

**Joan Dye Gussow, narrator**

**Anneliese Abbott, interviewer**

**December 1, 2022**

**JG** = Joan Gussow

**AA** = Anneliese Abbott

**AA:** This is December 1, 2022, and this is Anneliese Abbott interviewing

**JG:** Joan Gussow.

**AA:** And we are doing this interview over the phone. So Joan, thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview today! Why don't you start and just tell us a little bit about when and where you were born, and if you had any connection with agriculture when you were a child.

**JG:** I was born in Alhambra, California, on October 4, 1928. And my mother gardened, but I didn't. Agriculture was not on my agenda. My parents both came from Iowa. My mother didn't grow up on a farm. My father grew up in a farming family, but that was about the only connection I had.

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

**JG:** Pomona College. I was a pre-med.

**AA:** Did you have any connection with organic or sustainable agriculture at that time, or not?

**JG:** I don't think so. I don't remember having any.

**AA:** So then, what did you do after you graduated?

**JG:** I came to New York and went to work for *Time* magazine as a researcher.

**AA:** So what kind of articles did you write for *Time*?

**JG:** I didn't, women did not write for *Time*. Women researched for *Time*. Men wrote for *Time*. And that went on for a very long time. Then they were sued for it, and they denied they were sexist. Anyway, I worked for *Time*, and I ended up being the art researcher. I was the medical researcher for a while, and then I was the art researcher.

**AA:** So then what did that involve? Collecting then the information that the male reporters used to write their articles?

**JG:** You mean, what did I do as a researcher?

**AA:** Yeah.

**JG:** I looked up background material, and then I did interviews with my writer. (1:54)

**AA:** So then, when did you decide to go to graduate school?

**JG:** Much later, after I was married and had children, I went back to graduate school.

**AA:** And so you studied nutrition, right?

**JG:** Yes, I went to graduate school in nutrition.

**AA:** So what got you interested in nutrition? Why did you decide to study that?

**JG:** Well, I really decided to study it, because when I was pregnant with my first child, my brother-in-law sent me Adelle Davis's book, *Let's Have Healthy Children*. And I realized that I agreed with her about the state of the American food supply, and so I spent a lot of time telling my friends about the crap they shouldn't be eating and so on. And so I finally decided I really wanted to go to graduate school. And while I was thinking about landscape architecture, which interested me, but I decided that I should really study nutrition because I was always giving people advice, and I didn't think, I thought I should know something in depth about what was going on. (3:02)

**AA:** So before you went to graduate school, had you started gardening at that point? When did you first start gardening?

**JG:** I started a garden when we bought a house in Rockland County, in 1957, I believe. My first son was born in 1958, so we probably bought it in 1957. The date doesn't matter. The end of the fifties. And I decided to start a vegetable garden in part of the backyard, just because. I don't remember why. We were short of money, so that could have been part of it, but I just did. My mother had always liked gardening, and so I sort of had a feeling about it, I think. But anyway, I just started gardening.

**AA:** Was your garden always organic?

**JG:** I have no idea. I really thought about this question, and I thought, "You know, I don't remember." I probably, having read Adele Davis, who was very into the food supply, I think I probably, whenever I started taking *Organic Gardening*, which was sometime way back when. But at some point I realized that I liked the idea of not putting poisons on my food. I think *Organic Gardening* provoked my, *Organic Gardening* magazine. And like I said, Adelle Davis with her, *Let's Have Healthy Children*.

**AA:** And so then, your farming methods, were those influenced by what your mother did, by *Organic Gardening* magazine, where there other influences? What were the main influences on your farming methods?

**JG:** Exactly what I just said. Just what I said. *Organic Gardening* magazine, and it probably initially began with the idea of *Let's Have Healthy Children*, but it was certainly from *Organic Gardening* magazine that I learned how to do it. I don't remember where I first heard of *Organic Gardening* magazine, but I took it.

**AA:** And that would have been in the 1950s sometime, when you started getting that?

**JG:** Does that matter?

**AA:** Not that much.

**JG:** Please. That struck me as a really, really, pointless question.

**AA:** So you mentioned in one of your books something about John Jeavons, I think it's something about how to grow more vegetables on less land than you can imagine? Did that influence you also?

