

Terry and Jody Grundy, Narrators

Anneliese Abbott, Interviewer

July 8, 2021

Location: Cincinnati, Ohio

TG=Terry Grundy

JG=Jody Grundy

AA=Anneliese Abbott

AA: All right, this is July 8, 2021, and this is Anneliese Abbott interviewing both Jody and Terry Grundy in Cincinnati, Ohio. So let's start with Terry, and why don't you just give a little of your background and tell us a little bit about your connection with organic/sustainable agriculture and how you got interested in that.

TG: Sure, Anneliese. So we're old hippies, when you come right down to it. So we always were interested in the back-to-the land movement and the emerging ecological consciousness in the '60s. But without getting into the details of our personal journey, it brought us, at a certain point, to Loveland, Ohio. It wasn't the first place where we had tried to go, as they say, "back to the land," but it was the place where we really began to dig in on some of the critical issues facing farmers and rural America in general. Jody can tell stories about the time we spent at a Franciscan mission in California and the time we spent at a small farm in West Virginia.

But it was in Loveland that we really began to understand that some of the issues besetting farmers were interconnected. Not to get into details, but we had moved to a farm just down the road from a wonderful center at that time called Grailville, a Catholic women's center, activist women. They had a big farm. And we were living nearby, connected to them.

And very shortly after we moved there, there was a proposal from real estate developers ultimately to put in a suburban-scale sewage system for the whole area. And we could see very quickly would have gone right in front of our small farm. And we could see very quickly that that would have the effect of changing irreparably this rural community. Farmers would have to pay frontage assessments for this type of sewer system. And they wouldn't be able to afford them. And they would therefore have to sell off the frontage lots for development, which is of course just what the developers wanted. And so we could see how wrong that was, not only as it affected us, but as it would affect the whole community around us. Because we both had backgrounds as community organizers, we decided to do what we could to mobilize the community to fight this off. And we could get into a blow-by-blow, but we shouldn't. But it was a big fight, it was a big, big, big fight, because there were some very big political forces involved in wanting to make this happen. But we eventually succeeded in fighting this off.

In the midst of doing that, of course, you meet all of these local farmers. And you start to talk to them. And a lot of things which we kind of understood, we grew to understand even more. We could see that the whole family farming system was really under attack, that everything in the food economy was stacked against it. And these families that had held on for some generations were having to work outside jobs, or two people in the family working outside jobs just to be able to keep farming. And so we began to connect these dots to understand about

development pressures near cities, to understand about agribusiness, understand about the problems of marketing, unless you were just in the corn-beans rotation where you couldn't make enough money to survive.

And so we were very moved by all this, and we were very educated by all of this. And as a result of that, what had started as a fight about one thing in our minds showed the need to have a movement about all of these things. So that was where Jody and I, with Jody I think doing even more of the spade work than I, created this advocacy organization called Rural Resources. And Rural Resources was meant to be an NGO, a nonprofit advocacy group that would dig into all of these issues and try to come up with programs that would benefit small farmers, that would preserve the family farming system, that would increase regional food security and create marketing opportunities for farmers. And inevitably, to get mixed up in public policy debates, as they affect family farmers and the small farming system.

And the rest, as they say, is history. (5:07)

AA: Thank you! Jody, is there anything you want to add to that about your background and how you got interested?

JG: Sure. At which point do we start? Well, just one thing I'll start to build on what Terry said, this advocacy group, this organizing group that we convened to deal with this fight, basically, about the land, preservation of it as over against the very concerted forces that were trying to do major development in the area. It would have completely changed the whole character and been really quite a disaster for the local people there. It was called "Citizens for a Better Goshen," and that's another whole big story with lots of documentation about that. But it's an important one also in the history, just to give a tag.

Terry said without going into details. I will bounce back a little bit to our early roots though and how we even ended up starting to homestead, because we came from California. And my own family had farms. I grew up in a family, I grew up in Los Angeles, but every summer of my childhood, for 15-16 years my mother and sister and I would take the train back to Illinois to our relatives' farms. And so that experience of being on farms and the whole—and there it was still a form of farming that was very cooperative. Farmers always came and helped one another out. It was a scale of farming and a whole way of life in that community. In fact, that community was started by my Belgian ancestors. It was just wonderful, the sense of community, the sense of food security, the whole quality of life. So that was a very early formative, long-time formative experience for me. As over against the urban experience in Los Angeles where I grew up, which was becoming increasingly smoggy and distasteful to me, shall I say. Good things too.

But anyway, that rural-urban back-and-forth that I had in my own experience was very formative. And in fact, our lives—my life and our lives together, Terry and I and our community—have done this toggle between back-to-the-land and farming and that relationship and the urban core. And in fact we came to see the necessity to link these sectors, to see that first of all the problems, many urban problems are displaced people, displaced rural problems. There was a huge exodus from the farms as we know.

So this is kind of background to one of our adventures, as Terry said, one of our back-to-the-land things that really started in California. He said we were hippies. We were. I always say hippies make good, you know. We did. We didn't go down the tubes like some people. And we had a lot of thought. Some people differentiate between just kind of wild and crazy and sometimes very destructive directions of that generation, our generation. But also there was

reflection. There was a lot of reflection and a lot of innovation that started. There's a document called *The Whole Earth Catalog*, which is a real classical bible. So we've got our dog-eared copy of that that says a lot about the movements, a lot of it started in California and we were part of that.

