

Rosie Massie, narrator

Anneliese Abbott, interviewer

December 16, 2022

RM = Rosie Massie

AA = Anneliese Abbott

AA: All right! This is December 16, 2022, and this is Anneliese Abbott interviewing

RM: Rose Gaugler Massie.

AA: So Rose, thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview today!

RM: You're welcome.

AA: So why don't we start, why don't you tell me when and where you were born, and then some of your earliest memories of your parents' farm.

RM: Okay. I was born December 20, 1951 in Snyder County, Pennsylvania. I was born on a small farm, it had about 108 acres. I think maybe 60 or so were tillable. We had a lot of woods surrounding us, a lot of trees. Some grasslands. It was a little bit hilly. We're off the Appalachia. And that's kind of where I was born and raised until I was 18 years old.

AA: So you mentioned that your father decided to transition to organic farming at some point. Can you tell me what you remember about that?

RM: I was fairly young. I think it was somewhere around 1962, 1963, as best as I can remember. I remember lots of conversations about farming, because I loved, I really did enjoy the farm, and I was interested in what the men would talk about, because we were out at the barn a lot. And I do remember, that was the time when my grandfather had a dairy farm, my dad and my grandfather—which would have been his dad—farmed together. And there was a lot of talk, because in 1960, right around that time, I do remember in our area a lot of farmers were transferring over to chemicals or some of the new modern things that were being brought out. And that was a lot of conversation on the farm. My dad was an investigator. He was always very curious about everything. So there were a lot of times that I think he was curious as to what was what, and he did a lot of talking. He really enjoyed conversations with other farmers. So I do remember that being lots of conversation, because it was kind of, in our area—which I lived in a very rural part of Snyder County, it was a rural county, and a lot of Amish and Mennonite people lived in that area. So it was one of those things that was talked about. And I remember my dad wanting to know and investigate. And getting literature. I do remember him getting a lot of literature, trying to figure out about it from all kinds of places. I do remember that. (3:00)

AA: Do you remember what any of that literature was?

RM: I do remember he got things from Rodale, which is now called Rodale Institute. I do remember he got the *Organic Gardening and Farming* magazine. I remember a book that was pretty—I don't know if it was popular—but I do remember we had it. And my dad was not a reader, so my mom would read to him out loud, wherever we went, or in the evening. And she was reading this book. She actually read this book to him called *Poisons in Your Food*. I think it was printed in 1960. I looked it up, and I cannot remember the author's name.

AA: Would that be William Longgood?

RM: Yes, that was the author's name. And I do remember that being something that he really thought about. There also was, in our church, a real push for health, because we were starting to see things like, I remember my mom used Crisco for baking, and we stopped using Crisco because it was shown that that really wasn't good for you. I do remember things like that, because I was part of the kitchen. Those were some of the things that I remember. And him having lots of conversations with other farmers. I remember that. There was a gentleman in Juniata County, and I have tried to get in touch with them. I have not been successful yet. But he and my dad did a lot of conversation back and forth about farming, and organic farming. And I do remember sitting and listening to this conversation. So that's kind of what I remember from the beginning. It was a time of transferring, if you were a dairy farm, that you were probably going to push to get a little bit bigger, or you were going to decide maybe not to do something, or you were going to produce what they called Grade B milk, which was used for things other than selling on the market as drinking milk. And I remember that being an issue, that eventually my father did leave the dairy and went into crop farming, mainly vegetable crop farming. So that's kind of what I remember. (5:36)

AA: So do you know what year that was that he transitioned more away from the dairy towards the vegetables?

RM: I would definitely say it was probably between '63—I remember being in the fields when I was ten and twelve years old. Twelve years particularly—but I would say somewhere between '63 and '65. I'm not real sure, but somewhere between there.

AA: And so then, what kind of vegetable crops did he grow?

RM: Now that, I do remember. We grew, from early, we grew pod peas that you would shell out. And string beans, tomatoes, and potatoes were our really big crops. And tomatoes were our really big crop. And I do remember that we sold our tomatoes to Walnut Acres. That I do remember. Because they would come and pick it up, we didn't really have a truck to do that. And later I do remember—and I talked to my one sister, and she did remember this—we sold potatoes to them. And we raised a variety called Katahdin. It's still available. And I still raise it; that is what I raise. And I do remember someone from Walnut Acres coming to visit our farm when we were going to start that as a new crop and checking out the potatoes. And they were really large. And there was conversation about them being hollow in the middle. And my dad invited them to check them out. And they did. I remember them cutting them open and not finding them hollow, and they did accept our potatoes. Those were the two crops that I most remember we sold to Walnut Acres. And possibly some string beans. We didn't do string beans that many years

because they're very, very labor intense. And I know we did not sell our shell peas to Walnut Acres. They went to a place called Furman, which had a pea sheller. And they would shell them, and then sometimes if you had extra that you didn't want back, they would actually sell them on the market, just locally. So that is what I remember of him selling. We did raise and sell sweet corn, but we sold that right from our farm. (7:56)

AA: So were the vegetable crops organic from 1963 on, or did he use chemicals at first?