**JG:** I'll be honest with you, I don't remember when I first. I know John, he's a friend of mine. I don't remember when I first knew about him. All I know, when my husband ended up teaching at Santa Cruz, and I think that's when he first heard about John Jeavons's way of double digging. And that was, my husband went to Santa Cruz the first year I became department chair. So that was 1975. In 1975 I met John. I don't know why these dates are so important, honestly. I have a long life, and it doesn't really seem to matter very much about anything.

**AA:** I'm just asking about the dates to try to fit it in with other people's stories, like the big picture of organic gardening and how it all connects. That's the only reason I ask about those. So let's go on. Is there anything else you want to say about your garden, like your early gardening, any of the specific methods you used there?

**JG:** I don't remember a lot. I remember we probably undoubtedly composted, my husband liked to compost. And we lived on property with several huge oak trees. And so we had a lot of leaves. We had a little trouble getting enough green material, even though we had a half acre of grass. But it was hard to get enough green material to compost. I remember we would just get big containers full of oak leaves and save them for later. But I don't remember anything specific except we simply dug in what we could. We would mulch the paths. I remember that we would mulch the paths with newspaper and hay. And then in the spring we would simply turn all that into the beds next to them. We made paths and beds the way Jeavons did. And we were double digging. So we would double dig everything into the soil. (7:59)

**AA:** So then, back to your career in nutrition. Is there anything you want to say about graduate school? Did you learn anything about organic food, organic farming, was that ever mentioned in your graduate classes?

**JG:** Organic, in nutrition, the nutrition profession at the time I entered it, and to some extent going maybe ten years beyond that, was totally hostile. I mean, organic was a fad idea. It was a fad, you were called a faddist. And a faddist was the most awful thing you could be called in

those days as a nutritionist. So you certainly, if it was ever mentioned, it was certainly mentioned as a fad. It was not something I talked about. And I was myself called a faddist at one point, because I said, I one time gave testimony at the request of somebody—I can't remember who they were—having a hearing in the city on the deceptions of health food stores, and I was asked to testify. And I testified reluctantly, because I knew it was a death signal for me to get up and talk about it. But I very, very carefully wrote what I wrote about how I admired more someone who would pay more for organic carrots than someone who would pay extra to get carrots in browned butter, frozen carrots in browned butter in the freezer case. That if you were going to pay extra, it was better to pay extra for organic. But I went on and said, it was just something some farmers did. Some of them didn't even get extra money for it, so forth and so on.

Anyway, when I got up to testify, the attorney general who was having the hearing asked, the person who was running it for him, asked me if I could cut my remarks short. And I had spent all this time being very, very careful what I wrote. So I got up, and I said, "One thing I think is really unfair is the way there is so much bias in this hearing." And the attorney general turned and snapped at me and said, "Who's really biased?" And I said, "You." And he listened to every word I said, so I gave my whole twenty minute talk. And the next morning, my picture was in the *New York Times*, and it said, "Nutritionist Defends Faddists." So that's what it was. (10:25)

**AA:** And so what was that hearing? What law court or whatever was that in front of?

**JG:** You're kidding me. I have no idea. It was Louie Leskowitz who was the attorney general, and it was a hearing he was holding. I don't even remember the year, I don't even know if I have the picture. But anyway, that's what it was. I'm just telling you what people felt about organic at the time.

**AA:** Oh, yeah, that's really interesting. So do you have any insights into why, because nutritionally speaking, what they would always say is that there's no nutritional difference between organic food or conventional food. And so it seems strange to me, if there was really no difference, why they would be so opposed to you. Do you have any insights on why that was?