So we were back-to-the-landers there, up in the Santa Cruz Mountains, that was our first venture. And we learned about a person at the University of Santa Cruz who was quite famous named Alan Chadwick. The University of California-Santa Cruz had just begun really, it was brand-new. And they had policies like, you can't cut down the trees to build a building. There were a lot of things like that we have carried over into the present. But anyway, we met Alan Chadwick. Terry actually had a dream about him 😊 We were supposed to go to Santa Cruz and meet the gardener, and we did. At the administration, we said, "Where's the gardener?" and they said, "He's up on the hill." And we literally went up on the hill and these amazing, amazing gardens were laid out, permaculture gardens. And he was quite a character, ramrod straight, very fierce kind of guy. Not, shall we say, an easy person, but a brilliant teacher. And we went up to him, and he said, "Sit down." We literally sat down on the ground, and he began to teach us. So, he was our first real mentor-teacher. We—not only Terry and I, but a small community of people.

He then came to the land we had in the Santa Cruz Mountains on loan to us and helped us lay out huge, a big organic—

TG: French intensive.

JG: French intensive. And he was a master, master gardener from England. I think I told you yesterday. I think there's rumor that he was the Queen's gardener.

TG: Well, he was in the royal house.

JG: He was in the royal household. At any rate, Alan Chadwick was quite a force there. And his legacy there and all across California and even farther. So we feel fortunate to have that learning from him. I, with another one of our community, started taking some classes at the University of California-Berkeley from a woman named Bargyla Rateaver, strange name. But we were educating ourselves. And we were already in the mind of wanting to live more simply, more appropriately, more lightly on the earth in our way of living, that it would be a sustainable way of living that related to the land, related to other people and community. And so these themes were already there in what we were doing. (11:21)

Then we went back to the city. We ended up, we drove across country, we ended up back in the San Francisco Bay area, we lived there a little while, we were in a small community of people. And then we had care of one of the old California missions, Mission San Antonio de Padua, a Franciscan mission. And I might have mentioned to you, and I'll mention it here, that I am a member of an organization called The Grail, an international women's organization. And Terry just alluded to Grailville, where we later settled up the road from Grailville. Same organization. But they had a San Jose center. And I worked there and through my work there before we got together, while I was still in college, I met some amazing women who were going out to meet with farm workers. And this was pre, just at the beginning of when Cesar Chavez founded the United Farm Workers. And seeing the conditions, I'd never seen anything like that, seeing the conditions of the workers. So now, this was also formative to me. To a lesser degree,

Terry wasn't in that part of it, but I was. And with the Grail women, really developing an analysis of what was going on, looking at what really is happening with agriculture, what is happening with workers, what is happening with consumer-producer relationships and all of that.

So then, through these visits and through the Grail, I was fortunate to meet Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers. And later, when we were at the Mission San Antonio de Padua, it was actually a hideout for Cesar Chavez, as were the other missions, when his life was threatened by the goons and those who were after him. So, we literally sheltered Cesar Chavez at the mission at some points.

So these were all, as Terry said, we were educating ourselves and these things were influencing us. He started at a little later point in time. But we didn't really start fresh with the issues in Loveland around the big sewer fight and the development thing. It really was a process. Because of that, we also were deeply influenced by things like Schumacher—what's his first name?

TG: E. F. Schumacher.

JG: E. F. Schumacher. Thank you. Schumacherian economics, and *Small is Beautiful*. Again, we were searching for ways to live for ourselves, but it's also models of sustainable ways of living that have ecological appropriateness and sustainability in a broader sense. So that's the background. (13:58)

And then—so we did the mission thing, again with a mixed community of people. We always seemed to be hanging out with the Catholics, the Franciscans, whichever. But the Franciscans in particular were very proactive. They were very aware of these things and very proactive and very supportive of what we were trying to do.

A little bit later, we moved, as Terry mentioned, to West Virginia. We moved back to the city and then to West Virginia, to land that we bought. Beautiful land, but—

TG: But remote.

JG: Very remote. I mean, literally at the end of the dirt road, the end of “the electric” as they called it. And we dug in. And we thought we could do complete subsistence living there, which we mostly did. Although pretty soon we realized that it was too remote and just many of the factors, and the fact is that we were some of the most educated people in the whole—I hate to say it—in the whole state! That may be a bit of an exaggeration, but it was very clear we were outlanders.

TG: That's a theme.

JG: But anyway, we were very well received by our neighbors, who loved us, and we loved them. We plunged into a way of living there. I mean literally, we didn't have running water, we did have electricity. But we realized there was an inverse relationship between the distance between neighbors and the need for solidarity with them. Our neighbors were lifelines. And so we experienced that the need for cohesion and the old cohesion—which I had actually experienced in my childhood also, in Illinois, but in West Virginia even more so. Terry, who's a vegetarian, had to go help slaughter the hog when it came to hog slaughtering day, there was no getting out of it. You can tell that story.

But what I'm really getting at is the reckoning with, we were like new life coming back in because life had fled that area with the war, with the Second World War, with the consolidation of school systems, so kids no longer went right to their little local school there. Anyway, life had basically drained out, as well as basically the raping and wresting from the people all their underground, all their treasure in their properties, the oil, the coal, all of those things. So they were bought out from under them.

TG: Mineral rights.