RM: I do not remember that. I do remember—basically, what I remember is when we were picking things, we were doing a lot of weeding and hoeing, and it was hard work. Very hard work. So I would say he transferred somewhere between 1963 and 1964, as best I can remember. And I know there was machinery that you had to purchase if you were going to go more with chemicals and larger, and we did not purchase those. He stayed with a chisel plow. We used a chisel plow and another type of little rake. And I do not remember what it was called, but it had small tines, and we would use that when the corn or the vegetables were very, very small, we could go through, we would have it measured out, but it would work between the rows. And I do remember that. And I also remember that there were weeds a lot of times and things on the ground when we were picking, but you just kind of tramped them down. And you kept picking. It did not overwhelm the crop. We usually had very nice crops; I do remember that. And picking a lot of them. I remember that. (9:30)

AA: Do you remember what he used for fertilizer?

RM: I know he got his fertilizer from a company called Fertrell, which I think is still in business. And I do remember that a truck came to our house and would deliver it. And I think a lot of it had to do with fertilizer that came from seashells and that type thing. I remember a lot of talk about that, because it was unusual, we didn't go to the beach as farmers. And I remember them talking about some of the ingredients being seashells. That I do remember. The other thing I remember about it is when they were planning what they were going to purchase as fertilizer, I do remember, I think my dad was the person who got that order together and would send it in. And there were farmers in our area that actually used the same fertilizer. I don't know if they were totally organic. One was an Amishman who raised a lot of honey. We would buy their honey. His last name was Masland, but I do not remember his first name. And he would put his honey hives on our farm, because we were organic, and he liked that. And I do remember that he taught my brother how to take care of them, and eventually my brother had some of his own hives. I do remember that. And there was another gentleman named Bob Schrey in our area. And I do remember he got fertilizer the same time my dad did. And I think Mr. Brubaker did, too, in Juniata County. That's all I remember about that. (11:23)

AA: So tell me more about your family's connection to Walnut Acres.

RM: Well, our connection to Walnut Acres was, we did not live far away. Maybe a half hour at the most for traveling. They were Penns Creek, and we lived in an area called Mount Pleasant Mills, but we didn't live close to the town, we actually were out on a farm. And I remember going with my dad to Walnut Acres and being very interested in what was happening there. And I do remember tomatoes going there, and maybe my dad rented a truck some years, I don't

remember how they got there exactly. But I remember being there and seeing things being unloaded. And it being a busy place, I remember that. And going inside. They had a bookstore. I do remember my dad buying a lot of his books from Walnut Acres, and a lot were the Rodale Press books. I have some of them to this day and read them. They're still really interesting. That's basically what I remember from that time period. A lot of times you were the kid in the truck with your dad, you'd hear conversations but it's really hard to pull them back, especially so many years later. So that's basically what I remember about that.

AA: And you mentioned that your family also bought some products from Walnut Acres?

RM: Oh, yes, we bought products from Walnut Acres. We bought flour from them early on. Whole wheat flour, and I think we bought them in 50-pound bags at least, if not 100 pounds, I can't remember that exactly. It was big bags, I do remember that. And raw sugar. We got raw sugar from them. I remember their peanut butter, because that's where we would buy our peanut butter. And we bought it in a large container. And the other things we would buy, they had something called a seven-grain cereal, and I remember eating that a lot. That was earlier. Later, I would say toward the end of the '60s, we actually had grain that this gentleman named Mr. Brubaker over in Juniata County had a stone grinder in his barn, and we would get and grind our own flour, made our own cornmeal from our own corn. But I think we always bought raw sugar from Walnut Acres, and the peanut butter from Walnut Acres, and some other things that I don't probably remember. But I do remember those things. (14:03)

AA: Was there anything that you remember about the Keene family?

RM: What I remember about the Keene family is they were very well-respected. I do remember that. And I remember going over there, and it was always a busy place. I do remember that. Later, much later—like way later in my life, when I was married—my sister-in-law—and this doesn't have to do with organics, but they were very community-oriented. I remember him being part of the Susquehanna University Community Choir, because my sister-in-law sang in that also, and being like, "Wow, Paul Keene sings there." And I think it is one of his son-in-laws that is the director of that choir. I remember him being community-oriented and lots of people knowing about him. Always a high regard for Paul Keene and his family. That is really what I remember about them?

AA: Do you remember anything about the Walnut Acres farm?

RM: I do not. I'm sorry.

AA: No, that's fine. What about the business? Do you remember what it was like walking in there?

RM: I remember going back a lane and coming to, I don't know if it was truly a parking lot, but a large area that was kind of in front of you, and things always seemed busy. That's what I really remember. Which was exciting, because we lived on a farm. You didn't go, we did not go to town and buy things in a grocery store, but maybe once a month, on a rainy day. So I remember

that being very exciting, to go over there and see all the hustle and bustle, and people walking around, and Dad talking to people. That is truly what I remember about that. (15:57)

AA: So how important do you feel Walnut Acres was in helping organic farmers market their produce in the 1960s and '70s?