**JG:** Well, it was just thought of as a way of taking people's money, it was thought of as exploitative, I guess. I actually had a student who did her dissertation, I told her she should do a dissertation, because everybody said it and nobody had looked at it, because everybody was saying that the health food stores were exploiting old people, that old people went to health food stores and paid all this extra money that they didn't have, these poor old folks. And she went and looked, and there wasn't one single article about it. Nobody ever does anything except say it. Nobody ever looked at it. Of course, it didn't turn out to be true. So it was just part of our, we were a very small profession, at the bottom end of an industry which is the largest industry in the United States. And the food industry, of course, doesn't want organic to be good. So why would nutritionists, who need to work for them, go out on a limb and spend organic? There was no reason. There was no organic industry, there was no organic, you couldn't get paid by organic people. So it was just, it was just mythologists. Nobody paid attention. They didn't really know if it was better or worse, but they were denouncing people who went to health food stores, even though the people who went to health food stores were buying brown rice and all the kind of things we tell them to eat. But they were being denounced. I thought it was insane when I went

into the field. What are we denouncing these people for? They were all trying to eat good food. (13:04)

**AA:** So refresh me on this, you became department chair, then, right after you finished your master's degree?

**JG:** That's right.

**AA:** So was it difficult being the department chair, did you run into any difficulties with you being more favorable toward organics than perhaps the rest of your colleagues?

**JG:** No, no, I didn't run into any problems once I became department chair. The person who was department chair just before me, very briefly, had told me that one of the more famous people in the field had said that I was a faddist. But the teacher's college was, people outside of the profession did not agree with this evaluation of the organic. Anybody who could just think clearly didn't think that way. And so there was nobody in my college who shared this view that I was this radical person. They'd read a lot of stuff that I had written, and I had done a lot of public speaking at that point, and they had read a lot of what I had written, and they thought it made a lot of sense. And that's why they ended up making me department chair.

**AA:** So is there anything you want to say about your book, *The Nutrition Debate*, where you—I especially read the chapter about the organic food, because that is what I was most interested in. And that, I think, is the only thing I've read written by a nutritionist during that time period, the early 1970s, that even presented anything favorable toward organics. So is there anything you want to say about what inspired you to compile that?

**JG:** I don't even remember—oh, *The Nutrition Debate*? Yes, I'm sorry, I thought you were talking about my other book. Well, we just had a chapter about organic. We just gave both sides. And I don't think anybody cared that we did that. That never came up. The only comment I ever had on that was an amazing comment from a very well-known nutritionist who was supposed to be reviewing the book and hadn't gotten around to it. And I met him someplace, and he said to me, he said, "You wrote that book, *The Nutrition Debate*." And I said, "Yes." And I knew there was a "but" coming. And he said, "Well, it's very good. It's very good," he said, "but you don't end up telling them which way is the right." And there was nothing to say. I mean, we wrote it so that people would think. We tried to give both sides of all the issues so the teachers would teach it and have their students think through these issues. And he thought we should come up telling them what the right answer was. (15:45)

**AA:** So then, tell me more about that Nutritional Ecology class that you taught. What inspired you to teach that?

**JG:** Well, as I said to somebody who once asked me that, a woman who came to review the program, I said, "A high sense of indignation." I don't know. I just kind of fell into it. I was sort of helping somebody teach a course and I kind of slipped in things I felt were important. None of what I had going into the field that I thought I would learn was I learning, and so I put in a session on food and population. And then I put in, when *Limits to Growth* came out, in 1972, I

put in a session on limits to growth. And then she did not get tenure, and I was given the class to teach. And I just started collecting a series of issues that I felt were important. And over time it evolved, and then somebody decided it was important enough they wanted to put out a book. And after he decided he wanted to put out a book, I went back and sort of put together the things that seemed to go together. And books, as I said, being shorter than classes, I mostly put out all the things that related to the environment. And it just evolved. I mean, I invented the field of nutritional ecology, and it kind of evolved in my mind over time. And I produced it.

**AA:** So how long did you continue to teach that class?

**JG:** Until this year.

**AA:** Wow. So you still taught it this year?

**JG:** I said, no, I'm not teaching it this year.

**AA:** But you taught it last year.

**JG:** I taught it last year. I co-teach it with somebody. And I've had a co-teacher for quite some time. And last year was, a lot of it was remote. But I couldn't, I'm 94, I'm not going into New York every week anymore.

