

**Chris Anderson, narrator**

**Anneliese Abbott, interviewer**

**January 11, 2023**

**CA** = Chris Anderson

**AA** = Anneliese Abbott

**AA:** All right. This is Anneliese Abbott, and this is January 11, 2023, and I'm doing an interview with

**CA:** Chris Anderson.

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

**CA:** No problem at all. It's actually been really exciting to read the interview, to prepare for the interview and remember some of the things that have happened over that last fifty years. That was fun. Thank you.

**AA:** So why don't we start, give us a little background on when and where you were born.

**CA:** Sure. So I was actually born in Pennsylvania. I was born in Louisburg, [?] in the middle of a gigantic snowstorm. So I actually got to come home from the hospital in a stocking, if you can believe that that's what they did. That's because there weren't any seatbelts, it was easier to hold on to me or something. But that's where I grew up. I grew up in the middle of the farm my whole life. (0:52)

**AA:** So can you give me a little brief background on the history of Walnut Acres and your family's connection with that?

**CA:** Yeah, absolutely. To step back just a second from how the farm came about, my grandfather was a math professor at Drury [?] University. And he was really becoming a little disenchanted with academia. And joined an organization that would send him to be a missionary to India. He really wanted to see other parts of the world and interact with people. And so he went to a school near Bangalore, [?] and was teaching primarily expat children and then also local children. Again, teaching math but also learning about the culture and learning about the community there. Now this is all pre Indian independence. So while he was there, he actually had some phenomenal trips and adventures and got to know and become friends with a lot of the folks who were impactful in forming Indian independence. So he knew Mahatma Gandhi, and he knew Ali Gena [?], and he knew so many of the other people there. And he was really inspired by the simple lives of the people there. As he said, here he was surrounded by these people who had very little to eat and had next to nothing, and they were healthier than he was. He was in India as a young man and having to have his teeth pulled because they were rotting out of his

head. And he deduced that it was really the simple life and the whole foods and the diet that they were having that was allowing them to live such healthy, long lives in relative poverty.

At one point his students asked him lots and lots of questions about Indian independence, and he didn't shy away from voicing his views that he thought they would be better off with being an independent nation. So much so that he was kindly asked to leave the country and return to the States. At the same time, while he was there, my grandmother was there, who was the daughter of Welsh missionaries. She was also a teacher in the same school. And they fell hopelessly in love and decided to return to America together. I think my grandmother thought that she was marrying an academic, and when they arrived back in Pennsylvania, he decided and they decided that they wanted to become farmers. And they wanted to learn how to farm and live a simple life off the land. So she went from a life of academia, a pretty metropolitan life, to a life in the country.

When they got back to the States, he obviously didn't know anything about farming. He went to, there was actually a farming school at Kimberton, Kimberton Farming School outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. And what's really interesting about this school that he attended is that it's really the crucible of organic agriculture in the US. It really started out there in Philadelphia, it didn't start in California the way a lot of people would assume. But it was those early '40s where J. I. Rodale was starting *Organic Gardening and Farming* magazine and starting his farm as a research institution. And then the Kimberton Farm School was being developed, and my grandfather attended that, and some of the other luminaries that were in that world. And they all got together every summer and would discuss the land and discuss their techniques. Life would have been super different if my grandfather had accepted J. I.'s offer to work on his farm and work in his newsletter and magazine.

So after they learned how to farm—and they learned how to farm with horses—they bought a dilapidated farm in central Pennsylvania that would become Walnut Acres. It was a farm that he chose because it was surrounded by black walnut trees. And black walnut trees were an indicator of soil health and that the soil would be very similar to what was found in Germany in those days. And so that's where a lot of the Pennsylvania Dutch, why they settled in Pennsylvania was because of the walnut trees and the similarity between the soil. Pennsylvania Dutch not being Dutch at all, but Deutsch, it later got shortened. One of those crazy stories.

So they started with no running water in the house. They started farming with these horses, and in their first year they had a bumper crop of apples from an orchard that was on the farm. And they created apple butter, which is a very traditional Pennsylvania Dutch dish, and a lot of experimentation. They found a recipe that they really loved and made it over this open fire in a copper kettle and packaged it up and were selling it. They were selling it for a dollar a jar. And somehow, somehow, it ended up on the desk of Clementine Paddleburg [?]. Clementine was this iconic food writer who recently passed. But she wrote syndicated columns for the *New York Herald Tribune* and for *Gourmet* magazine. And she wrote this glowing review of this apple butter. And before you knew it, people were sending dollar bills through the mail to the farm to ask for this apple butter.