JG: Mineral rights. But we trekked around those hills, and we saw what were once—one of our neighbors showed us—were vast orchards. Vast orchards, apple, all these things—no more. And he said, “The thing is that we didn't have markets, and we couldn't, didn't have roads, and we could not get these things out.” So that stuck in our brains, my brain a lot. Both what it had been, and again this cohesion, but a way of life that was basically caput in many dimensions. (17:18)

TG: But there was a dilemma, a poignant dilemma for us. Because here we were, people from California, university educated, Jody and some of our group having studied French Intensive horticulture, all of the experiences that we had. But when you come to a place like West Virginia, with the depopulated hollers—or indeed, when you come to a place like Loveland, Ohio, Goshen, outside of Loveland, Goshen, Ohio, you still had family farms—these things were not particularly relevant to them. We could see the conceptual connection between the farmers in Goshen Ohio, whose farms we were struggling to protect from this inappropriate development. They had long ago just gotten onto soybeans and corn. And they had tenuous markets, they had no power of negotiation in the marketplace. So, whatever they got each year, that's what they got, and if it was sufficient to support the farm that year, hurrah, but frequently it wasn't. And so, when we would approach them—not that we did particularly—but had we tried to approach them with concepts of French Intensive horticulture, they wouldn't have had a clue what we were talking about.

And indeed, most of them didn't really have a clue even about what we would call today organic agriculture. They were just trying to survive. So even though we might have had a very deep commitment to things like purely organic, sustainable agriculture, that wasn't their concern. Their concern was survival. And so we had to be a little less purist in our way of approaching these things, even though, as perhaps we will discuss in this conversation, even though we eventually helped to give birth, and indeed our organization did give birth to the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association, we couldn't be purist about that. The important thing was to maintain family farms. That's what we were trying to do.

And we saw organic agriculture, apart from its ecological benefits, we saw that as an economical move by producers to cut themselves off from the huge expenses of having to buy petrochemical inputs. And you could talk to a farmer about that. You could say, “If there were a way to farm that didn't involve you having to buy all of those fertilizers and herbicides and pesticides, and you could save that as a cost line, wouldn't your bottom line be better?” Well, you know how they will answer, “Yes, but then the pests will eat up my crops.” And then you say, “What if there were a way?” So then you can open up that type of conversation, which we tried to do. So that's kind of a back-door way of thinking about how we not only got into it but promoted it. (20:37).

JG: Yeah, let me pick up the thread building on that again and kind of where I was going with it. The marketing thing, as Terry was saying, and he introduced the other theme about what kind of farming. Just a little anecdote about that. We learned right quick in West Virginia, we were producing like tons of beans, all these beans. And we had boxes of seeds—

TG: Green beans, we're talking.

JG: Way over the top. And we could not sell our beans for love or money. Because they only ate one kind of bean.

TG: Half runner.

JG: Half runner beans. And we had not grown the right variety of bean for them that they liked to can. And it was like, forget it. So that was a real quick lesson. We canned more beans than I ever even care to think about. But it was—so again, I just want to pick up on the theme of marketing, because there were some key learnings in here that were carried over in each of our developments, in the development of Rural Resources and eventually of OEFFA.

So, after a year, about a year there in West Virginia, we moved here to get onto a paved road. Literally. And we literally looked at a map. In West Virginia we weren't able to get out, even with horses, it was so bad. So our neighbor helped us. But we finally got out. And we made one trip to this area, the Cincinnati area, to Loveland, Ohio, where we knew the Grail Center because of my association with the Grail. And actually we had on our honeymoon come through and stayed at Grailville for a couple of weeks.

It all fell into place, and we were offered the rental at that time of a farm up the road from Grailville. And so within a month we moved and began what was about a ten-year period of living in Loveland over the line into Goshen, but continuous, and developed a close relationship with Grailville and with the community around there. And then that picks up the thread to where we got into the Citizens for a Better Goshen. Because some of the people we knew were in fact farmers. They were our neighbors, or they were affiliated with in some ways with the Grail, with Grailville.

We were still trying to do our kind of subsistence agriculture stuff. I actually saw a listing, and my name is listed as having a roadside stand selling some things from Loveland, Ohio.

TG: I don't remember that.

JG: I think I sold them at the co-op. But any rate, it's kind of funny. But we got to sell them there, it wasn't just one kind of bean. (23:19)

So, these themes about what kind of agriculture to do, way of living, a holistic and ecologically sound way of living that included right relationship with land. And later we came up with the moniker of "food, farm, land issues." But there was another thing which is "Cult, culture, and cultivation," those three words are very important. Because they come out of this Catholic tradition that we were part of, and people like Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin were notable figures for us with the Catholic Worker movement, as were the Franciscans and various influence we've had, as well as we were both Jesuit-educated at Catholic university. So social justice, and "cult" meaning ritual religious practice as supporting life. So, "cult, culture, and

cultivation,” culture, building up a culture that helps life to be meaningful and survive. So, the community relationship. And cultivation was really about cultivation of the land. How do we use land, how do we be good stewards of land in a way that the land will be healthy and produce healthy food and healthy people and healthy life? So those three, that was coined by Peter Maurin, I believe, that phrase “cult, culture, and cultivation,” which is findable in his writings, and Dorothy Day.

But we took those on. And we tried to, and the Grail certainly integrated those. Grailville, the farm to which we were related and was right next door to us practically, had started in the '40s. And from the '40s was practicing what was then called natural farming, organic agriculture. So, it's one of the longest in the area, longest practitioners of organic farming. And it was farming. And the women that came there for year schools did that farming. But they were also training, interestingly, there's always the local and global thing, because it was also a training ground, considered to be a sort of a Catholic women's Peace Corps type of thing, because they were training to go to other countries and to also share these kinds of practices and this way of living.