RM: They were extremely important. There would have not been a local market that you could have taken your organic vegetables, or fruits if you had them, or any other product. There would have not been a place. It just wouldn't have existed. And for us, I am sure having a place to sell our vegetables is the reason we were raising that. And I would say it had a great deal to do with us transferring over to organic. And I can say, I do remember, we were what you would have called 100 percent organic. I do not remember anything about certification back then, whatsoever, but I do remember that being a big issue if you were selling things to Walnut Acres. They wanted to make sure that what they were getting was organic. And that's kind of what I remember, really. You had to make a profit on a farm. And if you weren't in dairy anymore, and if you weren't going large with field crops such as your soybeans and your corn, which were the really big ones, and some grain, you had to have a market somewhere. And they were wonderful for that. They were wonderful for that type of thing.

AA: And then how important, on the other side, would you say that their direct marketing and mail order business was for helping people buy organic products?

RM: Absolutely important. Their mail order business was—I don't know if it was worldwide, but I do remember it was very, very popular in the United States. And they would get orders from all over. I just remember us even sometimes getting their orders in the mail and knowing what we wanted. And when we would go over there, then we would have our list of what we wanted. I do remember sugar being a biggie, biggie, biggie, because we used honey and sugar, and that was it, except we had one maple tree, a sugar maple. And my brother would tap that. But it wasn't a huge amount of maple syrup. But I do remember we used their sugar all the time. But having a store there, it was probably very important for local people who wanted anything. And it was extremely important, I would say it drove their business to be successful, to have the mail order business. That's from my point of view. (18:49)

AA: So what can you recall about the organic farming community in Pennsylvania in the 1960s and '70s?

RM: Very little. I remember the neighbor over in Juniata County, which was the neighboring county. And a few people in our area that I just mentioned. And there may have been a few more, I cannot remember, who would use some organic products. Being that we were in an Amish and Mennonite community, that's the portion I know more about, because we didn't really travel that much, I don't know about the rest of Pennsylvania. But I do remember in our area not really—when you talk about organic farms—not really much at all. That does not mean that everybody in our area went chemical. We had so many small farms, it was a small farm area, not large farm. And a lot of them kept farming with traditional methods. I mean, the horse and buggy which we had in our area, and the Amish—to this day, that's how they farm. And so they did not necessarily transfer over, they did their traditional farming for many years. I would say

now, many have transferred over. But at that time and place, I don't think they did. But that's from my own memory.

AA: So were many of those Amish and Mennonite farmers farming organically?

RM: I'm not sure. I do not remember. I wish my dad were alive to tell you. But I do remember Mr. Bob Schrey very much being a person that we were connected to with farming. So I would say he probably was, a major part of his farm was organic. I do know Mr. Roy Brubaker really was organic, and really pushed it in Juniata County. I do remember that. And this Mr. Masland that I talked about, I do remember that he was very interested in organic. And we would buy our honey from him until he started putting it on our land, because my dad felt he did not spray. I do remember that. But it was far and few between, really, as far as what we would consider really organic. (21:20)

AA: So did you have any connection with the Rodale family or visit their research farm?

RM: No. Only in the sense of getting their literature. I will say in my older years, after getting married and settling down and having my own family, in recent years I've visited them often. But not growing up. I don't think we ever went out there. We didn't travel very much when we were farming. So I can say no, we did not have a connection in that sense.

AA: Do you know if there was much connection between Rodale and Walnut Acres, other than them selling their books?

RM: I really don't know. I couldn't answer that, because I really do not know.

AA: Now you mentioned that people would stay at your family's farm while they were visiting Walnut Acres to buy products. Is there anything you want to say about that?

RM: Some of the families would come regularly, and they would get these mail order forms. And they knew about Walnut Acres. And sometimes we would travel to other areas with our church, and they would like to come to our farm, because we were organic, like Walnut Acres. And they would stay maybe a weekend and a Monday, because really what they were going to do is go over to Walnut Acres, and we were kind of a stopgap. That's really what I remember. I don't remember—I do remember one was a German man from Baltimore, I remember that. And he loved coming to our farm many, many times. But it was usually people who really were into wanting to buy from Walnut Acres. And knew we had an organic farm, and would want to come and stay. We did not have a lot of modern conveniences at our house, so we were also kind of a unique family to them, coming from places where—in the sixties, in the late sixties, people all had plumbing, all that type of thing. We did not. Not until I was like 14 years old did we even get running water in the house, because we lived in an Amish area, and nobody else did either. So it wasn't a big deal to us. And I remember them thinking that we were very unique in many ways. And they would like to look at our crops, I do remember that. They wanted Dad to take them out to the field and look at the crop. They were curious and interested in organic production. That's what I remember about them, mostly. (23:53)

AA: So what is your perspective on the hippies of the 1960s and the '70s and their connection with organic agriculture?