And really the business was born. They started selling whatever they had around the farm. At first, they just had small grains. And they would sell the small grains to people through the mail. Then, as people started requesting other products, they had a small mill, and they started grinding flour and selling the flour. And when they had all the flour, they had mill waste. On the mill waste they started raising chickens and started raising pigs and started selling eggs through the mail for ten cents a dozen—shipped through the mail, if you can believe that. And

that's really how the business grew, through these crazy logical extensions, into what became really the first vertically integrated production farm in the country. So we started at a hundred acres, my grandfather acquired neighboring farms, and then sold off the homestead portion of it and just kept the farmstead to grow the business to 600 acres.

At its peak we were selling organic foods through the mail and literally raising it, from soup to nuts. We would grow the small vegetables, we would process them in an on-site cannery. We were selling those through the mail. We were milling grain into flour and baking mixes and cereals. We had a bakery that did cookies and breads and things like that, and we sold those through the mail. And then we found other products around the world that were organic that we could sell and really fill it out. So it was really an organic food store through the mail way before that was a thing. That's really, in a nutshell, how it grew and how it became really the first organic brand in the country. (8:09)

**AA:** Thank you. So when you mentioned Paul Keene going to that Kimberton Farm School, was that a biodynamic school associated with Ehrenfried Pfeiffer?

**CA:** Yes, that's exactly right. it was. My grandfather really embraced the biodynamic farming. At the same time my grandfather was in India, Sir Albert Howard was in India as well. They never met, but they were there together. And Sir Albert Howard's book was really influential in my grandfather's thinking, as well as the teachings of Ehrenfried Pfeiffer at that farm. That farm only existed for a very short period of time, but it was incredibly influential. I remember, growing up, being organic was already on the lunatic fringe of agriculture. And being biodynamic, as my grandfather was, was way out there. To see him digging up the cow horn stuffed with quartz to spread that onto the field so that we would get more sunlight into the crops, that was beyond what anybody else was doing and was really, as a child, beyond my understanding. Why was he doing this thing? But it was really pretty inspired.

**AA:** I saw something in one of his writings about Ralph Borsodi's School of Living. Do you know anything about his time there?

**CA:** I don't know as much about his time at the School of Living. My mom might know more about that, or my aunt who's done a little more research on that. But I don't know as much about that school, sorry. (9:55)

**AA:** So are there any memories you want to share of Paul Keene?

**CA:** Yeah, my grandfather—I grew up, like everybody, and he's just Grandpa. As a kid, it's just Grandpa. And you don't really realize, he would fly off to India because there was a flood, and the UN had asked him to go and help. Or that he's writing letters back and forth with folks like Gandhi, and then Indira Gandhi and the rest. And you never realize what that impact is in a teeny-tiny town, to have those experiences and to be raised with that level of worldliness was really inspiring. I remember all the stories he used to tell about his early days in farming, including when my grandmother went into labor and he jumped off the horses and rushed back to the house to take her to the hospital. And they came back, and the horses had navigated their way all the way across the farm and put themselves back in the barn successfully. That's a great one. But really what I remember most about him is that he just loved life. And he was very much into

the arts and into singing in particular. You would hear him early in the mornings or late in the evenings, out on a tractor, and he would be cultivating a field on this little tractor that was his all-time favorite. And you could hear him singing across the whole farm. It's just a lovely memory of him, and one that I think of often. (11:41)

**AA:** So what was it like growing up at Walnut Acres?

**CA:** Like I said, we were organic farmers way before it was cool. We would have a career day, and people would say, "What does your dad do? What does your dad do? Your mom do?" And people were nurses, or a doctor, or a lawyer, or a truck driver, and I was like, "My dad's an organic farmer." People were like, "What is that?" So we were really out there. And in some ways it was a great way to grow up, and in other ways there was a lot of ridicule about it. Not just from kids, from my classmates. My classmates used to bring their own cereal when they came over to spend the weekend because they wouldn't eat our cereal. But even the teachers were like, "What happened to your sandwich? Did it fall in the mud on your way?" Because it was whole wheat bread and whole grain peanut butter. So there were a lot of challenges with that. Nobody ever traded with me for lunch, let's just put it that way. But on the other side, it was an incredible opportunity. I got to learn a ton, I got to learn about, not just organic farming, but about business. I got to learn about the world and see far more than I ever would have growing up anywhere else. (13:04)

**AA:** So what kind of farming methods do you remember being used at Walnut Acres?

**CA:** Farming practices?

**AA:** Yeah.

**CA:** I think that my grandfather was, at his core, still an academic. So he was really religious about keeping records of the fields and the crops, almost like you would see in a lab manual. His record keeping was really incredible. The biggest thing we did was crop rotation, of course. That was a must. It was about putting back more than we took out of the soil. We were, early on, doing tons of crop rotations, studying what crop was being taken out of a field and what would follow in that same field. As an example, corn pulls a ton of nitrogen out of the soil. So the next year we would plant with alfalfa or with soy into that field to replenish that nitrogen. And often just mow those or till those back into the ground without harvesting the crop. It was really, we could give back and replenish the soil from that hard work that it had done in the year prior. And that crop rotation also prevents and helps mitigate pests and diseases, which grow over time in monocropping because they don't die out in the winter, they continue to live in the next season's crop. So crop rotation was a huge thing.