**AA:** Very understandable. So what got you interested in the environmental, ecological issues in the first place?

**JG:** Well, my husband was on the board of Friends of the Earth, and I was, I had read *The Population Bomb*, and I was concerned about people running out of food. So I would say, probably, those two things combined, together with the fact that I liked to garden and I liked the outdoors. I like, I grew up in California, so in California I was used to being outdoors. And I felt, I was just aware of the ecological issues. The students in my classes in those early years thought I was crazy, because they thought, "Why on earth should a nutritionist care about agriculture?" And although that doesn't seem like a probable fact at this point, that was what people were saying. Why would you be interested in how food is grown just because you're a nutritionist?

**AA:** So was that quite unusual at the time, to teach what we would call now an interdisciplinary course?

**JG:** Oh, of course. There was no connection between nutrition and agriculture. None. None. I mean, I had a friend who, when she graduated, was going to a land grant college. And I said, "Oh, aren't you lucky! You'll be next to the agriculture program." Well, they were like blocks away on the campus. They hardly ever talked. (19:47)

**AA:** So were there any especially memorable moments from that class that you would like to share?

**JG:** When you've taught something fifty years, that's not a question you can answer.

**AA:** How did it change over the years? I'm sure you probably changed the readings and stuff from what you published in *The Feeding Web*?

**JG:** The readings were changed every year. Not all of them, but it was always updated. It's still always updated. And although we always start the year saying, "Well, we did so much updating last year that there's probably not much to change this year," usually we throw half the readings away. So there's usually a huge change in the readings. I mean, going with what happens in the world in each of those issues. Energy, for instance. When I put energy in—energy wasn't even a separate section in *The Feeding Web* book. And it evolved into a separate section. And then I remember, I said it, and then nobody seemed to understand why it was, it was when we were running out of energy that I had it in there. And then when it looked like we weren't running out of energy, nobody understood why we would bother to study it. So I dropped it, or put it into another session. And then, of course, it became incredibly important again. So things have come and gone, but on the whole it stayed the same. I put in a session called, "Information Pollution" probably ten years ago, long before it was as important as it is now, but it certainly is a major issue now.

**AA:** So what were the major issues that you covered in the last time you taught, last year?

**JG:** You're asking me what we taught last year?

**AA:** Yeah, just the broad topics.

**JG:** All right, I'll read you the topics. Limits to Growth, The Great Food War, Energy, The New Food Supply, Information Pollution, Agriculture, The True Cost of Food, Learning Organic in the Garden—they come out here to my house—Is Modern Food Safe at the Plate? Do We Need Biotech to Feed the World? Thinking Locally. Ag, Trade, and Development. That's it.

**AA:** Is there anything you want to share about that class?

**JG:** What do you mean? I have no idea what you are asking.

**AA:** Oh, just anything that you want to put on the record that was really good about that class.

**JG:** Well, I think it was a very popular class. People are very sorry I'm not teaching it anymore. It's a very life-changing class for people. There aren't many classes you get to take where you come out a different person than you went in. And most people tell me that they, it's a very life-changing class, because people are awakened to all this set of issues they've never thought about before.

**AA:** On average, how many students did you have in that class?

**JG:** At most, sixty, which we cut way down. We broke it into two, we taught it twice one year. We taught it in the fall and the spring. And we didn't want to do that. So we tried to limit it to thirty. We almost never succeeded in limiting it to thirty. (23:20)

**AA:** So when did you first get interested in the idea of local food? I think you used the term “relocalization” in a couple of your books.

**JG:** I got interested in local food for a very simple reason. I concluded that we had to do something about the problems of agriculture in this country, which were and still are and are getting worse. We’re destroying the planet with our agriculture. We’re growing food in an incredibly inefficient and destructive way. And I thought that—and the good farmers are going out of business, etc., etc.—I thought students needed to know that. So I—now I can’t remember what your question was. What was your question?