RM: In our area we really didn't have them—my rural area—anything at all. I would not even have known about hippies except for going to high school, which I went to the Selinsgrove high school. And it was obviously the movement of hippies, in various ways. Some of them were moving back to the land, some of them were moving to San Francisco. It was the time when that was all kind of going on. So what I remember mostly is the people who were in high school, who would talk about going back to the land. And I really thought they did not know what they were really talking about. I didn't really connect to them because I had very little in common with most of them. And I was shy, I was a quiet-natured shy girl in high school. So I would hear conversations about it, and I would think they really didn't know what they were talking about. But I will also say, I read a lot about these communes and people going back to the land and thought it very interesting, very, very interesting. I can't say that I had a judgment call one way or the other, I was just very curious about it. And when I met my husband in the early '70s, he was from Virginia, and they had a commune that was still very active, and I think it is to this day. So there were some I knew went on to be successful, very successful. I did not know that very many of them lasted long at all. But that's just what I know about them. (25:45)

AA: So what is your perspective on the environmental movement and the connection between that and organic farming?

RM: Well, I look around, because we live in a farming area here. It's still—where I live now is in Mifflin County—I would still overall say the farms are small. By Midwest standards they're tiny. But in our area I would still say they're small. It is a dairy area. A lot of small dairy, some larger. Not many over 500 or 800 dairy cows—and that's unusual, actually. I feel sad sometimes. I have a neighbor man who has taken a farm that was farmed conventionally, what we would say, with the modern ideas of chemicals and all the pesticides and all that type of thing. And he is trying to transfer it over, and he is very successful. He has 35 dairy cows. So I'm very excited when I see things like that. But overall I would say, it makes me kind of sad to see farmland that in this area was very fertile farmland. The land we live on, when we purchased it—about 43 years ago we purchased where we live, about six acres—we had the farm, my husband had the farm soil tested, and what kind of soil. And it's called Hagerstown soil, which is a very good soil. So it's very fertile in this area. And we've seen so many people just raising corn and soybeans, corn and soybeans. And some grain. And it makes me sad, because I think this eventually is going to destroy the soil. That's how I feel, from my background in organic.

The farm that we actually have was not grain, because an older family lived here, an older couple, and it was just put into grass and what we would call kind of a hayfield, and cut off by another local farmer. And we didn't find a lot of pesticide residue. So we've kept it organic. It is interesting, we've had a hard time sometimes finding farmers that do not want to spray. And I think they think that John's wife—which is me—is a little odd, because she put her foot down, it is not going to happen. And he's very open with that, very good with that, too. But we've actually had to find farmers who would not spray our fields. I just don't want that to happen. We've been very blessed to have a farm for so many years that has been left not sprayed with all those chemicals, and I want to keep it that way. We are large gardeners ourselves, and we are organic gardeners. (28:58)

AA: So then, when did you buy your land?

RM: We bought our land, I was just thinking, about 43, 44 years ago. I think it was probably in 1979, I think that's when it was. I remember we bought it in October. And we have the winter to think about it, because winter set in. And in the spring, we got someone that had a small tractor to—nothing had been tilled around here for years. And we did have it tilled to put in a garden. And it was very stony. I remember us picking stones, picking stones. For years I remember picking stones. And we started out with a small garden because our family was very young, I just had babies, really. And as they got older, we stopped farming that small garden and transferred our garden out to more of a field garden behind our barn. And we've farmed out there ever since. And as the boys got older, we would raise a lot of cash crops, and we would sell it right here off the road that we live on with just putting a sign up. And strawberries was something we sold a lot. For years I sold strawberries. Until all of my sons were in college and off getting their careers going, they would come and help. And neighbor boys, a lot of neighbor boys and some girls, loved to come and pick strawberries. And we would have them just sell from the farm. Never had trouble getting rid of them.

Some other things we would sell were pumpkins, tomatoes, potatoes, bell peppers—I remember selling bell peppers a lot. I hesitated selling things like string beans or shell peas or something that was very labor intense; that was just too much work. And I did not have come in and pick your own. I was a little fussy about that. So that's what I remember we sold, mostly. And some of those crops were what our boys, we let them pick a crop that they wanted to sell. And all that crop was theirs. And they loved selling pumpkins. That was something that sold really good here. And peppers. Bell peppers and tomatoes. So that's basically what we sold. (31:39)

AA: And how many acres did you have?

RM: We just have six acres. It's a little farmette. And most of it—I would say, if you were looking at my garden, is maybe an eighth of an acre, maybe a little bit bigger, something in that realm. I used to have a whole strip besides that that was strawberries, but I do not have that anymore. I just have one little strawberry bed in my regular garden. I don't know, maybe 300 feet by 50 or 60 feet. Something like that.

AA: So then, have you always grown vegetables organically there?