And then it came down to the point of putting the waste back into the same field. So if we were cultivating, if we were harvesting peas—that's a great example—a huge harvest, we would go through and we would pull all those pea vines out, we would devine them. And all of that waste, all of those pea vines went right back onto that same field to put the nutrients that were left in the plant back into the field. So all we were really taking off were the peas themselves. So there was a lot of stuff like that. Down to tomatoes and corn and the production of those, all of those wastes going back to that same field.

I think that some of the other interesting things that we did, we talked a little about the biodynamics, the treatments and the sprays, horn manure or horn silica, those sorts of things that were really interesting. But we also used the manure from our own beef farm, the manure from our chickens. There was a lot that went into it. (15:46)

**AA:** So which crops did you grow actually at Walnut Acres?

**CA:** It was a lot of the small vegetables. The farm was divided into several different parcels. The home farm, which was approximately 125 acres, that one is where we grew the small vegetables. So tomatoes to bell peppers, zucchinis, beets, carrots, all those sorts of small vegetables that would go into soups and stews and things that we were canning. Or individual crops, like peas, sweet corn, those sorts of things, were grown on the small farm close at hand. And that would be because we wanted to harvest them and put them into a can the same day. So literally the pea plants were still in the ground in the morning, and by noon we were already putting the fresh peas into a can. We didn't harvest and then process the next day. The farmers were up early in the morning, and the canners stayed up late to make sure it got done. But we also did carrots, tomatoes. Tomatoes were a great example. We hand-harvested our tomatoes. We didn't use mechanized harvesting. So we hand-harvested our tomatoes, and they would get three or four pickings out of a field instead of just a single picking. And of course, there weren't any chemicals that were put onto it. So it was really all the things that go into soups and stews and individual vegetables, that we grew on the farm.

And then outside of the farm we had a large hundred-acre, two-hundred-acre farm where we grew primarily grain for flour and things like that. And more than just wheat and rye and things like that. We grew some ancient grains as well. And then we had another farm where we grew still more grains which we primarily used as animal feed for our flocks of chickens and our beef cattle. So they were all living on a diet of 100 percent organic food as well. (17:58)

**AA:** What percent of the products that Walnut Acres made came from the farm? I'm sure that changed over the years.

**CA:** Yeah, it certainly changed over the years. I would say that probably with the exception of peanut butter—because we couldn't grow the peanuts—in terms of sales of products, I would say that probably in the high 80s were grown there early on, up until probably the early '80s when the marketplace expanded and we needed to source goods from other locations. And we didn't source things like those vegetables, but we would find really great dried fruits and nuts and things that we couldn't grow. And then eventually into some natural houseware-type items so that people could learn how to cook and how to create better products at home. And eventually we expanded into organic consumer processed goods. We sold some of the best of [?] Farm's juices, amazing products that we sold. And we had a great relationship with their founder, Jean Colin [?]. And etcetera.

**AA:** And you also purchased vegetables from local farmers, right?

**CA:** We did. We were influential in getting some folks to do that. There's a great guy named Leon Kunz [?] who grew to this day the best peaches I've ever had in my life. And we would buy his peaches, and he would bring them to us the day he picked them, and those would be

steamed and canned in our cannery. And that was one of the things that you only had as much as Leon could produce, and they always sold out as soon as they hit the catalog. People were buying them by the cases. But yeah, we had other local farmers who grew some of the things that we didn't do well. It's really interesting, I was at my mom's house, because my mom still lives on the farm. And at her house last year, around Christmas time, a stranger knocked on the door, and he said he'd just been driving by, and he realized that he hadn't stopped by, but he used to grow celery for us when he was a kid. And just talked about how fond his memory was and how much my grandfather had helped his father. It was really a sweet time. (20:19)

**AA:** So are there any other farmers that you remember? Did you ever visit any of the farms where they grew the produce for Walnut Acres?

**CA:** Yeah, I went to the orchards and things with Leon, and I'm sure I went to some of the farms. But what I remember most was we would contract with a local Amish family to hand-pick the tomatoes each season. And they were horse-and-buggy Amish, and there was no telephone, so you'd have to drive for about 45 minutes to get to their house to tell them that the tomatoes would be ready in three or four days and to get them to commit to pulling everybody together. And then they would contact, find a driver who would bring them in. It was really a wonderful experience to even go back in time to the horse-and-buggy Amish and their simple life. And what I remember most—and I was a teenager at this point, going out and letting them know what was happening. And the other teenage boys who were there would of course come over to look at the car I was driving, which was nothing fancy, but it was a car, and they would take me back to the barn to show me their buggy. In those days they were starting to put little LED lights into the buggies to make their buggies fancier, to soup them up. And instead of riding with an old field horse, they were starting to buy more thoroughbred horses to be of more stature. So it was really cool to see that even in that community the similarities were so stark between us. It was really neat.