So being part of that, and then our own background, and then as Terry said, this issue arose, it just arose as life brings to us. And we saw that Grailville itself was threatened with this, as were our neighbors, as was our own farm, frankly. People could not afford these high frontage fee assessments that were going to be put on them by this huge development project. So that, what ensued was a huge fight, as Terry said. But it led, each step—and I think I've talked about this before—we had a process, and partly we learned this from people like Paulo Freire and others, there was an action, what we would call reflection, action, reflection cycles. We would reflect on something, we would try to understand and analyze. And then, what is needed, what needs to be done? And to do that and dialogue, do that in a community way, come upon an action, try to take that action, evaluate, reflect again. And all through our work that particular way of operating and that philosophy continued. (27:01)

But just to kind of jump forward a little bit more. So that all happened, that fight, which started in 1975. Mary Lu Lageman, who was at Grailville—I don't know if she was actually living there, I guess she was already there. But she had been in Chicago, she had worked with the EPA in Chicago earlier. And she and another woman, Maria Duivenvoorden, who was one of our founders of Rural Resources, and I approached the Grail about these issues and then other, subsequently I talked about some other issues. But we were working closely there with them. And Mary Lu was very helpful also in this fight because of some of her connections with the EPA. And then I did a great deal of work on it, and we basically mounted with, brought in some national experts to give expert witness, did a lot of research on the area. And we actually won that fight. Not completely, but mostly. So that major development was never built. And the farms and the quality of that community remained.

Sadly, subsequently into the present, half of Grailville will be actually developed now, which is a sad thing for us. But it's part of the history, and it's part of an ongoing struggle about these pressures, about how do we live with right use of land, with right use of resources.

So anyway, we started in 1975 contemporaneously with the trigger of this particular fight. But the earlier background I was giving you as well, it wasn't just made out of full cloth right after the issue with Citizens for a Better Goshen and the sewer fight. We decided to start an organization that, as Terry said, would really help our neighbors, help small farmers basically, and help to preserve a quality of life that we saw was much healthier and much better than

consolidation, especially vertical consolidation, agribusiness and those kinds of things that were coming about.

So, we convened a few people and we literally started, we just made it up. And we said, okay, this is what we're going to do. And created this organization, Rural Resources. We incorporated in 1976, were granted tax exempt status, and we had our founding people, Sister Michelle Teff was with the Glenmary Sisters. She was one of our early founders. Terry and I. That person Maria Duivenvoorden I just named, who was a Grail member. I think we were the actual first four or five. Who am I missing here?

TG: I think Rich Campodonico was one of our incorporators.

JG: He was one, but he and his wife moved back to California. So, after that incorporation, but meanwhile the sewer fight was still going on. That work continued on for several years until, I think it was maybe 1978 or so when it finally settled. But as we got going here in 1976, we did bring in soon after that we brought in Roger Blobaum, Dan McCurry. Roger Blobaum, whose archives, his materials are already at the Wisconsin Historical Society, Dan McCurry, Lindsey Jones, a person, a Brit named Ivan Crow, an agricultural expert from England. I don't even remember how we first met him, but he lived with us and worked with us. Fran Hill, David Rosenberg, and others.

And we began to, not only did we formulate our mission, which we had to do for incorporation and all of that, but it was always to serve, to be a resource. The word was chosen carefully. That we saw ourselves not as building a big organization in the end, but being a resource to rural people. But also to the urban sector. And coming back to that theme of marketing [I] was always thinking about, how do we link these sectors? And I'm going to bounce it to you in just a second here, Terry, but I think that again we had a very strong support and influence from our Catholic associations, both education and then workwise, because Terry subsequently, after we were in Loveland, began to work for a Catholic organization. And that was a big connector for us to do a lot.

But anyway, around 1976 when we started this, we developed our philosophy, and we met regularly to reflect on it. And it began literally from the grassroots, like Maria, who was a farmer, began saying, "What farmers do I know? What are their needs? What's going on?" And so we started developing this. But then we decided to start programs. So programs were designed, not first to, we never thought to just impose an idea, this is what you all should do—we weren't trying to impose a way of farming or a way of anything, really. We were first listening. What do you need? What's going on? How can we help? How can we resource? And then I think this is a good connector, Terry, to your work, because you brought in so much through Catholic Social Services and those connections. (32:45)

TG: Well, there was a tradition in American Catholicism, 20th century, that was trying to support Catholic rural life. And there was in fact an organization called the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. It was a pastoral thing. But as a result of the pastoral involvement in the church, because there are Catholic rural areas, or rural areas in America largely populated by Catholic families, there was an attempt on the part of the Catholic Church to become more relevant to the lived experiences of these people. And so even though the church didn't come out promoting organic agriculture or specifically forming marketing arrangements that would benefit these families, it certainly was giving moral support to families.

We found in our early days that there were people in this Archdiocese of Cincinnati, and in the neighboring Catholic diocese of Covington, who were—I'm supposed to be looking at names here now—who were very alert to these kinds of issues. And they were more than happy to give us help. And they did. They joined us in our work, and that was good. But I really want to go back to something, though, because it would be easy to forget this. You know, these kinds of ideological constructs, to think about a broad ecological perspective, or to think about how the American economy has evolved in such a way as to be disadvantageous to family farmers and to farm workers, field workers, like in California and in northern Ohio. These were things that intellectuals, Catholic intellectuals among them, thought about. There were certainly a lot of people who were concerned about them.