RM: Yeah. Always. And still do. I still do. I do not sell any vegetables or fruits anymore. We have blueberries, raspberries, and strawberries, but I give them all away. I do allow people that are local here now to come in and help pick strawberries, because I am only picking somewhere between 150, 175 quarts a season. And I just share them. I share my vegetables. I pick a lot more tomatoes than I use. But I share them with neighbors and family. So yes, that's what I do. And yes, definitely organic. I'm probably more organic-oriented every year. I do a lot of reading in the wintertime about gardening. I really love gardening; I'm passionate. I call the garden my happy place. And my husband also is a wonderful gardener and finds it very enjoyable. So we love gardening. And we're both on the same page with organics. He did not come from an organic farm, but we transferred over when we started gardening together. And he's kind of

taken it off. He enjoys it, he reads about it, too. I probably am still the person that does most of the reading, but we discuss it, and we both enjoy it very, very much. (33:50).

AA: So what kind of methods have you used to grow your vegetables?

RM: We have a small tiller, a small tine tiller, and use that usually in the spring when we're going to—we do a lot of groundcover, to get all that prepared. We usually till it once in the spring. And then we do our planting. Of course we plant things at different times. But over time, over the summer, we do our planting. I use a lot of groundcover in the sense of straw for a lot of my crops. Some, we have a lot of purslane here, if you're familiar with purslane. That is a groundcover that is marvelous for things such as eggplant. Where I have crops like my squash, I use a lot of heritage seeds or saved seeds that I save myself. And I let them spread out, and then purslane covers the area around there. And eggplant, oh, eggplant and purslane really are companion plants. Purslane is like a succulent, and eggplant—I think it actually uses some of the succulent's moisture. But it also helps because it's a low cover, purslane is a low cover, it keeps moisture around the eggplant. And I have marvelous eggplant. We let it grow. We let some weeds grow—well, people call weeds. Grasses, or whatever you want to call it—in our cornfield after we get it to a certain height.

We do a lot of hand hoeing otherwise. We don't really do a bunch of tilling during the summer, mostly—I usually figure like this. I take twenty minutes when I go out every day to my garden and do a little bit of hoeing, or a little bit of weeding, or a little bit of whatever I'm going to do. And that's pretty much how we manage our garden. Once in a while we'll have to maybe till if something really got ahead of us, or that type of thing. In the fall we do till a little bit when we're putting in some groundcovers, we use the daikon radish. Some people call it the groundhog radish. We use that over the winter for a cover crop. I use straw on a lot of my things, on my blueberries and raspberries and those type of things. And I have a lot of plants that spread out, like my cabbages are very large, my broccolis are very large, those type of things. My asparagus patch is very large and bushy. They get actually bushy. And they basically are groundcover for themselves. And over the winter I leave them in when there's a late fall crop, when I put out a late fall crop like that. And I leave them in, and they actually help control weeds.

The other thing we use for a cover is grass clippings. Now, we do not do that early in the spring, because there are lots of dandelions, and I don't really want to plant dandelion in my garden. But later on, when the dandelion has stopped blooming, we use a lot of grass clippings in our garden. So we use a lot of straw, and grass clippings during the summer months, and that ground cover, we use the daikon radish on top of that. And there's some areas where we just let, there's another little groundcover weed, and I don't really even know the name of it. But it's not, it doesn't take over the garden, but in the fall, when we let it do that, it's like a groundcover. Especially around my fall things like spinach and lettuce, things I'm going to be picking, kale, during the winter. Because I just finished picking probably the last I'll do for my spinach. I'll pick kale for most of the winter. So we let that be a groundcover there, too. That's what we do.

AA: Is that purple deadnettle, you think?

RM: How high does nettle get?

AA: The purple deadnettle has heart-shaped leaves that are maybe an inch long, and it's usually kind of low. It's only a few inches high. And then it blooms in the spring, with little purple flowers.

RM: I don't think so. Mine has little white flowers.

AA: So maybe it's chickweed, then.

RM: Well, I do have a lot of chickweed. And we do leave a lot of that—I'm sorry, I forgot about the chickweed. We leave a lot of that in the fall, too, as a groundcover. Especially where I had my watermelon and cantaloupe, I would pull out the taller weeds that I don't want in there, that will seed and really take over. But I let my chickweed grow, because that's a marvelous groundcover. Yes, I do have that. No, it's another one, and I do remember looking it up, but off the top of my head I cannot remember it. But it's a common weed here in central PA. And it doesn't hurt anything. It spreads, which I don't mind. I let it do that all around the edges of my garden, and spread in. And then when we till in the spring, it just cuts it off there. But that's basically just some of the weeds that are groundcover-type weeds, we do keep them, too. (39:22)

AA: And then do you put on anything for fertilizer?

RM: My husband uses some fertilizer. I know we put on a little lime. And when he does the corn, I do know he puts on a little fertilizer. I don't know what it is, really. It's magnesium, basically. I'm pretty sure that's what we put on, because when we get our soil test, usually our magnesium levels should be up a little bit. So I know he puts on some magnesium. But not too much fertilizer, no. I do have a liquid fertilizer that's organic, that I get out of Lancaster County. And I do use that as a foliar spray, but that's about it. And it is organic.

AA: Do you make compost?

RM: Pretty well, yes. I feel like with the groundcover I'm helping my soil stay healthy, because it deteriorates into the ground. And we have fairly nice soil.

AA: Do you make compost?