**AA:** So were many of the farmers that sold to Walnut Acres Amish or Mennonite?

**CA:** No, not really. Most of them were just regular farmers who decided to grow at least a portion of their products for us on an organic basis. These were really small farms in central Pennsylvania. A five or six hundred acre farm would be huge in that community. And most people in that area were growing feed corn or corn for agriculture, not necessarily vegetables or things like that. It's sad, in the middle of all that farming it's really a food desert in a lot of ways, unless people are growing a garden of fresh vegetables. (22:56)

**AA:** So in the days before organic certification, how did Walnut Acres determine which crops were organic?

**CA:** Great question. My grandfather really developed his own standard and his own belief system and asked people to sign off that they weren't using any of those chemicals on the land or anything that was a preservative. I'd have to go back and look at it. In one of the catalogs there was almost a nomenclature, a symbol of what was guaranteed to Walnut Acres standard and what was guaranteed to another standard, etc. In a lot of ways it was the Wild West. But my grandfather was really committed to purity in his products, and would demand that, and would

just be very transparent with the consumer about what it was. If there was a product that wasn't organic, he was very upfront and said, "This isn't. But these are your options. And if we can't get organic almonds this year, we're still going to provide you with almonds, and this is the highest quality on the conventional market." And you're right, those standards evolved over the course of years and years and years, and got stricter and stricter. California was probably the leader in making real standards. But I think our standards were higher than what California's were and what eventually became the National Organic Program.

**AA:** Did Walnut Acres send someone out to inspect the farms, or did they just take the farmer's word for it?

**CA:** Inspection is a little bit of a loaded word, but yeah, we would go to the farms and the farmers. Not necessarily me, but my grandfather had deep personal relationships with the places that supplied us locally. And then my father and our other leaders in the organization would absolutely go out and look at the fields and ensure that the organic integrity was that. (25:08)

**AA:** So when did you first get involved in the Walnut Acres business?

**CA:** Growing up on the farm, you're engaged in it from the day you're born. Once I was old enough to actually be helpful, I guess. I started out in the most menial tasks there are, picking rocks out of fields with my friends from elementary school. I think we were probably twelve at the time. That was my first job, was picking rocks. And then I graduated to picking zucchini squash, and things like that. And then working in the cannery as a teenager, on those all-hands-on-deck kind of days where we would go out early in the morning and we would pick up the tomato baskets, load those onto a wagon, drive those back to the cannery, and then unload them into the cannery one by one, taking the waste back out to that same field, and taking those empty tomato baskets back out. And then I think that at some point I graduated a little bit into more of the business side of the operation. Certainly during my late high school and college days, I helped lead the transformation from a paper-based company to a computerized company. So we went and started computerizing our records. And I taught the company, our order entry folks, our customer service folks, and even our pick, pack, and ship people, how to use the new system and how to become computerized. Looking back on it, it was a far cry from what we would call computerized today, but it was a really important move for the company and allowed us to expand and continue to grow. And then after college there was a point in time where I came back and helped lead the wholesale distribution, and that segment of the company, and helped to expand it into a lot of the Whole Foods market, conventional markets up and down the East Coast, primarily. (27:21)

**AA:** So what years did you work for Walnut Acres?

**CA:** Good question. So in broad strokes, probably from 1980 until '93. And then probably came back right around '97, '99, in that range.

**AA:** So then, where did you go to college? What did you study?

**CA:** So I was the quintessential city kid who grew up in the country. So I went away to the University of Chicago on the south side and loved every minute of it. I went there and decided that if you're going to go to U of C you should study economics. So that's what I did, and had a blast doing it. And at the end of college I was interviewing, I was wearing a suit and interviewing with all of the companies to be a consultant. And I can vividly remember, I was driving back from an interview with Metropolitan Life in Detroit, and I drove back, and I was taking my rental car back, I passed a Fresh Fields Market that was opening near the airport. And they were having a job fair, and I pulled in and just said, "Hey, I'm here, I've done this a lot, I know a lot about this industry." And there was a person in there who became a dear friend and a mentor, who knew what Walnut Acres was. And I ended up deciding that I wanted to do something real rather than something consulting. And started out, my first job was being a food demonstrator in an organic supermarket. But I had great mentors and I had great leaders all around me, and kind of grew up in that business very quickly to the point of running stores and then helping to open new markets for the brand, all the way through its acquisition by Whole Foods Market and beyond. (29:29)