But what we discovered out in Goshen, Ohio was that as we were fighting off this suburban sewer system and trying to get involved in the lives of local family farmers, is that they weren't necessarily thinking about any of these things. They didn't have any grand ecological perspective. They were just farmers. They were trying to survive. And they didn't think deeply about what was going on in the American economy and why it was becoming harder and harder to survive as a family farm.

So, we had to kind of work on two levels all the time. We could feel very strongly about these sort of deeper analyses that we had, that we had worked hard to gain. But when you really got down to it with the local farmers, it came down to questions like, well, should you stick with corn and beans and chemical inputs until you can't survive anymore and sell your farm and it will turn into a little subdivision? Or, are there other ways? Are there other directions? Could you for instance—as we were saying a minute ago—practice a kind of agriculture that wouldn't leave you vulnerable to the prices of the chemical inputs? You can call it organic if you want, but you didn't have to call it anything. You could just talk to them in very straightforward terms about what might be a better strategy. And as regards your actual crops, is it possible that if you developed other kinds of crops than soybeans and corn that you would have a more profitable crop on your hands? Though that would then raise all kinds of questions about how would you market these things? And we would talk to some farmer who had spent thirty years on the corn and beans rotation, and you would say, well, how about specialty vegetables that you would sell in the city? And you could just see, their face would be full of confusion, "I don't want to do that, I don't know anything about any of that." But if you had an organization that could help you establish marketing connections with the city, even if it sounds weird to do to drive in and sell in a church parking lot in an African-American neighborhood, you could. And maybe we could show you that you could actually make more money.

So, you know, that was very incremental. (37:39)

JG: Talk about some of the connections you made when you worked at Catholic Social Services in Covington, Kentucky.

TG: Well, I worked with Catholic Social Services in Covington, Kentucky. For those of you who aren't from this area, it's a little city directly across the Ohio River from Cincinnati. But in Catholic fashion it has a diocese of its own. It had a social service agency. And I was privileged to work with them for a number of years before moving on to some other stuff. And because their diocese encompassed rural areas as well, all of a sudden it became a situation where in principle we could be thinking about the situation of small farms in Ohio, but we also had people who were giving us help, and in some cases, financial help for the organization, who were

thinking about small farm families in Kentucky. And so, though we mostly did our work in Ohio, we were certainly open to that.

JG: Yeah, I was thinking about how that's actually how we met Roger Blobaum initially, was through the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. I think it is, because I think I found a note where it says, "A memo to Terry," with Roger's phone number on it about that year. At any rate, however that happened, it happened. It was very fortuitous.

TG: It was, and what we need to recognize here is that we're talking about the '70s. And so what was happening was that there was this sort of emerging consciousness about these issues happening all over America. We were laboring here in Ohio trying to raise these issues and create a meaningful organization. But in Wisconsin there was stuff going on, in Michigan there was stuff going on, in California there was stuff going on, in upstate New York there was stuff going on. And so part of the drama for Rural Resources was not just a bunch of people outside of Cincinnati, Ohio thinking about these things, but finding other groups in other parts of the country that were thinking about these kinds of things. And some of them we really turned to to be our teachers. And I think we were ahead on some things, thinking about some things, but other people were very much ahead thinking about other things. And so we really tried these different organizations that emerged, tried to be resources for one another. And so people like Roger Blobaum were willing to come, or Dan McCurry was willing to come, because they saw it as a movement. (40:16)

JG: Probably this is a good point to pick up on Roger Blobaum, who became one of our first board members. Just because of what he taught us, also. He was a great teacher. I still have vivid memories of him coming to our farmhouse out in Loveland, Ohio, which is where Rural Resources was born, creating these big meals and everybody hanging out there. And he just shared about his work. And particularly one of the things that was so fascinating was his trip to China, I believe it was in 1975. And where he really looked at what was sustainable over centuries, forms of agriculture. And he had a wonderful slide show, it would be very quaint now I'm sure to see it, but it was riveting when he showed these practices and said, "Look, you don't have to, they can do it without all these other poisons and petrochemicals and stuff. We can do this. We can compost, we can do these things, and we can have a sustainable, permanent agriculture that is not dependent in these ways."

And that was the first time that we—well, maybe not the first time, but it really brought it home, that message. And he was such an expert on that and internationally. And again, the local-global thing, he certainly connected us to, and he went on of course to be quite an amazing teacher and expert nationally and even internationally. We were very fortunate to have him with us those first years.

So as Terry said, I think—I want to go back to a point you made about the different levels. That was so true. We were highly educated, and we were analytical. We were trying to understand systems, and then what's the applicability, or how does that relate to the concrete here in this situation locally? And then the other level was just relating to people where they were. Exactly where are you? And it wasn't just corn and beans. There were small farmers who were doing already—we didn't introduce them to, you want to grow something else, many of them were doing it—but they didn't have markets. Back to that theme of markets.

So, I'll segue into, as we listened and as we were developing our understanding and our connections to people, both institutions that could help, and many of them were Catholic institutions. There was Grailville, there was Xavier University, there was the Ursuline community at Chatfield College. Wilmington College was Quaker. There were these different institutions that were very helpful because they were analyzing and trying to see how they could put their resources to use. But we were also developing resources ourselves. And one of the things that we decided then to do was to start doing some programs. And one of the first programs we did—and we went to some programs. We went to a Rural America conference, one of the first. I believe that was in 1975 or 1976.