RM: Oh, yes. We make compost. I put some of that on. This year I tried something new. I've been reading about it, and instead of putting compost on a compost pile, I spread it throughout my garden. When we do sweet corn or something like that, we put it right back in, almost like a groundcover, in our cornfield, just putting it out. I do that with all my scraps, all my shells, except lima beans. I do not do that with lima beans. But all my others. And even like eggshells, and when I have some kitchen scraps—I'm cautious not to put my meat in there—but we have just spread that out over the garden all summer long, from early spring. And I was very curious whether corn cobs would deteriorate. And they do. In one season. I'm just amazed, because that comes like July, late July, into August, that we're growing sweet corn. So it's not put on early in the summer. And when I went out there, not too long ago, because I was just checking to see how things were. We were going to get snow. And there were a few left. But very, very few. I was just amazed how much that really did deteriorate. So we have not put as much on our

compost pile this year as we've actually composted it straight on our garden. And I think we're going to keep doing that. I really like that. I do use compost from the compost pile around my asparagus, because I want that to stay very, very nice. And I do that several times a year. But otherwise, I let the compost pile get covered up with grass clippings, and I even put a tarp over it, because we do not have a marvelous modern compost, so some weeds have gotten in around the edges of it. So we covered it to kill that. And we'll not use that probably until midsummer, probably, just to make sure there's no weeds and things growing underneath it anymore. But that's pretty well what we do for fertilizer.

One more thing. When I pull up my string beans, and my peas, and all my different crops that I do pull up because I'm going to plant them, plant something there, and they're done producing, I do not put them on the compost pile. I lay them in a row next to where I'm going to plant something that has been a little bit different. And that has worked out marvelous. It really is rich with getting that right back into the soil. It really is. And this fall I planted peas, regular shell peas that I'll plant in the spring. And I just let them grow. And just recently—I did not pull them out, I left them in the furrow, because I did read that fungi last longer if your plants are alive. And I don't know how long the peas will stay alive. But I am going to plant my shell peas, my pod peas, right along there in the spring, and see if the nitrogen level is higher. That's what I'm going to try. That's a new experiment. I love trying things. (43:58)

AA: So when you mentioned that you read books, what are some of the most influential books that you've read, about organic farming?

RM: Well, I guess the *Acres* magazine. And I get a lot of the books that are in their bookstore. I got one called *Malabar Farm*, which is a very interesting book, I just started reading that. I've gotten some, like *Grain By Grain*, I was very curious about that book, because I use so much flour in my bread baking. Oh, my. I got *How to Farm without Losing Your Hat*, and I've gotten a lot of books from the *Acres* bookstore. That's probably where I get most of mine. Once in a while I'll find one somewhere else, where I'll say, "That sounds like an interesting book to read about farming or gardening." But mostly from the *Acres* bookstore. (44:57) [Some of my books I use as reference books: *Crockett's Victory Garden*, *Rodale's Encyclopedia of Organic Gardening*, *Rodale's Natural Insect and Disease Control*, and *Carrots Love Tomatoes*.]

AA: And so, what is your philosophy of organic gardening?

RM: My philosophy of organic gardening is that if you are a good steward of your soil, it will give you good crops. I really, truly believe that. Does that mean that when we have a drought or it's very, very dry around here—which we get those summers—I might not have as good a crop? True. But I don't remember, I never had a crop failure. Other people, I'll just take an example from this summer. Tomatoes around here did not do as well. It just was too wet when they should have really been pushing to put out flowers and stuff. And being that close to the soil, they get a fungus when it's too wet. I don't have that problem, because I straw them. I also, when I plant them, take the bottom leaves off, so that they don't have that leaf coverage close to the soil. And then I don't have as much trouble with things like that. I didn't have any trouble with that.

So I would say, learning how to do certain things, which *Acres* magazine is wonderful for, and some of the books I read I get online a lot, just books for different things. Different

websites that I find very interesting. Garden Know-How is one of them. The Spruce is one of them. There's others, too. And I've learned a lot about what I should do without using chemicals, that are helpful. Such as, I'm going to give you an example. I had trouble with the cucumber beetles and the squash beetles, because those just arrived. And I read where to put wood ash around them, it helps. And so I do. When I plant it, I put a little wood ash in there. And then right afterwards I put wood ash around them for quite some time. I'll just—because we burn our twigs and all that kind of thing right next to the garden at the end. So I'll just get some of that wood ash and just sprinkle it on there. And it has really made a difference as far as cucumber beetles. Even my watermelon and my cantaloupe. It really made a huge difference.

So when I learn things like that, I just try it. I learn something that is helpful, not to put something on, and it takes care of the problem. So simple. I had trouble for about three years now with onion maggots getting into my onions, which is very disgusting. And I've done all the putting it different places, and eventually you get a little bit of onion maggot. And I read where—and I'm going to do this this spring to see if it works—where ash, again, put that ash right on the row pretty heavy when you're going to plant your onions, and then put it on top, and it discourages the flies that makes the maggots. So we'll see. But I'm always trying different things to help my plants grow. And straw is a great one, because it does help that. Soil doesn't brush up on your plant to create some funguses that might not be good, or bacteria, or different things that can do some damage in the wet season. So I'm always learning about stuff like that. (48:30)

AA: So how would you say that organic farming and gardening has influenced your life?