**AA:** And so that was before you went back to Walnut Acres?

**CA:** There was a time and a place, I worked for Whole Foods in Chicago. Fresh Fields became Whole Foods. And then in metro New York. And then I moved to Atlanta with my wife. And there weren't any markets there. So I was a free agent, and I came back to work at Walnut Acres because they needed help on that sales and marketing side, to help expand the wholesale business. So I did that for a little while until Whole Foods came to town, and then I rejoined them. And it was at the same time, it was always a bridge job. I was commuting back and forth. And it wasn't a long-term thing, but they needed help at that point, and I was happy to offer it. (30:21)

**AA:** Is there anything you want to say about the closure of Walnut Acres, the whole sellout?

**CA:** Yeah. I mean, that was heartbreaking. That was heartbreaking on so many levels. It was heartbreaking on a family level. It really impacted and led to the divorce of my parents. The closure of the business that you had always thought would be there. I think that that's the one thing I would say I regretted. I didn't realize, I wanted to go out and do my own thing to prove to the world that I could do whatever I wanted to do and be successful, but in the back of my mind that business was always going to be there, and I could come back and be impactful in that and live there. But yeah, we were at a point where we needed capital. There's no other way around it. Our equipment was small and our batch sizes were small. Our equipment was old. It was probably antiquated when we started using it. And we needed capital to expand, to be able to compete in the new dawning internet age, and also on cost. So we went out and we found what we thought was a really great venture capital partner. And sometimes you get lucky and sometimes you don't, and unfortunately we didn't land a great venture capital partner. So we lost the business and we lost the brand. I think that what's important there is that we never lost the land. The land was always separate from the company. And my mom and her sister own that to this day, and it remains a working organic farm, very much in the way that my grandfather would want it. And my mom is surrounded by those fields. I got to go visit last week and walk around the farm, and it's still as beautiful as ever. (32:22)



**AA:** And then after that, did you continue to work for Whole Foods, or were you doing something different?

**CA:** I worked for Whole Foods a little while after that, and then really decided I wanted to do more on the business development side. I went and worked for a company called Brookstone, the gadgets and mall retailer. And I did that for a little while. I really identified, fell in love with the business at the airport, of all places. We had stores in airports, and I started by running some of the stores in the Atlanta airport and really found that there was a need for more development and more supervision in these stores. And again, with some great mentors and some great leaders, was able to carve that out as its own division, separate from the mall business, and really stand it up and expand it to a really viable spot. And today it's the only part of that brand that survived and lives on, so I'm really proud about that. And then after that I went on and worked in nontraditional business development. I worked for Beecher's Handmade Cheese, which is a fabulous company in Seattle and in New York. And helped them expand their presence in airport stores and other nontraditional places. And at the same time, for the last twenty years I've been working with my father. We have a consulting company called Sustainable Strategy, and we're really advisors in food and agriculture. We work with different companies to help them achieve organic certification or to deal with challenges in organic certification. And then we also work a lot with the Organic Trade Association and the federal government to establish trade equivalency agreements around the world, to facilitate the trade of organics and to ensure that something that's organic in Europe is meeting the same levels of standards it would be here. (34:30)

**AA:** So how have you seen the natural foods industry change over the years?

**CA:** Well, like any industry, it's grown and it's changed, and it's undergone some consolidation, to say the least. Is it the same industry that it was in the '70s and the '80s, or even the '90s? No, it's not. Is it a better model than conventional agriculture? A thousand percent yes. I am not, though I am an organic evangelist, I am not an organic purist. I still believe that you should have organic, you should have the option for an organic Oreo. If you're going to have an Oreo, at least it should be one that has much better ingredients, ingredients that are better for the planet, that is at a higher standard. We don't eat a hundred percent organic, but we are very, very close to that at home. (35:37)

**AA:** Now you mentioned that you've been involved some in the policy side of organic certification. Do you want to tell me more about that?

**CA:** That kind of goes back again to history. Probably the activism in organics started with my grandfather, and I think that, just to step back a little bit, in the '70s we were making peanut butter just by grinding peanuts into a jar. Just like you would see in your supermarket today, there's that little tiny grinder. And we were told by the government we couldn't sell that as peanut butter. We had to sell that as imitation peanut butter. Because it didn't contain hydrogenated peanut oil, which is what the regulations said was pure peanut butter. And so there was that incident. There was the incident where we were taking our organic cattle, we were grinding the beef and putting them into all natural casings and selling them as hot dogs, and were told that we couldn't sell them as hot dogs because they didn't contain nitrites and nitrates, the

preservatives that defined what a food was. And my grandfather and my father went to D.C. and really lobbied to help create the regulations that would govern whole foods and natural foods. That's where it started. That's where the policy work really started.