But our first big conference that we organized was in January 1977. That was at Chatfield College in St. Martin, Ohio, Brown County. And it was called “Rural People, Rural Prospects.” And this first conference assessed the “State of the countryside. The future of rural communities, especially for farmers.” It was a listening process with farmers. And that led to the need to focus on marketing strategies. So that was very concrete toward that action. (43:49)

TG: Well, we ought to say that it was the farmers themselves who said this.

JG: Oh, yes, exactly!

TG: We went in and tried to be respectful listeners. And they were happy that somebody was willing to listen to them, because it's rare that farmers were listened to by anybody. But they were very clear. They said, “We can't, we're not going to be able to move into different kinds of production and maintain ourselves, family farms, if we don't have access to markets where we do have some power. Because now the markets into which we sell are markets where we have no power of negotiation at all, whereas if you have some control of local marketing, whatever your produce might be, you have some ability to set the price and to cut out all that middleman type stuff. And that led us directly to, “What can we do to help them create new marketing relationships with local cities—Cincinnati, Dayton, whatever?”

JG: Yeah. Exactly. And so we started tailgate markets. Actually, we didn't start them immediately, there was another piece in here, which was allying ourselves with the Federation of Ohio River Valley Co-ops (FORC). And that's where we met David Rosenberg first, through them. There was the Federation of Ohio River Valley Co-ops. But anyway, David Rosenberg was a small farmer, and he was an intensive farmer doing lettuce and small intensive crops and also looking at markets. And he was also a very thoughtful person to look at systems. And I had helped to start the first co-op out at Grailville, and we were in affiliation with FORC. There was that whole thing about food co-ops being maybe the way to do it. That preceded tailgate markets. And then also how to get healthier foods, how to get organic produce. Not so much even produce, but more it was like grains and other kinds of things that were produced in a less poisonous way.

So that was an important piece in there. And then there were, right after we'd had that conference in January of '77, in October—it wasn't right after, there were other things that ensued in between—but another important conference was one called “New Directions in Agricultural Marketing.” And that was in Dayton, Ohio. So again, you hear the marketing. We had been listening and, as Terry said, the farmers, we had a process where we really asked them, “What do you need? What's important to you?” Taking that feedback, working with it, and then

the next one was looking at those new directions in agricultural marketing. And there was a woman, Lindsey Jones, came from the Agricultural Marketing Project in Nashville, Tennessee. And she was one of the speakers of that. Actually, I had met her at a Rural America conference. But she was one of the speakers there, as was Dan McCurry, who both became members of our board.

So, they were really, in Tennessee, Lindsey was the coordinator of their agricultural marketing project. She was looking at the southern region of the United States, direct marketing, and was very very smart and very experienced already in that. She was a great mentor and helper in our moving toward the establishment of the markets, which, as I said, came even after food co-ops.

There was another group that was operating called CAMP. Very small-scale earlier on, and by 1978 CAMP, which was the Cincinnati Agricultural Marketing Project—all these acronyms.

TG: Also direct market.

JG: And they were doing some direct marketing. They were trying to work on this, too. And they realized that they were growing as Rural Resources was growing as an organization, we had similar aims, and we had a lot of dialogue with them—we have some of this in our files. And so we reached an actual merger with them, and they said, “We’d like to become part of you and come under your umbrella and your nonprofit status and work with you.” And so that was a very, Steven Zoeller was the head of that, one of the heads of that. And that was a very useful and productive partnership.

So, the markets thing began to really develop. There was also a look at other kinds of production, local production. And we started thinking about local gardens. It’s almost like the Victory Garden thing, what can people do for food security locally? We didn’t do that full-tilt, I thought we had started it in ’77, ’78, but actually as I looked at the records I think it was closer to 1980. But the dialogue about this was going on.

The overarching theme here, and that we saw with other groups, as Terry mentioned, this was popping all over the country—how do we achieve food security? What does food security mean in a community? And everywhere from, what are the markets where people can get good food, fresh food, non-poisoned food? to, how is it produced? What’s happening in the whole food supply system, all the way from the land itself through all the things, through distribution, all of it? And we saw what we called and what was a big enemy, vertical integration. (50:09)

TG: Well, I just wanted to say that we have to put this in the context of the times. At this time Americans had experienced the oil embargo that gave rise to OPEC. And so you could see very clearly that we were creating, had created a food system in America, quite apart from the health and environmental aspects of it, that was completely vulnerable to world oil prices. That couldn’t be good in the long run. And let’s just recognize here again in 2021 that that problem has not been solved. We’re still vulnerable in that way. So that’s one way to think about it.

The other way to think about it, which is a very 2021 recognition, is how tenuous really supply chains are. You can see that we can’t manufacture cars in America because we can’t get the chips from China. So, you can see, that’s just one example. But it’s absolutely the case in agricultural foodstuffs too. I mean, during the pandemic, how many stores got run on so that there was nothing available in one category or another? This concept of regional food security, it

sounds kind of quaint that you have a local city, especially a smaller city like Cincinnati, with a bunch of yeoman farmers all around it, creating cabbages and bringing them in their truck—

JG: You didn't say "their wagons," at least.