**AA:** It was just what got you interested in local food.

**JG:** I decided that nobody was going to understand, that the only way we could have local food, the only way we could draw people’s attention to the problems in agriculture was if they knew a farmer. And the only way they could know a farmer was if they lived near a farmer, if there was a farmer somewhere in the area where they lived. And there couldn’t be a farmer there unless people were willing to buy that farmer’s food, what was available. And that meant that if you were living in the Northeast, you shouldn’t be buying food from farmers that were in the West, which is what you were doing all the time anyway. So I decided that in order to have local food, in order to have farming at all, we had to tap local farmers, and that meant we had to eat local food. So I went out and suggested that people needed to buy local. That was how it all started.

**AA:** So was it difficult to get local food in New York where you lived in the 1970s?

**JG:** It was difficult to get local food anywhere in the country in 1970. Nobody labeled food for where it came from. And most of the farms in the Midwest did not grow any food that anyone could eat. They were growing corn and soybeans, they weren’t growing anything anybody ate. So it was hard to get local food anywhere. And it wasn’t labeled at all.

**AA:** So when did it start to become more available?

**JG:** I have no idea. I mean, generally—well, you know yourself. You’re old enough to remember. Do you remember buying local food when you were a child? No, I think it’s maybe ten, fifteen years, maybe. When the farmers markets began to increase, and so on.

**AA:** Yeah, around the mid-2000s I would say is when the local food movement really started to take off.

**JG:** Well, you can judge that better than I can. I’m sitting out here in the country growing my own food. (26:04)

**AA:** So how long have you grown most of your own vegetables?

**JG:** Well, since we came out here. I did it because, having gone out and said to my colleagues that they should eat local food, the first question I got asked was, “Well, what would I eat in



December, or January?” And I realized that I was from California, and I didn’t have a clue. I had no sense of what the seasonality of vegetables were. So I thought, well, I should try to grow this. So that’s how, when we came here, I decided at this place where I’m living now, I decided I had to try and see what we could grow and what we would be able to eat if we just ate what was local. So that’s how I started gardening. I mean, I was gardening, but I wasn’t making an effort. I gardened long before I came to the idea that we had to eat locally. But I made an effort to grow a much more variety of things, and trying to live on what we grew.

**AA:** Did you ever talk to Michael Pollan or Barbara Kingsolver about local food?

**JG:** Barbara Kingsolver endorsed my book, and that’s how—I know Barbara Kingsolver. Barbara Kingsolver’s a friend, and she endorsed my book because she was interested in the same thing, and she wrote about it being an important book because of that reason. And so we got to know each other. She wrote to me, and I wrote back, and we started, and so on. And I went with her one time on a trip when they were looking at various places to see where you could get, who in the Northeast was growing food. I went to a cheesemaking workshop with her, and then we went to look at a guy growing tomatoes under plastic somewhere. Anyway, yes, she’s a friend, and we’ve certainly shared ideas. And Michael Pollan is also a friend. He’s interviewed me extensively, credits me with having started his book about just eating food. And he came and interviewed me about that. We’re old friends.

**AA:** So are you more optimistic about local food now than you were in the ’70s? Is it a lot easier to get now?

**JG:** Well, it’s certainly easier. Certainly the existence of all these farmers markets. I mean, many more people are shopping at farmers markets, so yes, I would say, definitely food is more local than it used to be. But certainly it’s not local yet. Nobody particularly thinks of giving up tomatoes and other things in the winter any more than they did. Maybe some people do. But not, I don’t think it’s widespread. (29:00)

**AA:** So you shared a lot about your Piermont house and garden in *This Organic Life* and in *Growing, Old*. Are you still able to work in your garden?

**JG:** Yes, to some extent. The problem is that the Hudson River is a tidal river, and because the seas are rising, the Hudson River is rising. And I think that the groundwater has risen, because my soil is often too saturated and I can’t grow potatoes any longer because they rot. And half my sweet potatoes rotted this year. So I can’t. Also, I’m not able to do everything that I was able to do in my garden before. It doesn’t please me. But other people think it’s beautiful.

**AA:** Yeah, I saw you mentioned a lot about floods in both of those books. So those have continued to be a recurring problem?