And then, in the '90s, as the National Organic Program was being developed, my father was the president of the National Organic Standards Board, which was charged with developing that program. So we got to be intimately involved in that process. And now on the policy and the certification side, we work with certifiers to help them expand their business and to understand what challenges they could encounter, especially with international trade. We work with small companies who want to achieve certification. I actually worked with a student at Bucknell University this last year to help us recertify the land on the home farm that the foundation owns, to have that in its own certification. It's always been certified, but we wanted to bring it under the foundation's own certification. So it's been really enjoyable and exciting to be able to spread that knowledge and help other people become certified. (38:22)

**AA:** So what is your perspective on the organic certification debates of the 1990s?

**CA:** Well, I think that they're like any other debates. The National Organic Program didn't really please anyone. It was too liberal for some; it was too stringent for others. So it ended up being a compromise by this piece of legislation. But it did ensure a level playing field. It ensured a level standard. And I think that what's important is that being USDA organic is a baseline. You can always do more. But the USDA organic is a baseline and a protection for consumers and an assurance of quality and purity for those consumers. I think that everybody in those negotiations thought that it would continue to evolve. And sadly, there's been a lot of things that the National Organic Standards Board has put forward and recommended change that haven't been enacted by the USDA at this point. So there are a lot of those that are starting to come through. We hope that the continuous improvement will continue. For example, livestock just passed last year, the strengthening of organic enforcement act we hope will be enforced, or at least distributed in the next couple of days, we hope. And those are really important things that industry is asking for to strengthen organic. And we just need some help from the government to move a little quicker. (40:17)

**AA:** So what is your perspective on the critiques, I guess you'd say, of organic certification, like the Real Organic or regenerative, proposing different seals or certifications?

**CA:** I think that, personally, I believe that all organic is real organic, all organic is regenerative, just by definition. I think that as an industry we have to acknowledge that we've had an organic standard now for thirty years, and we're still trying to explain what is and is not in organic. One that you didn't mention is Non-GMO Project. Well, if you're organic, you're already prohibited from handling GMOs. But people don't know that. And I think that as an industry we fail in our communication of what is in organic, what organic means, what's in it, and what's not in it. I think there's pretty strong recognition amongst consumers that there are no pesticides, there are no herbicides, and there aren't preservatives. I think that from that standpoint we've nailed it. But I don't think that consumers understand the 100 percent organic feed that goes into organic livestock. I don't think that people understand or recognize as much that there are no GMOs in it, that there are no artificial colors or preservatives. I think that there's some other places where we need to do a much better job. I think—and I worry that other labels could splinter the consumer

confidence in USDA organic and in what that baseline standard is. And like I said, USDA organic is a baseline. It is just an assurance, and I hope that it can strengthen, but I worry that consumers will become confused, and we could end up back in some of the confusion that led to NOP being created in the very first place. The debates in the '80s and '90s are beginning to happen again. (42:28)

**AA:** So you mentioned that you were involved with the Organic Trade Association. Do you want to tell me more about that?

**CA:** Yeah. That's really exciting work. My dad and I have worked with the Organic Trade Association for over twenty years. We are senior trade advisors for them, so we work with them primarily on international trade and helping facilitate that trade around the world. And what I mean by that is, the Organic Trade Association really protects everybody and represents everybody, from the smallest consumer and the smallest farm to the largest manufacturer and distributor of organic foods in the country. And so we have a real interest in expanding those markets around the world and creating market access for US goods. A lot of our members are manufacturers. So they have a real interest in getting certified organic goods from other countries that they can trust are organic. Counterseasonal produce is a huge example of that, so that we can enjoy organic blueberries around the year, year-round, but also for manufacturers it's super important that they have a supply of those year-round.

So what we do primarily with the Organic Trade Association is, in partnership with the Foreign Agriculture Service and the National Organic Program, we provide analysis and side-by-side gap analyses of the US regulation and other country's regulations to help facilitate the creation of equivalency agreements, so that organic goods can flow freely from both sides and be recognized. So currently the European Union has just released new rules. We have an equivalency arrangement with them through the end of '26, then we'll be going through those rules with a fine-tooth comb, identifying what are the commonalities, what are the critical variances, and where are the things that we can really find agreement on.

It's a lot of fun. I think that if you get into being a policy walk on organics at all, and read any of the organic regulation, the mind-blowing part of it continues to be for me all of the things that are in conventional agriculture that are explicitly excluded in organics. Down to the use of plastic pellets in conventional livestock as roughage. It's just mind-boggling that that's even a practice and that somebody thought that up, is mind-boggling. So it's really fun, important work, and it lets me travel and meet organic farmers and organic industry folks around the world. (45:26)

**AA:** Is there anything else you want to say about the international certification aspect?

**CA:** Well, I think that internationally, there are a lot of great people and lots of great farmers out there. I had the privilege of being in Bourdeaux last year and meeting with a very small organic company, and how they were approaching growing. And also, I've been working with a group in the United Arab Emirates. And they're really seeing organic, not just as a fad or a way of producing, but as a really value-added and a really climate-smart solution. And that's really, really incredible. We're also working again with the European Union. The European Union's Green Deal and their plans are, quite frankly, admirable. That they're trying to get to 25 percent certified organic land by 2030 is amazing, when the US is at a fraction at that of organic land. So

by making the market bigger, we help the environment, we help US farmers, and we help consumers around the world. (46:46)

**AA:** So what is your perspective on the relationship between the agricultural universities, especially the land grant universities, and organic agriculture?