TG: --and selling them directly to upstanding citizens in the city. It sounds all very quaint. But taking kind of the romance out of that, the truth of the matter is that in the 21st century a society, a region that had more robust local relationships between producers and consumers, where you had shorter supply lines, you would be more secure. You would actually have more food security. And there's no security more important than food security. We couldn't have foreseen back in the mid-70s or late '70s how tenuous supply chains would become. But I think the argument for regional food security is even stronger today than it was then. We're old, so we're not going to go out and fight the wars now, so it's got to be folks like you folks at the University of Wisconsin, young activists are going to have to do it. But it's still very real.

And there was enough understanding of it at the time that some farmers were willing to get involved with these new kinds of marketing approaches for two sets of reasons. One was survival, because they could hopefully see a way to survive as a family farmer, and secondly it was because they did to some degree buy the analysis. Because we were trying, as we were doing these direct programs, we were trying to help people develop analysis. (53:36)

JG: This is very important what you're saying, the linking then and now, and I'm tempted to jump to the present, but I want to go back for a minute to another conference. It was not our conference, but was extremely important. It was in January 1979 and it was in Nashville. This was the seminal conference where—it was January 12-14, 1979, Conference of Alternative State and Local Policies sponsored this, so that was a national organization. The national organization of this name convened a seminal gathering of food-farm-land activists. There were farmers, consumers, legislative, and public interest groups that formed alliances here. There is a book on this available, I have a copy, but I believe it's also available from Washington, DC. That was incredibly important. It was a huge conference, people from all over the country as Terry said earlier, these groups were popping up everywhere. We were always like, "We're it, we came up with this idea, we grew like Topsy." But it was so exciting.

Terry was not able to attend that one, but I did, and some people who became some of the first founders, board members of OEFFA such as Jon Shafer and others were at that conference and saw what was happening. Jon Shafer was one, and he said, "We need to do this in Ohio, we need to form an organic farmers' association. We need to support each other."

So, what I was talking about earlier in my childhood experience of seeing farmers, my relatives and their neighbors, that they would come together, and maybe you know that from your own background. But that was how you lived. That was how it worked. That was how you not only survived, but you thrived, because you were cooperative and you worked together. Those ideas that we could do this in a region or a state, it was more about the ideas about doing that statewide, were already percolating at that January conference.

In March we had the very important conference, the Rural Resources conference in Columbus, Ohio, that was March 4, 1979. And we convened and organized a statewide conference for natural, also called ecological farmers, in Ohio. FORC, Federation of Ohio River Valley Cooperatives, also assisted with that conference. The purpose was to discuss ecological

farming methods and marketing possibilities, develop a communication network. And a group formed at this meeting to form OEFFA, Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association.

I wanted to link those two conferences, because the January one, with the convening of people from all over the country and all those different groups, not only farmers, but public interest people, policy, consumers and farmers, all of it was together. So, the ideas were formed there and then they were implemented to actually say, “We’re doing that in Ohio,” a couple months later, in March of ’79.

So, I really love the way, it’s like seeds, the way ideas move. They move, and then they grow, and then they kind of die down, but maybe they make seed, and it starts another round of it. What Terry said is so true. It’s so discouraging at one level. We are not secure in our food system here in 2021. We weren’t secure then. We had actually been more [secure in the past]—I had never thought anything like food insecurity growing up, or farming, or anything.

TG: America was a land of abundance.

JG: Oh my god, it was so abundant. And such amazing, deep soil and resources and all of that. And then to see the insecurity coming in. Of course, it was not secure for many parts of the population, particularly urban parts. Rural people were poor very often and were insecure in many ways, but they always had the sense that they had their land, and they could always survive because they could produce food.

TG: Well, except in the mineral colonies of Appalachia.

JG: But even there—no, but Terry, that’s what’s so interesting—yes, but they did, even there where their land was being undermined (pardon the pun). But anyway, not to get off on that too much. My point is that here we are, as Terry said, the energy things. That’s another big theme. Because it isn’t only about agriculture, it’s about rural life, it’s about rural energy, rural electrification at one point, about getting the internet, all of these things, transportation, all these things would often come late or not at all to rural communities. These were also really important things that needed to be addressed, policy-wise and legislatively.

And so, I’m happy to say, I was so thrilled with where OEFFA has come. Forty-three or whatever it is, forty-four years later, OEFFA is still not only alive but thriving. They have their struggles, and there’s always funding struggles, and the pandemic really knocked everybody in the chops, but they interestingly at the last conference—which had to be Zoom—listening to, participating in that, listening to the farmers and listening to how they adapted, how they pivoted, how they adapted, how they were able to start bringing their produce into parking lots again! I thought, oh my god, it wasn’t our tailgate markets, but it’s all of these different ways of working, connecting the urban and rural sectors.