RM: Well, it certainly is a joy. Gardening is a joy. And having a productive garden is a joy. And always learning, for me, is a joy. I like learning new things. So I would say it plays a very important part in my life. I had an older son, my oldest son, our oldest son, had hereditary Crohn's disease. It kind of runs in John's mother's side of the family. And actually John has IBS. It runs in their relatives somewhere. He [our son] actually had Crohn's. And he didn't get it until he went to college and ate a totally different diet. But he has been able to control it with diet, he's not on any medication. My children are organic gardeners. They saw that as a value. And I would say our diet is definitely connected to organic practices. When I go to a grocery store, I really look for the organic sign if I have to purchase something I don't have. We do buy local a lot. We have a lot of, we have a valley called Kish Valley, where a lot of the Amish have little produce stands. And we do buy from them, local, as much as we can. There are a few organic farms over in that valley, and we purchase from them as much as we can. I get my milk from a neighbor guy who pretty well doesn't use any pesticides anymore, and is pretty well 100 percent grassfed for his dairy. So I would say organic plays a large role in our health and in what we look for if we go to the grocery store to purchase things. And what we raise for ourselves. And we raise pretty well what I eat, as far as vegetables. Not all fruit, of course. Blueberries, raspberries, and strawberries, that's what we eat a lot. I freeze some, make juice out of them. But we buy apples and oranges and grapefruits. But when we do that, I do try to find something that is organic.

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

RM: I would say so. I was raised thinking you should eat healthy. I was also raised that, and feel this very strongly, that God made beautiful soil. He created a marvelous place. And when I'm on this portion, this lot of land that I have, six acres, I become its steward. And I feel that is a very important job. And if we take good care of it, it will take good care of us. But if we do not, eventually, your garden isn't going to do very well. And I see that all the time, where somebody's gardened and gardened and gardened, and soon they have a lot of problems. Or it gets dry; that's a big problem. They won't have as good a crop. But I also see in my area gardeners who are very interested in doing it organically or naturally, without putting stuff on. There's a little program [sponsored by Community Partnerships in our area] called Garden to Table, and it is a growing program, because people are interested, who do see a connection between what you eat and your health. So I'm encouraged that people are really seeing that. Since COVID, I would say I also see more people interested in gardening. So I see those as wonderful things, and I really do believe we are stewards of what God gives us. I really do believe that. And the soil is irreplaceable. We aren't going to get more of it. So we need to take care of it. (52:56)

AA: Is there any person or publication that has strongly influenced your philosophies?

RM: Oh, yes. *Acres* magazine. Very, very much. I used to get the *Organic Gardening* magazine. I do not get that anymore. I get the *Acres*, and I really enjoy it. And I would say the books that I read, and the websites that I read, they definitely help me become more attuned to anything that is helpful. Everybody's always learning. I want to know what they learned. So yes, I would definitely say *Acres*, and a lot of the books that I read through the *Acres* magazine. And I would definitely say the garden to table program makes me do a lot of research online, or read a lot of different books, with variety. I get my seeds—if I get my seeds at all. I am trying really hard to pretty well be parity seeds, and I have another girl in our area that is a large gardener, and she pretty well has transferred over to raising all her seeds. And we share seeds. I do a seed sharing through the garden to table program. And that's very popular. People are interested. So I would say some of the research I do online, and the reading I do in *Acres* magazine, really does affect what I am doing here. (54:37)

AA: So do you have any thoughts on the relationship between agricultural universities and organic agriculture?

RM: I can't say that I have a very large opinion about that, just because I do not know about a lot of it. I am familiar with Penn State a little bit, from the point of view—well, they're local, about an hour away from here. And Penn State actually has, I've seen articles—and I do do the Penn State extension, I get information from them quite a bit. They are very interested. I get organic gardening, they do online programs that I can get. And they seem to be very much into looking at soil. And I don't know if I would call them regenerative as much as, they really do have quite a bit about organic gardening. And I would say they definitely are looking at regenerative farming. I don't know how much. Because I don't do the farming program, because I'm not a farmer. But I look at the gardening ones quite a bit. And they are definitely more interested in the gardens. And they are interested in health, they have a health interest in their extension. So I'm encouraged by that, from what I know from Penn State. But I'm not as familiar with the others, so I hesitate to comment on that. (56:15)

AA: So especially when you were younger, did you run into many anti-organic attitudes?