**CA:** I think that the land grant universities are getting there. I think that there's a growing awareness. Growing up on the farm, we were—and in a lot of ways organic agriculture still is—the red-headed stepchild. It's still an experiment in the minds of a lot of farmers and a lot of academics. And it's really taking a new crop of academics before it's starting to come in and see the opportunities and see the need for study and quantification, to be able to teach those techniques. The sad part is that farmers are getting older, conventional farmers are getting older, and there aren't a lot of them that are going to convert anymore. They know how to farm the way that they know how to farm, and farming organically is a huge investment initially, to go through the transition period, and then a huge investment in that it's more labor-intensive. I think that what we're seeing is, as new farmers enter the market—and the largest growth of those are farmers of color and female farmers, and the intersection of both of those as well—starting out farming and wanting to grow organically for the health benefits, for the environmental benefits, and that the universities really have an opportunity now to become the Kimberton Farm School of the day and help with research, help with more than just papers and really start creating farming laboratories to help expand the market. (48:51)

**AA:** So what is your philosophy of organic food and farming?

**CA:** I think that I would go back to my grandfather, really his catch phrase was to give back more than you take. And that's really, in its simplest form, that is what organic is all about, is that you are giving back to the land and making the soil and the land better every single year. No matter what you're growing or what you're harvesting, you're putting back more into it and making it better at each and every step. And that would be my biggest thing about a philosophy. Yes, it meets all of the same criteria that organic means, no GMOs, no pesticides, all of those things. But at its core it's about doing well by doing good. (49:47)

**AA:** Would you say that your religious or spiritual beliefs have any connection to your philosophies about organic farming?

**CA:** I'm not a terribly religious person. I would say that I certainly feel a connection to the earth and a connection to this world. And yeah, I think a lot of that comes from farming and actually being able to get your hands in the dirt, and come from that. So in that sense, yes, I think they go hand in hand. And I think my love of food and my love of travel come directly from growing up on that farm, eating some of the best food that you could have, being exposed to the world because of food and my grandfather. A quick aside, growing up we weren't allowed to, we didn't pick the corn until the water was boiling on the stove. We put the water on for the sweet corn, and when it was starting to get to a rolling boil then my brother and I would jump into one of the farm vehicles and drive to the sweet corn field and pick it in the field and bring it back. Those kind of experiences, you don't get that in a restaurant, you don't get that anywhere else. So that's probably as spiritual as, my spiritual connection to the land. (51:16)

**AA:** And you would say that your grandfather was one of the main influences on your philosophy?

**CA:** Without a doubt. He was a huge influence on me, and he just was on the community. My grandfather was very religious. He and my grandmother founded a church in the town. What I loved about him was that he really was giving back to the community as well. He established the foundation early, I want to say in 1959 was the start of the foundation. And I grew up playing sports on the baseball field that the foundation built. I remember being a kid and helping the men of the community build the playground at the community center. I remember learning to roller skate in that gymnasium. It was probably the first place I knew that there was education outside of a school going on, were in these facilities that again, as a kid, I just took for granted that they were there. I didn't realize that it was my grandfather who was really making that happen for the community and for his kids, but really just for the whole community. So yeah, he was incredibly influential in that. And then I think that my mom and my dad were incredibly influential in exposing me and wanting me to go out and take risks and do things on my own. And also for trusting me and trusting my opinions. Even as a kid, we talked business at the dining room table every night. That was what we talked about. And as a kid, I had a voice in that, and that grew up through adulthood. I was really lucky, I had a great family and a really strong group of mentors. (53:25)

**AA:** Is there anything else you want to say about the Walnut Acres Foundation?

**CA:** Yeah, so the foundation is a really cool organization. My grandparents started it, again, to give back to the community. Not just in our local community, but also in India where they had both been profoundly influenced. Family Village Farm, near Bangalore, had a building that was dedicated to my grandmother, because she raised money to build a dormitory for these orphan girls. And the foundation has evolved over time. Most recently the foundation, we gave the community center in Penns Creek back to the community, so it is now owned by that community, it's not owned by the foundation. And we used the money that we had to repurchase the original farm buildings and the small plot of land that was sold when the brand dissolved. So that's really exciting to me, to be able to repurchase that and really be able to work toward developing that as a community gathering space, very much the way my grandfather would have liked it.