**JG:** I wrote a lot about what as being a problem?

**AA:** The floods. The flooding.

**JG:** No, I'm not talking about the flooding. I'm talking about the groundwater level rising. I don't flood anymore because I put a berm down at the far end of the garden, about three feet high soil mound. And it prevents the water from coming in the main part of the garden. And collects the logs that float in from the river that are usually the worst problem. I used to have logs floating all the way up to my house, practically, and I'd have to get a team of people to help me get the stuff out of my garden.

**AA:** So is there anything you want to share about how your garden is now?

**JG:** I find these, "Is there anything you want to share?" questions almost impossible to answer. I'll be honest with you. They're not good questions. You should find another way of saying it. Is there anything I want to share about my garden? No. I just told you about my garden. What more do you want me to share? I told you it's getting flooded from underneath, it doesn't get flooded from on top, so I can't keep it up the way I used to. I don't know what else I should share.

**AA:** Are you still able to grow some of your other vegetables?

**JG:** Yes, some. I grow tomatoes and peppers. I also have deer apparently coming in from—I used to joke that other people had deer, I never had deer, because my house is right on a street and to get back to my back garden you'd have to go down these sort of narrow walkways to get into the garden. Well, it turns out the deer have found a way to come in from the river when the river is down. They swim, actually. But they can also climb up from the riverbank. So apparently that's what they were doing for a while. So I've had a lot of trouble with protecting my plants from feeding. But I do grow things, yes. I still grow things. (32:05)

**AA:** So you mentioned that you were on the National Organic Standards Board for a few years, is that correct?

**JG:** That's correct.

**AA:** So what did you do when you were on the National Organic Standards Board? How many years was that?

**JG:** Well, it was at least two, it may have been four. I don't remember right now. I just don't remember. I would have to look it up. It was near the beginning. I wasn't on the first. I helped re-write the standards when the law was passed and they were writing standards. And then I was not on the first board, but I think I was on the second, on the second round when they added people. And the whole thing then was everyone wanted to get whatever material they were using called organic. We got leather trimmings, people coming and saying, "Can't this be called an organic amendment?" Because you couldn't use anything in organic processed foods unless it was approved, unless it was on the National List. So we spent a lot of time hearing from people who wanted various things and arguing about what should be allowed and what shouldn't be allowed. That's mostly what you do on the National Organic Standards Board.

**AA:** Were you involved in any other organic or sustainable food or farming organizations?

**JG:** I don't think so. I can't remember if I was. I mean, I was teaching full time and department chair. I had a fulltime job. I did a lot of speaking to associations and other people because I was thought of as this radical and they all had to hear me. And I had to convince them that I wasn't that radical. So I really talked a lot in those days. I gave a lot of speeches. But I don't remember being on other, I don't remember being on anything other than the National Organic Standards Board. I was on the food advisory committee of the FDA for a couple of years. That didn't have, I don't think we ever dealt with organic. I can't remember, actually. (34:35)

**AA:** So if you were to briefly summarize your philosophy of organic or sustainable food and farming, what would that be?

**JG:** Try to fit in with nature.

**AA:** Did you want to elaborate on that at all?

**JG:** No. That's it. Farm in such a way that you fit into nature.

**AA:** Great. So would you say that your religious or spiritual beliefs have any connection—

**JG:** I'm not religious.

**AA:** So has your philosophy changed over time?

**JG:** That's—I'm 94, for Christ's sake! Of course it's changed over time. I mean, what wouldn't? Wait until you live 94 years, and you'll realize everything changes. I don't know what philosophy you mean. What do you mean? I don't know what you're talking about.

