So there's been a lot of changes here, and things are much more positive. There's no longer a stigma. One of my first bosses was Marvin Pritts, our berry expert, who we had featured in the magazine years ago. One of our soil scientists, Harold van Es, wrote a book on building soils on your farm. This was the early pioneer soil health. He co-wrote that with Fred Magdoff, from the University of Vermont, who was one of my key sources in that *Farmers' Fertilizer Handbook*. So they had been working together. The soil health lab here on campus. I mentioned Chuck Mohler doing weed science work here. Tony DiTommaso's currently the chair of our soil and crop sciences section. He founded the ecological weed management lab. We have a student farm, Dilmun Hills Student Farm, which is managed organically. Our horticulture farm in Freeville has an organic section to it. Our grain farm up in Aurora, the Musgrave Research Farm, does organic research. We have a sustainable farming systems lab, run by one of our faculty, Matt Ryan. Dave Wolfe, who recently retired, was a pioneer in the effects of climate change on agriculture, learning how to adapt and mitigate through agriculture. A recent retirement, Ian Merwin was like the leading ecological orchard person. His grad student Greg Peck did his thesis research on organic orchards and came back to head up that program.

There's just a ton of things going that, again, no longer, they're hard to keep up with. It's still not like the majority of the things that we do, but the university is sure proud of the things that are organic and regenerative and meet the needs of people outside of agriculture as well as in. I think that's where a lot of land grants are at now. Resources get tight, they need support. Not just traditionally—when I started all this, land grant universities served the farmers. And that's one of the biggest changes over the last forty years, is land grant universities serve the citizens of their particular state, the majority of whom are not farmers. And so they need to make sure that their research and outreach are also meeting the needs of a broader audience.

So that about brings you up to date. I don't know, anything else? Anything else on your mind? I've rattled on, I thought you'd interrupt me more than you did. You're a good listener. (1:53:34)

AA: Yeah, that was great. I just wanted to let you go and tell the story, because then I didn't want to interrupt the flow.

CC: That's okay, I'm more than interruptable.

AA: So we've just got a few minutes left. Is there anything you want to say, if you were to briefly summarize your philosophy or organic or sustainable, regenerative agriculture, what would that be?

CC: Oh, boy. That's a tough one. Part of it is that I haven't been directly involved in 25 years. So I have sort of a long-term perspective. Maybe I tend to romanticize that time back then. Now it's just, to me it's matter-of-fact that these ideas that were once wild are now more acceptable. That there's science behind them, that they're credible, that they're not joked about so much, that credibility has taken over. I guess I would say, let's look ahead. And we're kind of at, again, another pinch point where the climate concerns coming on, we have concerns with our economic system, inequality has gotten worse, not better, since I first started working on hunger and justice issues. There are a lot of things that affect our agriculture. There's not a crisis right now, there's a ton of resilience. Ag systems are resilient. Economic systems maybe not so much.

But I think we're coming to another point where we've got some choices to make, and I'm hoping that the next generation, the graduate students I work with now, the undergrads and the like, I hope they're looking ahead and trying to figure out, "How do we apply the science that we're learning here at Cornell, how do we apply the experiences we've gained on our own farms and the farms of our neighbors, and how do we continue to transform our farming systems so that they serve some of those needs that Bob pointed out?" So they don't use too many resources, they rely on the internal resources, they don't pollute, they support families and economies and rural landscapes. I haven't even mentioned like the top shelf, they supply sufficient and healthful food for the rest of the world. There's some things that need to happen or need to continue to evolve, and maybe have to evolve quickly, depending on what happens. And I hope that people will make sure that they found their decisions moving forward in some of the seeds that were planted back in the '40s through the '90s and figure out how to put that to work on a broader scale.

So that's not a coherent philosophy, and I guess if you haven't picture by now, I'm not the black-and-white, you're-organic-or-you're-not dogma type of person. I just think we need to keep improving our health, and we need to keep improving the health of our land and our

systems. And the more people that are aware of it. I'm encouraged that, again, consumers know the right answer. Consumers know that organic foods are better for you. Consumers know that we need to reduce the carbon footprint of our agricultural systems. What we do a lot of here is working on how we can quantify and make happen that agricultural systems become a sink for a lot of that carbon. So I'm somewhat optimistic, but I'm also, it's like, let us get our act together here, let us make some prudent choices, and move forward.

AA: So we are almost out of time. Is there anything else you want to add before we wrap this up?

CC: I think that's all I've got. (1:58:08)