We started on that process, we've established walking trails around the farm, we've established certified organic gardens where we're growing food to fight food insecurity in the food deserts of central Pennsylvania. We would like to raise ten thousand pounds of organic vegetables in the coming year and donate all of them to the community. But it's also about providing access to nature, showing what real work on an organic farm can be, and really preserving the work and legacy of my grandparents and the history of the organic foods movement. We've been exceptionally lucky to have such a deep partnership with the students at Bucknell University, who have done tremendous work on the website, helping create a digital museum so that folks around the world can learn about my grandfather, learn about what was Walnut Acres, and then come and visit and see the interaction of digital and physical exhibits in the museum. (55:55)

**AA:** So do you think there was a connection between organic and sustainable agriculture and the back-to-the-land, environmental, or any other social or political movements?

**CA:** Yeah, I think that there are certainly connections there. And what I was saying earlier about younger farmers, especially farmers of color and female farmers, that's really I think a return to a simpler life in a lot of ways. Just as many consumers are first introduced to organic when they first have a child, and they want to do better for the child, I think that younger and younger people are, in many ways, giving up on the corporate world and being attracted to a simpler life on a farm, in part because the internet allows you to still be connected and still be part of a larger community. But I think there is a real trend of small farms doing exceptionally impressive work out there, and helping to make organics not just a fringe product but really a value-added and exceptional product.

I guess that if you went back to my philosophy for half a second, just because it's organic doesn't mean that it's going to taste good. And it's got to be both for the business to survive, for the community to survive, and for the industry to thrive. My grandfather grew up, and kohlrabi was one of his favorite things on the planet. I grew up hating kohlrabi. Couldn't stand it. Even fresh out of his garden, he could come over to the dining room table with a fresh bunch of kohlrabi. Bleck. I hated it. I was in a restaurant in Germany last year, this incredible vegetarian restaurant, and had kohlrabi done five ways, and it might be my favorite vegetable. So it's all about how things are packaged and how they are prepared. And I think that the innovation is going to come, and it's coming from those smaller farms, from people who have again taken an academic approach to farming and learned about it, or learned of it, and to put those things into practice and really just want to do better for themselves, for their families, for the planet. (58:42)

**AA:** And have you been involved in any social or political movements that overlapped with your organic farming interests?

**CA:** No, I think that just being a good public citizen. I think that my goal has always been to promote local folks and local organic artisans. So that goes back to the days when I was running a supermarket for Whole Foods in Atlanta. I went out and found organic farmers and set up a farmers' market outside our supermarket on Saturday morning. And at first, I got a lot of pushback from my supervisors and even from my own team inside the store, because they were afraid that was going to cannibalize their sales, because this farmer was going to come and sell, nobody would buy their tomatoes, nobody would buy the bread or whatever. And it turned out to be exactly the opposite. We got more and more consumers who came because we were supporting these local guys outside, without taking a cut, without charging any rent. And they got to experience some really great things, learn some really great farmers. And some of the farmers ended up being suppliers to us when they got bigger. So that, I think, is more what I'm about socially, in terms of social movements. Support the small guy and the really highest quality stuff that's out there. (1:00:26)

**AA:** So what do you think are the most important aspects of organic farming history to preserve and pass on to future generations?

**CA:** In a nutshell, once upon a time all farming was organic. So it's important to realize that we're not trying to create something new, we're trying to make something that was really good

better. And I think that too often the history of organics is, again, on this hippie fringe of agriculture, and it was maybe a rebellion against conventional agriculture. And I think that we need to look at the future as much as we look at the past and realize that the way conventional agriculture is destroying our planet is not sustainable. And we have to do something different, or we won't have—well, the planet will be fine, we just won't be on it. But we've got to do something, do something quickly to understand that the soils are better on an organic farm, that the yields are comparable on an organic farm, and you don't need all of the inputs that conventional agriculture requires in order to be successful.

Are there people and times that need to be memorialized? Absolutely. I mean, people need to know about Rudolf Steiner. People need to know about the history of Sir Albert Howard and J. I. Rodale and my grandfather. But I think that equally people need to understand that there are some brands in the supermarket that started out as really small companies, and by doing really good things ended up being super successful and making organic a very mainstream product. Cascadian Farms is a great example. Arrowhead Mills. There are a lot of great companies out there who started out really small and who have grown into large, large companies, and been gobbled up in some cases, but are still doing very important work. (1:02:52)

**AA:** So is there anything else you want to share before we end the interview?

**CA:** No, other than that this has just been super important and super exciting to take part in, and I really appreciate it. One person who I wanted to say, who I think was an influence in my life, was working with John Mackey, who founded Whole Foods Market. And really just influenced by a guy who saw natural and organic foods as such an important thing that he would go out and make it his whole life's story. To be a vegan who saw that bringing organic and natural meat to a marketplace was better for everyone, it's such an important thing. And just loved that his first store was Safer Way, because he wanted to make it a social commentary on what was going on in the food market. That's really the nuts and bolts of it for me. It's been a wild ride going from the lunatic fringe to now being at a dinner party and telling people that I work in organic agriculture and people think that's really interesting and maybe even a little bit cool.

**AA:** All right, well thank you so much. (1:04:19)