RM: I wouldn't say it was anti as much as, "What? What's that?" I would say that more. I do remember, we packed our lunches because Mom didn't want us eating the food that was being served at the school. So I packed my lunch, and I always had whole wheat bread. I do remember kids being very curious about that. Because they had the—what I'm going to title Wonder Bread, it was different brands, I'm sure—but the soft white bread, that they brought for lunch. And they were very curious. And I would share some of it with them, because they were interested in what it tasted like. But I wouldn't say it was antagonistic. I've never felt like it was antagonistic, even when my dad would be talking to people. Of course, my dad was a very likeable person. But it wasn't antagonistic as much as just not really knowing about it, or aware, or interested in that. They were interested in what they were doing in farming and saw that as productive and making them money. So I would say, no, not antagonistic, but maybe not knowing a lot about it. (57:36)

AA: So what is your perspective on organic certification?

RM: I will tell you this, I think it has its good parts, and then in other parts I think sometimes it limits some people. But when I do go to a grocery store, I go to the organic portion. I look for that sign. Because otherwise, I don't know. There's no other way to know. So that's important. I feel that's very important. I feel like some farmers who have really invested, that their sign of being certified organic is very important to them. Then I see my neighbor man, who basically I would say is as organic as you're going to get. And he's selling his things to his regular dairy co-op. And he's not making any extra profit off of it. But to him, it's okay. It's all right. So I am glad there is certification. But to do that, all those places, you have to find a place to sell your milk, you have to have a standard, you have to have lots of things that he doesn't have to worry about now. So I can see that for some farmers, maybe not wanting to do that. I never was certified organic. I mean, we just raised our crops here local and sold our vegetables. I've never been certified organic. But I never had trouble selling anything. People knew me. So I see tremendous pluses, particularly for folks who are reliant on going to grocery stores. But from the farming point of view, I sometimes think some farmers hesitate because of the certification. And I'm going to call it the paperwork behind it. And some of the struggles behind staying specific about certain things that otherwise they wouldn't think about that much. So I think it has its pluses, it has major pluses for most people. But I think from a farming standpoint of view, sometimes it might have some drawbacks. But I'm still glad it's a certification. (1:00:11)

AA: Do you have any thoughts on the Real Organic and regenerative organics and their critiques of USDA organic certification?

RM: I see and read about those all the time, both online and in the *Acre*s magazine. And sometimes will see them on PBS, which is our local public station, where they'll have programs. And we love listening to them. I can't say. I'm always happy to see regeneration. I think that's very important, where you regenerate and keep your soil, if your soil was depleted, which I would say if anybody's starting from purchasing a farm that's conventional, the soils are going to be depleted in certain areas. I think it's very important to rebuild those soils. And that's where I see the regeneration of farming heading. And I like that. I'm encouraged by that. Real Organic,

same thing, except sometimes I think, you know, to somebody who goes to a grocery store, that means nothing. But in the farming community of organic, it does mean something to them. And that's okay with me. I'm very pleased that we have organic, and that they are placed in our grocery stores where people can see it and say, "I would prefer purchasing this." I think it not only helps people with their health and making better choices, but it helps the farm community of organic, regenerative—all those things, Real Organic—it helps them because their products are noticed and purchased. If they were not marked, who would know the difference? And there are people who are making that choice because of that sign. And I'm happy about that. And I'm happy about the regeneration, particularly, building soils back up. That's very important.
(1:02:17)

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

RM: I think understanding why people went organic when the push was to go—I'm going to say chemical, because back in our day, that's what we called it. And I'm not looking at that as good or bad. But from the history point of view, I'm saying, why did some choose that? What was their purpose? Because their purpose was stepping out. It was not what most people were doing. They were becoming the unusual. The rare, actually. In the United States. And all of it pushing against what was being promoted. So why did they do that? What was their reasoning behind it? I think that's very important for people to know today. Because if they had not done that, we would not be where we're even talking about this today. They made the way. They started the path. And it wasn't easy. I mean, they were learning as they went, I am sure. But I see it as extremely important to understand why they did that. It's not necessarily about the hardships, it's the why. What was their purpose? What was their reason? Because their purpose and their reason was what is still driving organic. And it was helping their farms stay healthy, with their soils. They cared. And they cared about their family eating healthy. And they saw it as the way, where in the future, this was better farming. That's what they saw. And better for everybody. They saw it as the way to go, versus reading about what people could do. And I can remember that book, *Poisons in Your Food*, being something we talked about in our house. I remember that. That was important. And I think that's very important for people to know today.

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

RM: The only thing I would say is, I am encouraged when I read my *Acres* magazine, or I see people in our area, over in the valley that I talked about. There are quite a few Amish who have gone organic. They sell to Organic Valley. They are small dairies. They are not large. I'm encouraged when I see things like that. Very encouraged. And I look forward to my *Acres* magazine coming every month. I shared it with my neighbor man, and he shares it with another young man in our community, I think he's 19 years old, who is actually field grazing his chickens, which is very unusual. He had his problem with the hawks, and there was an article in *Acres* about it, and so I copied it off, and so I'm going to make sure he gets that. But I'm encouraged by those things. Those things are exciting to me. And I would say, the more they're exciting to someone local, and they talk about it, and they try to connect to other people about it, that helps everybody. And so I'm encouraged by things such as that. I wish there were more of it. I hope it continues to grow.

AA: All right, well thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview!

RM: You are welcome, and I wish you the best with your research. (1:06:03)