I’ve always been just thrilled that OEFFA took—with much debate and struggle at that March ’79 conference in Columbus—what is the name? Why do we have that big mouthful, which is a ridiculous acronym of OEFFA? But every word is important. It’s Ohio, it’s this region, it’s Ohio. Ecological means relating all of these pieces in a sustainable, healthy way, in a viable way. Food and Farm Association, it’s about the food. Why not just say Farm Association? Because it always had in mind the relationship to the urban sector as well to food production for the whole populace and relating those. And then we always said that the mission was to really

work for the good, food, farm, land issues. Putting those pieces together. And that's still, it's almost verbatim in the mission statement of OEFFA at this point. (1:00:53)

So again, coming way forward but going back, as I said, things grow, they make seed, they die, they fall apart. You know Malabar Farm, that was a big—I think I have all the books, if not all of them, most of Bromfield's books on my shelf—but a lot of the things we read, who put us on to them? Our own research? It doesn't matter—but we could see that what Roger Blobaum was looking at in China, what I remembered from ways of cultivation, agriculture of my relatives, of what we learned from Alan Chadwick about ways of cultivating, ways of understanding more deeply the soil and all the creatures, the microbial levels, all of this together. All of these learnings put together led us to an understanding that the family farm—not to be too purist, as Terry said—but honestly, smaller-scale agriculture done ecologically is sustainable and does provide, not only food security, but community security. And it can relate—

TG: Provides security to the families. Because the problem that we faced was that as more and more of the family farms were becoming economically non-viable in the other model, more and more of their kids decided not to stay on the farm. And the farmer him or herself were taking side jobs in town in order to support their farm. And we said, “This isn't sustainable, it's not humanly sustainable, it's not socially sustainable, because it's not economically sustainable.” And so the issue really became, how do you help them to become sustainable over time? And I'm not saying that we have solved that problem. But I will say for those farmers who have allied themselves with OEFFA, while I haven't seen a scientific study of it, an economic business study, I would imagine that they are more secure, they have a greater feeling and reality of financial security than farmers who haven't made the switch. So, in that sense, I think in terms of our five-plus years of work with Rural Resources, that that really is one of the big successes. The direct marketing continues to be something to which people resort when they feel they need to. So, in that sense that's also been a success.

The third thing, though, about keeping the family farms viable was, as fewer and fewer young people see a future for themselves in farming, you don't have the kind of apprenticeship system whereby young farmers learn farming from their dad or older farmers down the road. So, you do have some young people who would like to go back into farming, but how do they learn their jobs? They don't feel they want to go to Ohio State and get a degree in agriculture, they just want to farm. And so one of our dreams at the time was to create a system in training for idealistic younger farmers who had a commitment to ecological farming, natural farming, but would also learn the practical ropes on how to really do it, both from the farmer's side and the marketing side.

And that was the one nut that we were never able to crack. Because these other approaches, where you could put on an educational conference about ecological farming, or you could bring people together to create new associations—those are things you can do without a lot of up-front capital. You get a small—Chatfield College agreed to let us use their facilities, you bring your own big coffee urn, people meet all morning or even all day, and they go away full of enthusiasm and excitement about your approaches, and they stay in touch, and things like OEFFA get founded. But for a small farm training center, you have to like have the land and have the dormitories and have the classrooms, have the funding, and you have to hire a faculty to come in and do that. And we looked at Chatfield College, which is a small liberal arts college that came out of the Catholic Order of Nuns, and they could have seen themselves doing it, but they had another whole mission about reaching out to low-income people, rural and urban, to get

them prepared for jobs. And then we looked at Wilmington College, which I don't know if you're aware of this, but you think that Ohio State is the only agricultural college in Ohio, but no, it turns out, Wilmington College, which is a small Quaker college north of Cincinnati, has had an ag school for decades and decades and decades.

But that was the one we were never able to solve. And we even got a couple of our staff, our young staff people going to the one training center we knew about, which was in North Carolina, the Frank Porter Graham Center. One of them then became affiliated with that, which was great, for a few years. But we were never able to replicate that in the Midwest. And I still think that it's something that's worth doing. It won't be us that do it, but—

JG: Yes, and others have had this dream and tried it, too. We also tried Grailville, I have documentation of these proposals and all the work on that. And honestly, that was right from the beginning, we saw the need for that from '76. And till the end, the bitter end, we were still struggling.

TG: It would have taken a million bucks and—

JG: But let me just say in a positive way, and again, it makes me very happy to say this, that OEFFA has taken this very seriously, apprenticeship and teaching. And also access to land. So retiring farmers, not necessarily related to their son and their daughter, younger farmers are being incentivized, actually legislation just passed in Ohio by leaps and bounds, which is amazing, to give incentives and help to farmers to be able to offer this to younger apprenticing farmers, both access to land and to some of this training.

So just to wrap this piece up, kind of a big circle, and then Terry can get in a few more words, the fact is that this work has gone on, and training, marketing, but that the need for doing it and the need to get legislative policy directions, supported by lobbying, supported finally by legislation, is huge. And I think a huge success. Even as other things that are very sad, like there was just a huge blow to farm workers by the Supreme Court that are being a big *kibosh* put on organizing farm workers at farms, which means virtually there won't be any. So that was a real blow to all the work Cesar Chavez and others have started. Good and bad news. The good news is that some of these directions are very positive. And also the Biden administration is supporting sustainable agriculture, putting money behind it, unbelievable, whereas in 1980 as we know the big slam-down, destruction even of documents supporting sustainable agriculture, the Bob Bergland secretary of agriculture study was destroyed.

TG: But the truth of the matter is that the oil industry and the petrochemical agricultural industries that are outgrowths of the oil industry came to dominate agriculturally worldwide, particularly in the United States. The grants that places like Monsanto were giving to land grant colleges, to the ag schools, their ability to field lobbyists at the state and federal level. You take a group like OEFFA, you have to respect the fact that they got this legislation passed in Ohio. But the truth of the matter is that for every success of that kind you'll find dozens and dozens being outgunned by the petrochemical companies. (1:10:31)