**AA:** What you were saying, working with nature. Have you felt that way for a long time, or is that more recent?

**JG:** I have no idea. I mean, I cannot remember what I thought a couple of days ago. That's what I believe organic is about. At what point in my life I came to that particular conclusion, I have no idea, because nobody's asking me that question. Nobody's saying, "What's your philosophy?" I have believed for a very long time. And my book reflects that. Everything I've written reflects that. That we are destroying nature by how we are growing food, and that we should try to grow food in a way that is not destroying nature. So obviously that's the underlying theme. I can't, to put it in other words, organic is about not putting unnatural things into the system. That's what most people think organic is, having no pesticides. That's the sort of simplistic view of organic. Organic is about the fact that if you grow food right, you don't even need pesticides. As Eliot Coleman has said, "No pesticides is the consequence, not the cause of organic." I don't think I've changed. I don't know. I don't know how to answer these questions. (37:04)

**AA:** Do you think there is a connection between organic farming and the hippie counterculture of the 1960s and '70s?

**JG:** I saw that question and had no idea what you meant by it. What do you mean, “is there a connection?” You mean they’re the same people doing it, the same people sympathetic toward it?

**AA:** Yeah.

**JG:** You know, I can’t answer that question. I don’t have any idea what you’re talking about.

**AA:** That’s fine.

**JG:** You know, there were people going to health food stores, and if they were going to health food stores, they were probably getting “organic” food. So yes, in that sense, there was a connection between the people who were choosing to eat organic food and organic agriculture. But the counterculture is a whole other thing.

**AA:** Were you involved at all, would you consider yourself involved with the back-to-the-land movement, or not?

**JG:** No, the back-to-the-land movement—you mean people actually going back to the country to farm, is that what you mean by the back-to-the-land movement?

**AA:** Yeah.

**JG:** No. That’s not why we moved to Rockland County.

**AA:** So were you involved in any social or political movements that overlapped with your interest in organic or local food?

**JG:** Not that I know of.

**AA:** What is your perspective on the connection between the agricultural universities, especially the land grants, and organic agriculture?

**JG:** On the whole, they were incredibly hostile for years and years and years. And largely because a lot of their grant money, a lot of their research money came from the food industry. And the food industry is implacably hostile toward organic. Until there was an organic industry, and then they took it over. So they’ve taken it over now. But the point is, originally the land grant colleges were hotbeds of opposition to organic. And they had a few secret professors working on those issues, but that was not what they did. And they were not. There’s a whole book written about that. I can’t remember the name of that right now. Someone wrote a whole book about the land grant colleges.

**AA:** Would that have been Jim Hightower’s *Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times*?

**JG:** Is that right? Did he write about the land grant schools? I’m looking at his book right now. Was that book about the land grant schools? I don’t remember. If that book was about the land

grant colleges and what they were about, then that's the book I'm thinking of. But there wasn't, I didn't think it was Hightower's book.

**AA:** Hightower's was the most famous. There were others, but his was written, I think, early 1970s criticizing the funding of the land grant universities, that they were funded by industry.

**JG:** Then that's the one I'm thinking of. Yes. So you know it's true. So you know what it is. So you don't need to ask me. Ask Jim Hightower.

**AA:** Yes, just getting confirmation from different people. So would you say that the relationship is more favorable now between organic farming and the land grants?

**JG:** You know, I have to say, anything I say is totally made up, because I have no contact. I'm sitting here in my house. I have no contact with any land grant university. I have no idea what they're doing. At the moment I don't know anybody who's teaching in one. I'm sure—let me put it this way. I'm sure they're less hostile, because they would be insane if they weren't. But I have no idea about that.

**AA:** That's fine. Do you have any opinions about the current USDA certification debates, like these suggestions that Real Organic and regenerative organic should be certifications in addition to the USDA's certification?

**JG:** I don't know how they're thinking. No, I know how they were thinking originally. I know that there was no such thing. I think that—I mean, you want my real opinion? I think there's a lot of people out there in these big industrial, food industrial complexes, the agribusiness complexes, that are trying to create as much confusion as they possibly can in order to make as much money as they possibly can. So the whole confusion about regenerative versus organic versus organic regenerative versus sustainable is all deliberate. So don't expect anyone in power to try to straighten any of that out any time soon.

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

**JG:** I've never thought about that.

**AA:** Are there any final thoughts you have before we end the interview?

**JG:** Not really.

**AA:** Okay, thank you so much!

**JG:** Okay. (42:49)